

Call for Kennedy Trust *Research Ignition Awards 2026*

Application guidance notes



Context and introduction

The Kennedy Trust is a focussed charitable trust whose mission is to provide sustainable, long-term funding of medical research to provide support, infrastructure and training in research that enhances understanding of the basic mechanisms and clinical features of the rheumatic disorders and related immune mediated conditions, as well as the application of this research for the benefit of patients.

With the goal of stimulating new and ambitious avenues of research, we are seeking incisive and cutting-edge project applications for awards of up to £100k over 1-2 years. The awards will be highly flexible and designed to support a wide range of research costs to seed funding of larger programmes of ambitious basic, translational or clinical research. To this end, the awards will be designed to include support for basic mechanistic understanding of disease, proof of concept, pre-clinical or early-stage clinical research.

As the Trust recognises that these awards are particularly valuable for researchers building an independent research career, for the 2026 call awards will be limited to independent early and mid-career investigators. We appreciate that the definitions for this career stage are not necessarily exact and we will therefore assess each application for this criteria on a case by case basis. As a broad guide, however, we expect this stage of career to be up to 10 years post-PhD (taking into account career breaks).

What the Kennedy Trust is looking for

- **A focus on relevant higher-risk questions:** the funding is intended to prime research in areas that have a clear relation to disease pathways of rheumatological, musculoskeletal and related inflammatory disorders where the scientific evidence is still being accumulated and needs a major boost, and/or where questions are not being routinely investigated by other researchers.
- **The potential to break new ground:** a strong case that the larger question holds importance and, if answered, would significantly move the field on. It is understood that the pump priming award would be aimed at developing further evidence towards larger programmatic funding, rather than addressing the question in full in its own right.

- **Providing impetus to the field:** where other researchers are likely to follow towards the bigger question.
- **Enabling collaboration and interdisciplinary science:** breaking barriers and encouraging novel research across major disciplines is encouraged e.g. AI, physical sciences and the application of novel technologies.
- **Areas of science:** the research does not have to be focussed explicitly on rheumatological or related musculoskeletal conditions, providing that there is credible evidence that the work has the potential to impact directly or indirectly on the understanding of these conditions. This will be critically assessed by the expert peer-review panel.
- **Applicants are requested to consider carefully the feasibility and timeline of their projects, including being able to start their projects within 6 months of receiving their award.**

What applicants can expect

- **Rapid application and review process:** Applications will need to provide sufficient detail of the planned research and be exceptionally well-written, including accessibility to lay audiences. However, the application process will be designed to set out new science without onerous levels of detail and repetition. The Trust will use full peer review through an independent expert peer-review panel with oversight from our Research Committee. At the same time, we commit to ensuring that the applications will be rapidly evaluated and decision made on approval for funding within 4 months of the submission deadline. For all applicants, high-level feedback will be provided on your application.
- **Scale and flexibility:** Up to £100k over 12-24 months to be used on any area of research costs, including posts, but excluding PhD studentships. Salary costs of 'supporting posts' only will be covered. This includes salaries for postdocs or technical staff, but it does **not** include salaries for tenured posts, such as PIs or Co-Is.

Research that harnesses new technology or new techniques, including access to equipment and/or training in new technologies, particularly across laboratories and institutions is encouraged. Applications presenting realistic and well-argued budgets for the scientific question will be prioritised. Other costs such as access to equipment, travel, conference and training costs will be eligible if this is well justified.

- **Focus on early and mid-career investigator led science:** in recognition that these awards are particularly valuable to researchers building an independent research career, for 2026 eligibility will be limited to independent early and mid-career investigators. We appreciate that the definitions for this career stage are not necessarily exact and we will therefore assess each application for this criteria on a case by case basis. As a broad guide, however, we expect this stage of career to be up to 10 years post-PhD (taking into account career breaks). Applicants must be UK based and hold a position at a recognised UK research institution for the full period of the award at the time of award commencement.
- **Opportunity to network and share:** These awards are designed for collaborative activity across disciplines. Opportunity to travel and work across laboratories, including internationally, will be encouraged. The nature and scale of the costs associated with the

collaborative activities supporting the application should be articulated clearly in the application form. While the awards are designed to support early to mid career researchers, applications including collaborations with more senior scientists will be welcome.

How to apply

The deadline for the receipt of applications is 17th June 2026.

This is a single-stage application process and funding decisions will be reviewed by an expert panel with final awards being approved in the Autumn and announced in October 2026.

Please read the application and guidance document before starting an application and ensure that the most appropriate language is being used in each section of the form and that the correct sections are completed.

Submit applications to submissions@kennedytrust.org. Further enquiries can be made by contacting Kennedy Trust Submissions Kennedy Trust Submissions at submissions@kennedytrust.org.

Applicants are asked to give notification of their intention to apply for the awards by submitting this short form by Friday 24th April 2026. Applications will still be accepted if a notice of intent has not been provided, but we strongly encourage you to complete this form.

Application form guidance notes

A. Project description (maximum 3.5 pages A4)

1. Background to the proposal

Please set out the context to the proposal together with a short summary of your relevant research over the last five years and any work which has led to this proposal, including a description of your most notable scientific contributions. The background should clearly set out the bigger question to be addressed and why it is important for the field. It should be compelling but written in clear and concise language and readily understandable to a range of scientific audiences. The plan of how the research will eventually seed larger scale funding should be set out in the background and evidenced in the aims and plan of investigation.

2. Aims and objectives

Set out the research questions you plan to address and explain why these are important. Also set out your short and long-term objectives and describe how these will advance the field.

3. Plan of investigation

Provide an appropriately detailed plan of investigation, including a description of the approach to be taken and any milestones. Graphs and figures may be embedded in the text where they clearly support the context of the application.

It will be important for applicants to consider a realistic start date of their proposal, with activation of the award starting **no later than six months** after the award is approved. The feasibility of starting and completing their research within the timeframe proposed should be carefully considered and justified in the application.

4. Justification for resources requested

Provide details of the roles and responsibilities of any support staff being applied for and justification for non-staff costs. Salary costs of 'supporting posts' only will be covered. This includes salaries for postdocs or technical staff, but it does **not** include salaries for tenured posts, such as PIs or Co-Is.

Where animal costs are being applied for please explain why these are necessary. Explain why any equipment is needed and why it cannot be provided by the host institution.

'Other' research costs, such as access to equipment, contracting work, travel for conferences and collaborative activities between labs will be allowed but must be well justified. Similarly for costs associated with training.

5. Scientific references

Please provide only the most relevant scientific references. Please include the first three authors/senior authors/key authors, rather than 'all authors.'

B. Budget details

Provide a full breakdown of costs being applied for. Given the short duration of the awards, we expect applicants to build in appropriate adjustments for inflation within the overall £100k budget. All equipment and animal costs should be separately identified. The Trust does not pay indirect costs.

C. Use of animals

We expect our funded researchers to adhere to the cross-funder [guidance](#) on the use of animals in research produced by the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs).

D. Research involving humans

Only complete this section if it is applicable to your application. HRA and Health and Care Research Wales (HCRW) approval applies to all project-based research taking place in the NHS in England and Wales. HCRW approval applies where the NHS organisation has a duty of care to participants, either as patients/service users or NHS staff/volunteers. References to participants include people whose data or tissue is involved in a research project. If your project is led from Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales and involves NHS/HSC sites then you will not apply to the HCRW. You should apply through the appropriate NHS/HSC permission process for that lead nation.

E. Details of proposed collaborators

Provide details of collaborations you expect with either academia or industry, including names and a brief outline of how that collaboration will work and its benefits towards the aims of the project.

F. Details of any patient or public involvement

The Trust is keen to promote the involvement of patients in its funded research and wider public engagement in the science that it supports. Please include in your application any plans you have for involving patients in the design or delivery of your research, or plans for outreach or other engagement activities.

G. Applicant's CV

Please provide a succinct CV as a separate PDF with the application. Please ensure that this includes a list of publications from the last three years plus up to five key prior publications (with citations in full). Also list any grants held in the last five years (including name of awarding body, title of project, start and end dates, and value of award).