



Working Group Project Seed Co-funding 2023

Health Research Board – Trials Methodology Research Network

and

MRC-NIHR-Trials Methodology Research Partnership

Guidance Notes

Key Dates & Times

Call Open	07 June 2023
Closing Date for Submissions	29 Aug 2023
Notification of outcome	25 Sep 2023
Anticipated project start date	01 Oct 2023¹

Applications must be completed and submitted to the relevant funding authority for the relevant funding stream (i.e. HRB-TMRN or MRC-NIHR-TMRP), with the subject line “Working Group Funding Application”. Applicants are recommended to read the below guidance notes in full before completing the application form. Queries relating to this scheme can be directed to the HRB-TMRN Programme Manager at hrb-tmrn@universityofgalway.ie or the TMRP Coordinator enquiries@methodologyhubs.mrc.ac.uk.

¹ Subject to the execution of a Funding Agreement by the recipients and the funding body.

Introduction

The MRC-NIHR-Trials Methodology Research Partnership (MRC-NIHR-TMRP) in the UK and the HRB – Trials Methodology Research Network (HRB-TMRN) in Ireland have secured strong international reputations and have significantly contributed to trials methodology research.

Several initiatives, projects and programmes of work related to trials methodology have been successfully developed and co-led between the MRC-NIHR-TMRP and HRB-TMRN members, and it is the intention of both infrastructures to further foster and develop these important links.

Aims and objectives

The overarching aim of this scheme is to support collaborative trials methodology work through the provision of pump-priming awards to members of the MRC-NIHR-TMRP Working Groups including researchers within the HRB-TMRN.

The objectives of the working group scheme are to:

- Provide seed funding for TMRP working group members (which includes HRB-TMRN researchers) to conduct high-quality trials methodology research that is relevant to existing (or develop new) methodological priorities nationally and/or internationally;
- Further develop trials methodology research collaborations between Irish and UK colleagues within the TMRP working groups;
- Provide a foundation from which TMRP working groups can springboard future research or priority setting activities;
- Raise the profile of the activities of the TMRP working groups through peer-reviewed publication and other dissemination activities.

Scope

This scheme supports research and training workshops that address questions of direct relevance to trials methodology, which ensures trials become more relevant and influential, lead to better patient care and have strong potential to have an immediate use for decision makers in everyday clinical practice or policy.

This scheme will not fund:

- Research not directly relevant to trials methodology, i.e. research without methodology related primary focus;
- Development of training not directly relevant to trials methodology;

- Standalone systematic reviews not related to trials methodology. Reviews related to trials methodology are eligible and must be achievable within the funding timeframe of 12 months;
- Administrative costs related to running or management of working groups;
- Work already in receipt of funding other than in exceptional circumstances and for additional objectives to work already funded.

Funding Available

The MRC-NIHR-TMRP and HRB-TMRN will commit £30,000 and €30,000 respectively to this call in 2023. Applicants may submit a single project to both schemes with the intention of securing a higher total award. However, this will only be permitted if the applicant provides sufficient explanation for the increased costs and demonstrates a corresponding increase in expected outputs and outcomes.

Applicants seeking financial support through this scheme must ensure that funding received is used within that country for the intended purposes outlined in the proposal. Failure to comply with this condition may result in the termination of funding.

The funding limit for a single award is £10,000 or €10,000, depending on the funding stream applied for. Please note that just because the maximum funding limit is stated, it does not mean you should automatically apply for that amount. We urge all applicants to thoughtfully assess their project's financial needs and request funding that accurately reflects the scope of the planned work.

Where an application does not address the aims, objectives and scope of the call, the application will be deemed ineligible and will not be accepted for review.

Timeframe

The timeframe for this award is **twelve months** from the date of award.

Eligibility Criteria

- Applicants must be members of an MRC-NIHR-TMRP Working Group.
- Applicants must demonstrate that the team contains the necessary breadth and depth of expertise in all the methodological areas required to deliver the proposed project.

- Applicants are encouraged to collaborate, where appropriate, with partner organisations such as hospitals, health agencies, universities, local government, voluntary organisations, public and patient involvement groups and/or industry.
- The MRC-NIHR-TMRP and HRB-TMRN encourage applicants to secure co-funding, where possible, from partner organisations.
- Research funding awarded must be managed in a separate reportable account, within the successful host institution.
- Applications should be concise while providing enough information for reviewers to assess feasibility and value.
- The TMRP and HRB-TMRN reserves the right to contact the applicants for clarification or additional information prior to a decision being made. The TMRP and HRB-TMRN reserves the right to delay any final decision on an application.
- Applicants are advised to discuss their proposal with their finance officer at an early stage.

Lead Applicant

The Lead Applicant will serve as the primary point of contact for the award during the review process and on the award if successful. The Lead Applicant will be responsible for the scientific and technical direction of the research programme. They have primary fiduciary responsibility and accountability for carrying out the research within the funding limits awarded and in accordance with the terms and conditions of the HRB or the University of Liverpool.

In cases where an application is submitted to both schemes for joint funding, it is necessary to have two lead applicants: one based in Ireland and one based in the UK. This requirement ensures compliance with the criteria set by both funding agencies. The Lead Applicant is responsible for disclosing any relationships with other entities that could potentially create a conflict of interest or otherwise impact the funded research. This information should be communicated to the respective funder to ensure transparency and proper management of any potential conflicts or relevant considerations throughout the research process.

To apply for the HRB-TMRN funding stream:

The Lead Applicant must:

- Be a member of the HRB-TMRN based in Ireland and a member of the respective MRC-NIHR-TMRP Working Group from which they are applying.

- Hold a post (permanent or a contract that covers the duration of the award) in a HRB-TMRN partner Host Institution ² in the Republic of Ireland as an independent investigator.
- Create a team of Co-applicants which comprises of Irish and UK based members. Support can be provided in identifying suitable UK based members should Lead applicants require it.
- Consider capacity building in the research team by way of including less experienced members as Co-applicants, and to consider public and patient involvement.
- Submit the research programme to the respective MRC-NIHR-TMRP Working Group to obtain approval for the project.
- Provide a letter of endorsement for their application from the respective Working Group Lead(s).

To apply for the MRC-NIHR-TMRP funding stream:

The Lead Applicant must:

- Be a member of the MRC-NIHR-TMRP based in the UK and a member of the respective MRC-NIHR-TMRP Working Group from which they are applying.
- Form a team of Co-applicants that includes members from both the UK and Ireland, where feasible. HRB-TMRN can offer assistance in identifying suitable Irish collaborator(s) if needed. However, in the event that this support does not lead to the identification of an Irish collaborator, it will not hinder the submission of an application, nor will it make the application ineligible.
- Consider capacity building in the research team by way of including less experienced members as Co-applicants, and to consider public and patient involvement.
- Submit the research programme to the respective MRC-NIHR-TMRP Working Group to obtain approval for the project.
- Provide a letter of endorsement for their application from the respective Working Group Lead(s).

It is important for all Lead Applicants, of both funding streams, to engage with the respective MRC-NIHR-TMRP Working Group leads as early as possible in the application process to ensure all of the above steps are completed.

² University of Galway, University College Cork, University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, University of Limerick.

Co-Applicants

A Co-Applicant has a well-defined, critical and substantial role in the conduct and steering of the proposed research. Encouragement is provided for new collaborations, as well as the active participation of Early Career Researchers and PhD students. It is permissible for non-Working Group members to be included as co-applicants; however, it is important to note that funding cannot be directly transferred to them unless exceptional circumstances arise.

Support in identifying suitable Irish and UK based Working Group members can be provided.

Where a UK Lead Applicant uses the supports available through the HRB-TMRN to identify Irish Co-Applicants, and this is unsuccessful, evidence that an Irish Co-Applicant was sought will be required.

Request for support in identifying Irish Co-Applicants through the HRB-TMRN must be made by **July 24th** to give adequate time to identify candidates.

Lead Applicants are encouraged to consider the inclusion of team members with less experience who bring an important perspective and expertise to research and who may benefit from the opportunity to participate in the research.

Collaborators

An official Collaborator is an individual or an organisation that provides an integral and discrete contribution (either direct or indirect) to the proposed research activities. A collaborator may provide material, training, access to specific equipment, specialist staff time, trials advice or other support, access to data and/or patients, instruments or protocols or may act in an advisory capacity. They can be based in an academic institution, a private enterprise, a healthcare organisation or agency, or come from the charity sector. Collaborators may be based outside the Republic of Ireland or UK.

Relevant key gatekeepers should be named as Collaborators within the application form if the success of a project is dependent on access to:

- Healthy volunteers or patients;
- Vulnerable population groups;
- Data or databases;
- Existing national or international study (e.g. an existing cohort or longitudinal study or a clinical trial).

Budget

Funds must be used only for the approved Project work and supported by evidence of expenditure (Final Expenditure statement) provided within one month after the Project end date.

Allowable costs include;

HRB-TMRN Funding Stream:

Overheads

Institutional overhead costs are also available under the HRB-TMRN funding stream, at 25% of direct project costs. This is additional to the running cost budget of up to €10,000.

Salary (salary, PRSI, pension contribution)

Applicants should use the IUA website for the most up-to-date recommended salary scales for academic researchers (<http://www.iua.ie/research-innovation/researcher-salary-scales/>). Please note employee pension contribution of 5% has already been incorporated into the IUA gross salary figure. Please state the pay scale used and the level and point on the scale. This should be justified accordingly.

The HRB-TMRN does not provide funding for the salary or benefits of academic staff within research institutions who are already in receipt of salary or benefits. The HRB-TMRN does not provide salary or buy out time for collaborators.

Employer's contributions to PRSI and/or national insurance at the appropriate rates (e.g. PRSI is calculated at 11.05% of gross salary in RoI).

Pension provision up to a maximum of 20% of gross salary will be paid to the host institution to enable compliance with the Employment Control Framework (an additional 5% employee contribution are part of the salary). The level of employer contribution should be in accordance with the model adopted by the host institution.

Running costs

For all costs required to carry out the activities. Access to necessary special facilities or services which are not available in the host academic institutions. Funding for small items of equipment can be included in this section. Standalone computers or laptops **will not** be funded. All costs must be inclusive of VAT, where applicable. Funds may be used to cover expenses such as travel (standard-class rail and economy air fares), subsistence and associated expenses are permitted.

Dissemination and knowledge exchange costs

This covers costs associated with the Dissemination and Knowledge Exchange Plan – i.e. Open Access Publication fees, Seminar/conference attendance (provide details of name and location, where possible) and any other means of communicating outcomes or engaging with stakeholders.

Note: HRB Open Research provides all HRB-funded researchers with a place to rapidly publish any results. All articles benefit from rapid publication, transparent peer review and editorial guidance on making all source data openly available. The publication costs are covered through article processing charges, which are funded centrally by the HRB.

MRC-NIHR-TMRP Funding Stream:

- Funding will need to be restricted to UK costs only.
- Core staff salaries cannot be included in the costs, however directly incurred staff costs related to the project e.g. temporary administration or research staff, can be included.
- Funds may be used to cover expenses such as travel (standard-class rail and economy air fares), subsistence and associated expenses connected with running a workshop.
- The award will be made on a basis of **100% of directly incurred costs only, not Full Economic Costs**. Institutional overheads are **not** permitted under this stream.

Deadline

The deadline for submission of complete applications is: **29th August 2023 at 1pm.**

Queries relating to HRB-TMRN applications can be sent to hrb-tmrn@universityofgalway.ie.

Queries relating to MRC-NIHR-TMRP applications can be sent to enquiries@methodologyhubs.mrc.ac.uk.

All application forms must be submitted as a PDF by email, along with relevant documentation with **'Working Group Funding Application'** in the subject line.

Peer Review Process

Applications will be subject to peer review as per the policy of the funding body. Successful applicants will be notified by **25th September 2023**.

Successful Awards

- For successful awards, the University of Liverpool or the HRB-TMRN will issue a Research Agreement which must be signed by a formal representative of the Host Institute prior to the start date.

- The Lead Applicant must confirm in advance the actual start date and length of the Project after decision notification.
- Successfully awarded Projects will be funded by a one-off payment allocated directly to the Host Institution of the Lead Applicant **after the completion of the Project**. The award will be made on a basis of 100% of directly incurred costs only, not Full Economic Costs.
- A final report, of expected length of 2-4 pages, will be submitted to the TMRP or HRB-TMRN describing the objectives achieved, project outcomes and future outputs within one month of the award end date.
- The support of the TMRP and / or HRB-TMRN must be acknowledged in all research communications, including websites, arising from the award, including publications and conference presentations with the TMRP / HRB-TMRN logo and/or note: This work was supported by the MRC-NIHR Trials Methodology Research Partnership (MR/S014357/1) and / or This work was supported by the HRB-Trials Methodology Research Network (HRB-TMRN-2021-001).
- The TMRP and HRB-TMRN reserves the right to contact the Lead Applicant at future dates to establish the progress, outputs and impact of any funded Projects.