Research Facilitation Fund 2027: Call for applications

What we are looking for

Arthritis UK is the largest dedicated funder of arthritis research globally. We fund research driven by the needs of people with arthritis and with the greatest potential to improve the quality of their lives. Our research ambition is to accelerate the pace and precision of research that benefits people living with arthritis.

Our organisational strategy is focused on ensuring that people with arthritis are at the heart of everything we do. We have extended the lifespan of our research strategy to spring 2028, to align with our organisational strategy. All our research investments aim to generate the best possible impact for the benefit of people with arthritis and studies should therefore advance the translational pathway towards impact.

We fund research that covers the causes, consequences and effects of the most prevalent arthritis conditions. We will also support those conditions most frequently associated with arthritis and may actively seek research proposals in defined, narrower areas where needed. We do not actively exclude any areas of arthritis-related research. Where necessary, we will prioritise our investments to ensure that we maintain a varied and balanced research awards portfolio that covers the most prevalent arthritis conditions as well as rarer conditions.

The Research Facilitation Fund offers support for a variety of activities, including for example: networking, collaboration, scientific meetings, project management support, key personnel across technical and administrative roles, data platforms and sample collections, but does not support buildings, equipment or major facilities.

This ring-fenced funding is about gaining access to hard to obtain resources and facilitating research to leverage the speed of research delivery and the allocation of funding to arthritis research.

Investments will only be made to provide necessary additional resource where critical additional resource is required and where realistic impacts are sought towards bringing ground-breaking scientific discoveries to people with arthritis at pace and with precision.

The second round of Research Facilitation funding was dedicated to support improved public and patient involvement (PPI) in musculoskeletal research and resulted in an award to establish a patient voice network. Therefore, PPI network support is excluded from this round.

A realistic projection of activity should be made for the use of funds and the nature of the existing resources, demonstrating the facilitatory value and intent.

Applications do not require contributions from host/member organisations.

We expect researchers to explain how this investment will contribute to direct or indirect impacts for people living with arthritis.

To provide some guidance, areas which are eligible and ineligible for funding are listed below. The lists are not exhaustive, so please get in touch if you need clarification before submitting an application. Potential areas of funding support include:

- Sustaining or evolving Centre of Excellence and Experimental Treatment centre resources and other similar infrastructure support.
- Costs for travel and accommodation for scientific exchanges.
- Setting up and maintaining a network – manager, meetings, administrators, contracts, regulatory support, commercialisation/tech transfer/translation support – for dedicated key areas where time can be charged to the award.
- Setting up symposiums, seminars, workshops, thinktanks/sandpits.
- Patient and public involvement costs where directly associated with the nature of the activity within the application.
- Existing (not new) patient (longitudinal) cohort studies and biobank/sample collections For further guidance on the nature of support provided for data and sample cohorts please refer to our forthcoming position statement.
- Dedicated support in key areas where time can be charged to the award, e.g. statisticians, data informaticians/analysts, histologists, study coordinators, sample managers, data managers/officers and technicians.
- Researcher skills development (not for conference attendance).
- Bridging funding for contract continuity between start date gaps on secured awards.
- Mentoring and leadership development in areas of unmet need.
- Coordination of funding applications to funders/business development.
- Capacity building in strategic areas via pump priming (pilot) data/evidence gathering projects. NB: we do not expect to see or review discrete project outlines within an application, the process for use and allocation of such funds should be clear.

Exclusions from this funding support:

- Patient and public involvement network support (there was a dedicated round for this).
- PhD programmes and support of fellowships.
- Travel costs other than for scientific exchanges or skills development.
- Sponsorship of meetings and conferences.
- Patent applications / licencing costs.
- Data structures / databases.
- Disease model support (*in vitro/vivo/silico*).
- Large equipment purchases.

These areas of support and outcomes sought have been informed by the research priorities work of our Research Advisory Groups, collated in our gaps and opportunities document.

If you have any questions about the scope of this call or would like to discuss the eligibility of your proposal, please email awards@arthritis-uk.org.

Research Facilitation Fund 2025 Awards

- **Biopsy investigation of Oxford Synovitis Cohort (BIOPSICO).**

Professor Christopher Buckley, University of Oxford.

Enabling modest adjustments to be made to a dedicated clinical research space allowing the collection of small samples of patient tissue for research studies.

- **The Manchester Musculoskeletal National Bioresource**.

Professor Gisela Orozco, University of Manchester.

To ensure that the largest collection of arthritis patient samples in the world is maintained, added to, and made available to the research community.

- **Norfolk Arthritis Register: Resource Enhancement for Sustainability and Translation (NEST).**

Professor Alexander MacGregor, University of East Anglia.

To modernise and enhance the Norfolk Arthritis Register (NOAR), one of the most important resources for arthritis research worldwide with detailed health and biological information from over 5,645 people with new-onset inflammatory arthritis followed since 1989.

Research Facilitation Fund 2026 Awards

- **STRIDE: Scottish Tracking of Rheumatological Inflammatory Diseases from Early life.**

Dr Eve Smith, University of Glasgow

To address the problem of there being limited long-term data following children with Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA) into adulthood. STRIDE will build a clearer picture of how childhood rheumatic diseases begin, how they affect children over time, and how differences in access to care influence outcomes.

- **msk.NETWORK**

Professor Gary Macfarlane, University of Aberdeen

Making better use of what already exists to support people with arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions to keep working, or return to work. Existing tools, including those developed as part of the Arthritis UK/MRC Centre for Musculoskeletal Health and Work, will be brought together in one connected, easy-to-use digital system.

- **Technical support to facilitate human cell based research into understanding the molecular mechanisms underlying arthritis pathogenesis**.

Professor David Young, Newcastle University

Funding a dedicated research technician for two years to help collect and process joint tissues that are already being obtained as part of routine joint replacement surgery. This will help

accelerate arthritis and musculoskeletal research without placing any additional burden on patients or clinical teams.

- **ARISE-MSK: Arthritis Research and Intelligence for Service Excellence in community MSK: Establishing the infrastructure to enable a future nationally commissioned MSK Improvement Programme.**

Professor Jonathan Hill, Keele University

Addressing the lack of data about who uses community MSK services, how long they wait, what treatments they receive, and how well these treatments work. Over two years the team will support up to 55 NHS community MSK providers to set up consistent data collection and reporting. Data will be analysed to understand variation between services, identify inequalities, and highlight opportunities to improve care.

Requirements

Pace and Precision - a translational approach

We want research to rapidly enhance better-tailored solutions that directly benefit people with arthritis, translating discoveries more quickly and efficiently into practice. Applicants should explain how this funding will lead to impact and benefit for people with arthritis.

Research Involvement

Wherever possible, applications should involve people with arthritis in the development of the outlined work as well as collaborating with them during the proposed duration of the work. We recognise the nature of these projects may preclude there being true value and relevance of involvement of people with arthritis. For example, bringing lived experience into the case for support of a business development role is not required. We would expect to see lived experience input for research related activities, such as maintenance of a cohort or how pump priming fund would be defined assessed and monitored. Applicants will need to provide an explanation if patients and/or members of the public have not been actively involved. More information and guidance can be found in our Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement Hub on our website: support for researchers to involve people with arthritis.

Diversity and Inclusion

Our vision is for our research to reflect, and address, the diverse needs of all those living with arthritis. We aim to be open, inclusive and equitable in the support and service we provide to our stakeholders. We are committed to ensuring meaningful inclusive involvement in research and the promotion of equitable access to participation in, and the benefits from research. We are committed to diversity, equity and inclusion in who does research, what research is done, and who benefits from research. We will publish our research equity, diversity and inclusion plans in 2026.

We expect people with arthritis from a diverse range of backgrounds, cultures and experiences to be partners and participants in our research activities, representing the full life-course of the population. Where a research proposal involves the participation of people with arthritis, we

will only fund research that is able to demonstrate appropriate representation and diversity (ethnicity, socioeconomic, gender and age) as relevant to the aims of the proposal.

Research involving animals, cells and tissues should consider sex, genetic and other relevant characteristics. For research using animals use the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) Experimental Design Assistant to support experimental design.

We will fund health service research that accounts for differences in local environments, noting that specific needs of the four UK nations devolved healthcare and research funding contexts require tailored solutions.

Applicants should design research carefully to ensure that project outputs, outcomes and impact do not contribute to exacerbation of health inequities. Applications should show that they have deliberately considered the desired impact on health inequities, any risks or possible unintended consequences, and identified any relevant barriers.

Animal Research

We will only fund animal research where there is no viable alternative, that is well designed, ethical and scientifically justified. We are committed to the principles of reduction, replacement and refinement (3Rs) in animal studies. More information and guidance can be found on Applying for an Award.

Collaboration and partnership

We welcome collaborations and partnership with industry and international stakeholders. If your proposal is suitable for co-funding with another funder or you have third party funding, please email awards@arthritis-uk.org as early as possible.

In some areas – such as multiple long-term conditions, rare diseases and collective immune-mediated inflammatory – we particularly welcome partnership approaches.

Data and sample resources

We encourage researchers to make use of established, pre-existent cohorts, collections, bioresources and registries. When proposing to make use of human tissue, consider carefully whether existing resources meet your needs and justify why any new collection is necessary.

We require those receiving funding for a tissue collection, provide access to this and register the collection in a publicly accessible directory.

Intellectual Property

Applicants should make careful consideration regarding use of background IP. Use of patents, software, datasets, biological materials, compounds, cell lines or any background IP owned by your institution or other institutions involved and confirm access through the required agreements (Material Transfer Agreements, licenses and permissions).

Applicants should assess whether the proposed research will create protectable IP: including therapeutics compounds, diagnostics, new methods, new targets, MoA (Mechanism of action), devices, software, algorithms, research tools, datasets or proprietary know-how. Consider and

declare anything that produces or might produce new IP or provides a competitive advantage. Please remember that even negative results or optimisation data can constitute valuable know-how.

Who can apply

Arthritis UK research awards may only be held in universities, NHS Trusts or recognised academic research institutes in the UK. The lead applicant does not need to have a permanent position, but at least one applicant must have a substantive position at the host (lead) institution.

People with lived experience and international collaborators may be included as co-applicants.

Individuals who are employed by, or whose salary derives from, a commercial organisation are not eligible to lead an Arthritis UK award, they can be included as a co-applicant or a collaborator.

We welcome applications affiliated to the UK Musculoskeletal Translational Research Collaboration.

For further details on who can apply and other roles in the application, for further information see the associated guidance document.

What you can apply for

Awards of up to 60 months duration, between £50,000 - £250,000 in value are available. We plan to invest around £500,000, making between 2 - 10 awards.

Costs for salaries, expenses and small items of essential equipment can be requested.

If you intend to outsource parts of the project, to be undertaken by a third party, please email awards@arthritis-uk.org as early as possible to discuss this with us.

If your proposal is suitable for co-funding with another funder, please email us as early as possible, at awards@arthritis-uk.org as we may be able to facilitate such partnerships.

For further details on what you can apply for, see the associated guidance document.

How to apply

This is a single-stage application process.

Apply via our Grant Management System. Applicants must carefully read the application form and guidance document before starting an application. Please ensure the most appropriate language is used in each section of the form and that the correct sections are completed.

The deadline for the receipt of applications is **16:00 on Wednesday 3 February 2027.**

Submissions after 16:00 will not be accepted. Please allow ample time for management of appropriate reviewers and signatories to access the grant management system and provide their approvals.

How will applications be assessed

Applications will be reviewed by our Research Facilitation Fund funding panel, which includes people with lived experience of arthritis. All eligible applications will be reviewed and feedback provided. If necessary, a panel triage process may be implemented such that only a proportion of the proposals will advance to provide rebuttal to reviews before a formal funding panel meeting.

Applications will be reviewed and assessed on the following criteria:

- importance and potential impact
- relevance and scope
- novelty and innovation
- involvement in application development
- involvement plans
- research design, delivery and clarity
- feasibility
- value for money.

We expect applications to include information on how the research will bring impact and benefit to people with arthritis. We currently capture the impact of our funded research using our framework below, which focuses on seven areas:

- Policy and Practice – our research is influencing how arthritis is treated or managed.
- Intellectual property, products, and services – new innovations, treatments or tools which improve patients' lives.
- New knowledge – our research has changed what we know about arthritis.
- Patient and Public Involvement – the benefit that patients bring to the research itself.
- Partnerships – new networks, partners and collaborations which extend research.
- Capacity Building – our investments are increasing the human or technical capacity to conduct research.
- Leveraged funding – new funding that has been awarded to continue the research we funded.

More detail around these impact areas can be found in the guidance document, including examples of outcomes which relate to each impact area.

Award management

Reporting - We expect all awards outputs and outcomes to be reported annually during the funded period and for 3-5 years post-completion. Reporting expectations are agreed at the start of the project.

All award holders must also provide an annual expenditure report for monitoring of finances and project progress. A meeting will be held to discuss any budget variance and agree payment for the following year.

Projects that require recruitment of human participants are required to complete a six monthly progress report to the Progress Review Committee.

Translational projects are required to compete a quarterly progress report through the lifetime of the award.

Publications - All original peer-reviewed articles published as a result of our funding **must** comply with our open access policies. Award holders should tell us directly about all articles in peer-reviewed literature or disseminated publicly (for example, press releases) as soon as possible and by the time the article has been accepted for publication or dissemination.

More information and guidance can be found on Managing your award.

Intellectual property - Award holders must notify us of **any** potential for, or activities relating to, development of intellectual property and seek our consent before progressing any commercial activity arising from this award.

Award holders can get help on IP management from their local technology transfer or commercialisation offices. Early consultation will help prevent issues that might arise during the course of the project and can identify additional opportunities.

Research Engagement - We are dependent on funds raised from public donations. It is important that you join us in raising the awareness of Arthritis UK. Our current logo and acknowledgement of Arthritis UK's support should be used on all documents/presentations relating to this award.

Award holders may be invited to meetings with Arthritis UK to discuss their research and/or asked to contribute written summaries.

Timelines

Call opens	Monday 9 November 2026
Deadline for applications	16:00 Wednesday 3 February 2027
Invitation to provide a rebuttal to panel reviews	Mid to late May 2027
Deadline for rebuttal of panel review	Mid-June 2027
Notification of award	July/August 2027
Project start	From November 2027 at earliest

Contact details

For all enquiries, please email the Awards Office at awards@arthritis-uk.org.