

How to ... successfully find and apply for Clinical Education Research (ClinEdR) funding

Megan Brown¹  | Bryan Burford¹ | Ray Samuriwo²  | John Sandars³ 

¹School of Medicine, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

²School of Nursing and Healthcare Leadership, University of Bradford, Bradford, UK

³Edge Hill University Medical School, Ormskirk, UK

Correspondence

Megan Brown, School of Medicine, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK.

Email: megan.brown@newcastle.ac.uk

1 | INTRODUCTION

Money makes the world go round. We need money to pay for people to 'do' research, for equipment and supplies, travel and for basic overheads like administrative support. In Clinical Education Research (ClinEdR), funding is most often obtained after competitive application processes, where research teams have to demonstrate the rigour, value, impact and feasibility of their project, as well as their own credibility.¹

As a young discipline, funding for ClinEdR can be challenging to locate and secure.^{2,3} Novice and mid-career researchers, therefore, often have questions about how to locate funding for research and ongoing career development. Regrettably, there is no fool-proof formula for writing a winning funding proposal, but we can identify guiding principles for developing a project so that it has a better chance of being funded. In this 'How to ...' paper, we draw on our shared experiences as members of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Incubator for Clinical Education Research to offer advice on finding and applying for funding opportunities in this field. The NIHR Incubator for Clinical Education Research is a UK-wide network, established with support from the NIHR, which is leading initiatives to build capacity in the field. As members of this group, we are invested in supporting developing researchers in the field and believe guidance on applying for research funding to represent a necessary component of this support.

Funding for ClinEdR can be challenging to locate and secure.

Our advice spans three key considerations: *knowing yourself*; *knowing your funding and your funder*; and *knowing your study*. Throughout, we consider important decisions when pursuing funding; offer an overview of sources and types of funding; and consider the practicalities of writing proposals, including estimating costs. We present a curated glossary of common funding terminology to help you decipher jargon that you may encounter (see Appendix A). Glossary terms are highlighted in bold text.

Our advice spans three key considerations: knowing yourself; knowing your funding and your funder; and knowing your study.

1.1 | Knowing yourself

Bidding for research funding is time consuming, and there are no guarantees of success. Probability dictates that we all either have or will fail to secure funding after working hard on a research bid. Therefore, it is important to carefully consider your reasons for pursuing a specific funding **call** prior to investing significant time, energy and hope in a **proposal**.

There are many motivations for seeking funding. You may simply be interested in the topic. You may be encouraged (as we all

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TABLE 1 Example funding opportunities within and beyond clinical education within the United Kingdom.

Funder	Remit	Types of funding available as of date of publication (examples, non-exhaustive list)
Within clinical education		
The Association for the Study of Medical Education (ASME) https://www.asme.org.uk/	Clinical education	Small grants—up to 5 k Medical education developing scholarship award—up to 2 k ASME Board Award—up to 20 k PhD/Doctoral grants ASME/GMC Excellent Medical Education Awards—up to 5 k Faculty of surgical trainers/ASME educational research grant—up to 3 k Mindfulness in medical education research award—£500
Association for Medical Education (AMEE) https://amee.org/home	Clinical education	Research grants—up to 10 k Student initiatives grants—£500 to £2000 Faculty development research grants—up to 7 k Medical educators working in resource constrained settings grant—up to 2 k TEL committee innovation development grant—1 k
British Medical Association https://www.bma.org.uk/	Clinical research, mental health, well-being	Kathleen Harper grant for research into vaccine hesitancy—65 k Pushpa Chopra to assist research into women's health and well-being—65 k Topics change annually
General Dental Council (GDC) https://www.gdc-uk.org/	Dental education	Periodically invite tenders for evaluative work
General Medical Council (GMC) https://www.gmc-uk.org/	Medical education	Periodically invite tenders for evaluative work
NHS-England (NHS-E) https://www.england.nhs.uk/	Clinical education	Periodically invite tenders for evaluative work
Medical Protection Society Foundation (MPSF) https://www.medicalprotection.org/uk/home	Medical education, patient safety, mental health and well-being	Grants—5–200 k
National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) https://www.nihr.ac.uk/	National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)	Fellowships
Selection of funders from beyond clinical education with possible relevance		
Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) https://www.ukri.org/councils/ahrc/	Arts, humanities	International research on climate change adaptation and migration—375–500 k International fellowships—5–12 k Research networking scheme—30 k Early career research grant—50–250 k
British Academy https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/	Humanities and social sciences	Pandemic preparedness: lessons to learn from Covid-19 across the G7—up to 100 k International fellowships—80% FEC Small research grants—up to 10 k
British Council https://www.britishcouncil.org/	International networks, education, sustainability	Researcher links climate challenge workshops Research consultancy opportunities
Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) https://www.ukri.org/councils/esrc/	Social sciences, economic	Strategic fellowship in data-driven research skills and research methods training—370 k ESRC new investigator grant—100–300 k Secondary data analysis initiative—300 k UKRI policy fellowships
European Commission https://commission.europa.eu/index_en	Health, culture, creativity, inclusion, digital health	ERC Starting Grant—up to 1.5 million Euro ERC Proof of Concept—150 k euros
Leverhulme Trust	Humanities and social sciences	Early Career Fellowships—up to 118 k

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Funder	Remit	Types of funding available as of date of publication (examples, non-exhaustive list)
https://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/		Emeritus Fellowships—up to 24 k International Fellowships—up to 50 k Research Fellowships—up to 60 k BA/Leverhulme small research grants—up to 10 k
Medical Research Council (MRC) https://www.ukri.org/councils/mrc/	Medical research and health systems	Public health intervention development—150 k Better methods, better research—2 M Develop guidance for better research methods—60 k
The Healthcare Improvement Studies Institute (THIS) https://www.thisinstitute.cam.ac.uk/	Health care improvement research, equity and diversity	Fellowships—salary costs to max. 220 k
Wellcome Trust https://wellcome.org/	Mental health, infectious diseases, climate change	Postdoctoral Fellowships—up to 300 k (final round) Open Research Fund—up to 100 k

sometimes are) by institutional expectations regarding securing funding for career progression. Funding can also enhance the scope, reach and quality of research through access to new professional networks, routes to recruitment and **dissemination** and resources to improve the ease and impact of the project.⁴ Given this, you may wish to develop the impact and quality of existing work through securing funding.

Having reflected on your motivations, ask yourself: is it worth it? You need to consider the ‘opportunity costs’ of seeking the funding (if you secure funding, you will not be able to take on another project), whether you have the necessary expertise (individually, or collaboratively as part of a team), whether you have capacity to commence the project and deliver it on time/within budget, and the alignment of your idea with the funder’s priorities. You may also want to consider **how committed you are** to a particular vision of a project. Some calls may require you to be ‘agile’⁵ and adapt your thinking to a specific funder’s need. Others may be ‘researcher led’ and allow you to frame questions and methods in your own terms.

Ultimately, the first step in maximising funding opportunities in ClinEdR is understanding your own purpose, motivations, preferences and abilities.

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1.2 | Knowing your funding and your funder

The next logical step is finding out more about your prospective funder and the funding they provide.

Your choices may be shaped by your professional background, motivations and aims—there are professional societies that offer small- and medium-sized pots of funding specifically for medicine and nursing, for example. You may also be able to find and access funding for ClinEdR projects linked to other areas (e.g. mental health, or patient safety).

Table 1 gives some examples of funders in the United Kingdom and the types of funding they award. Funding opportunities change, so make sure you regularly check current and forthcoming calls.

The scale of funding varies but tends towards smaller amounts compared to clinical research. If securing research funding is condition of employment, or a promotion metric, it is important to manage expectations of the sums that can be secured, given the high level of competition.⁶

When exploring available funding, be pragmatic and target relevant funding appropriate for your career stage and project scale. If you are a novice researcher, it is best to first consider smaller **grants** offered by several organisations—thinking creatively, there is much you can do.³ These grants provide experience in project management and delivery that can demonstrate your suitability for future, larger grants. If your planned project needs a larger grant, consider collaborating with established researchers who can guide you through relevant processes.⁷

Be pragmatic and target relevant funding appropriate for your career stage and project scale.

Always read the funder’s guidance thoroughly regarding what will be funded, how bids will be evaluated (as this might influence your strategy) and what funders expect from the **proposal** (e.g. deadlines).⁸ A summary of what many funders look for in a proposal is provided (Table 2).

TABLE 2 What do funders look for in a proposal?

Criteria	Explanation
Relevance and importance	Relates to the significance of the research topic
Researcher suitability	The qualifications, expertise and past record of the researcher and/or team
Work plan quality	The appropriateness and clarity of the proposed research methodology and timeline
Strategic alignment	How well the proposal aligns with strategic aims or research priorities
Innovation	New and innovative approaches to the topic or research
Feasibility	The likelihood that the research can be completed within proposed timelines and budget
Value for money	The expected return on investment, cost-effectiveness
Potential impact	A clear plan for disseminating results and the expected societal or scientific impact
Collaboration	Demonstrated willingness for cross-institutional and interdisciplinary work
Stakeholder engagement	Engagement with relevant interested parties including patients, the public and organisational partners
Sustainability	Long-term sustainability of the innovations or impact from the research
Career development	For novice researchers, how the funding will help enhance their career development

TABLE 3 Example research proposal costing for a £75,000 funding call.

Item	Detail	Total
Staff costs		
Researcher A	Daily rate: £600 Time commitment: 10 days	£6000
Researcher B	Daily rate: £350 Time commitment: 20 days	£7000
Researcher C	Daily rate: £650 Time commitment: 8 days	£5200
Researcher D	Daily rate: £250 Time commitment: 72 days	£18,000
Non-staff costs		
Travel	Presentation to funder in London Travel within England, to Scotland, to Wales and to Northern Ireland for data collection	£5500
Accommodation	If overnight stays required for above	£1500
Transcription	990 min of focus group audio, at 1.60 per recorded minute	£2880
Publication fee	Publication fee for open access publication	£2500
Conference attendance	Fees, accommodation and travel for 2 delegates	£2000
Estates and indirect institutional costs		£10,950
	Non-staff subtotal	£25,330
	Staff subtotal	£36,200
	Subtotal excluding VAT	£61,530
	VAT	£12,306
	Total	£73,836

1.3 | Knowing your study

Our final advice is to know your study. This means being able to communicate clearly, efficiently and robustly the elements of a research project that a funding proposal will need. Some key questions to orient your planning are: *What are you going to do? How are you going to do it? Who is going to do it? How are you going to demonstrate impact?*

Answering ‘What are you going to do?’ requires clear goals and a well-defined operational statement of the aims, objectives and research questions of your study. Within the background section of a

proposal, demonstrating the need for your research and its possible impact for a non-expert audience is critical.⁹ Your proposal may address an important gap in the literature, meet a policy need or meet a funder’s evaluative need.

The study methodology you select helps answer ‘How are you going to do it?’. Your methodology may have several phases, such as a combination of literature reviews and empirical research. These should be clearly summarised, with justification of how the planned approach will meet your (or your funder’s) aims and objectives.

TABLE 4 Checklist for a typical funding bid in ClinEdR.

Proposal component	Is this section complete? Is there sufficient detail? Does it match funder guidelines?		
	YES	NO	N/A
Cover page—descriptive title, names of team, affiliations, contact information, date of completion			
Proposal abstract/summary			
Introduction/background—illustrate the need for your research			
Aims/objectives/research questions			
Methodology—how will this help you answer your research questions?			
Methods, including plans for ethical approval, data collection and analysis			
Implications—what are the anticipated outcomes of your research? What are possible next steps/future directions?			
Dissemination and impact strategy—who will you target, and how will you communicate with them?			
Timeline (including Gantt chart, with indication of start/end date and specified project milestones)			
Costing—has this been approved by your organisation?			
Research team and relevant experience (do you need to attach your CVs?)—are the team well-qualified? Who will do what? Are junior members supported?			
References—follow funder referencing guidelines if available			
Formatting—does it meet funder requirements (e.g. word limits, table/figure limits, page numbering)?			

Answering ‘Who is going to do it?’ usually involves describing relevant team expertise.¹⁰ For example, if you plan to conduct a survey-based evaluation, a team member with expertise in survey design will reassure your funder that you have the necessary skillset to complete the project.

Demonstrating impact depends on the nature and topic of your project, but, for ClinEdR, this usually means showing how the findings of your research will benefit healthcare. Involving **patient and public** representatives throughout a project (e.g. within a **project advisory group**) can enhance depth of interpretation, add context to findings and recommendations and is increasingly expected of high-quality funded research. Patient involvement should be meaningful—what is meaningful should be discussed and judged by patients themselves.

An additional dimension of enhancing impact is a thorough **dissemination** and impact strategy, usually described in a proposal—how will you communicate your findings to those you need to act on the results? How will you ensure the way you present your results is accessible? Leveraging professional and online networks and thinking creatively about the use of visual media can be useful.

Check your institutional policies and procedures regarding funding.⁸ There are often processes for signing off **costing** (as well

as many ‘hidden’ costs) to avoid contractual issues. Make sure you know who to contact and how long they will need to complete the task in advance so that you can manage your writing timelines. Some institutions have dedicated staff (e.g. research facilitators) who can assist with costing and preparing a bid. For most ClinEdR studies, the bulk of **the cost** is staff costs—particularly researcher salaries. Note that these are the salaries of researchers employed specifically to work on a project (as research assistants, etc.), and so are **directly incurred** by the project. Salary costs of academic staff who contribute to the project as part of wider duties are referred to as **directly allocated**. On larger bids, these more senior researchers may be **nominally costed**—meaning costed for a small amount of consultation time, rather than significant time for carrying out day-to-day project tasks. Non-staff costs include **consumables** (such as research incentives, travel and transcription costs).

See Table 3 for an example costing from a large bid.

We conclude with a checklist for preparing a typical funding proposal. This is a basic guide for the skeleton of a bid and should be cross-referenced with funder-specific requirements in the **invitation to tender** (Table 4).

2 | CONCLUSION

Bidding for funding in ClinEdR is competitive, and one cannot always win. However, there are guiding principles that can boost your chances. Given that funding enhances the quality of ClinEdR,⁴ consistently making this effort, even when we fail to secure funding, is what is most important. If you are unsuccessful, allow yourself the time and space to process any disappointment, and work through feedback received to enhance your idea. For researcher-led calls, you can take your improved idea and submit elsewhere. For funder-led calls, there is still learning you can take from the process of bid construction. Although it is true that ‘money makes the world go round’ in ClinEdR, it is our commitment to learning and improvement that matter most.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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The authors have no ethical statement to declare.

ORCID

Megan Brown  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9334-0922>

Ray Samuriwo  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5954-0501>

John Sandars  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3930-387X>

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Glossary of terms	Description of terms
Project advisory group	A project advisory group, or PAG, is a group of interested parties on a research topic that provide guidance, make suggestions and support researchers to shape research projects throughout the lifecycle of a project. Typically, PAGs bring together interested parties with different backgrounds and lived experiences (e.g. patient representatives, organisational leaders, students, members of the participant group of interest). Specific roles and responsibilities of the PAG vary between research projects but may include providing feedback on research focus and questions and feedback on study design/conduct/analysis
Proposal	A written document that outlines in detail the plans for a research project. Usually includes justification of why the research is important, details the focus of the research (study aims, research questions, how research design will meet these aims) and information on how the project will be practically conducted (including the project timeline e.g. a Gantt chart, and the resources required)
Research office	A central team within many institutions (such as universities) whose purpose is to provide administrative and practical support to institutional faculty engaging in research. The scope of a research office's activities includes support in preparing and submitting grant applications, as well as managing research funding once secured and, in some locations, assisting in developing wide-reaching dissemination strategies for research
Tender	A tender is a competitive bidding process for research or evaluation funding that is used to select that team will receive the funding. Professional bodies and organisations can issue tenders in order to procure the services of a research team to meet a specific organisational aim or mission. The purpose of the tender process is to ensure that the organisation receives the services of a research team who are able to competently meet their aims and offer good value for money