Research Starter Grant 2026

Top tips and FAQs

The RCOT Research and Innovation Fund has offered a range of research grants annually since 2007. Over the years, 229 proposals have been submitted and 72 grants have been awarded. Each year, the Research and Innovation Fund Panel highlights points for general feedback to applicants. We have developed these points into a list of ‘top tips’ and FAQs which we hope will be helpful as you prepare your application.

**Top Tips**

* Seek advice early. If you are a doctoral student, discuss with your supervisor whether it is the right time to apply for a grant.
* Be mindful of the submission criteria and deadline, and allow sufficient time for obtaining signatures of any co-applicants, calculation of financial costings, any institutional sign off required and peer review. This can take longer than anticipated!
* Describe how your proposal addresses one or more of the [Top 10 research priorities](https://www.rcot.co.uk/top-10) for occupational therapy in the UK.
* Consider whether the size of your proposed project is appropriate for the funding available; pay close attention to all financial elements.
* Consider whether your proposal represents good value for money.
* Be realistic about what can be achieved, and not too ambitious. Build on your existing research strengths.
* Make it explicit within your proposal what you intend to do and how you will do it. Keep it simple and focused. Include sufficient detail and ensure it is clearly explained.
* Think about the participant population and how you will include diverse populations.
* Ensure your proposal demonstrates that you have appropriate and relevant support from an experienced researcher (who may be the co-applicant) to ensure the project’s successful completion.
* Think broadly about the potential for relevant partnerships, given the scope of occupational therapy interests.
* Consider including people with lived experience as co-applicants. Be clear within your proposal where people with lived experience and/or their families or carers have input into the research design and how they will be involved in the research. Ensure you are compensating people with lived experience at the [NIHR benchmark rates](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/payment-guidance-for-researchers-and-professionals/27392#payment-rates). State how you will ensure a diversity of perspectives are included.
* Obtain your manager’s support if any of the proposed research activity will be undertaken within the workplace.
* Understand the required deliverables if your proposal is successful.

**FAQs**

**Q:** **Is it necessary to have a co-applicant to apply for a Research Starter Grant?**

A: No, it is not necessary to include a co-applicant in your application, but you should consider whether you need mentorship, additional expertise or support to carry out your research.

**Q: Will the RCOT Research and Innovation Fund support research activities based outside the UK?**

A: Yes, the RCOT Research and Innovation Fund welcomes and has funded projects with an international collaboration, but proposals must be aligned to one or more of the top 10 priorities for occupational therapy research in the UK, reflect UK local and national policy and offer outcomes to benefit UK practice and service delivery, and people accessing those services.

**Q:** **I am interested in applying for a Research Starter Grant to support my doctoral studies. At what point should I consider applying?**

A: The application form for the Research Starter Grant must include a good description of your research study, your proposed methodology and data analysis. You also need to demonstrate the likely impact of the research for the profession, the role of people with lived experience in the research and provide a breakdown of the funding you need. It is unlikely that you will have these details before you start your doctorate, so a more appropriate time to consider applying might be once your research proposal has been agreed with the university. We expect that your doctoral supervisor will read and comment on your proposal before you submit it and must give their support via a signature on the application form.

## Q: I am applying for a Research Starter Grant to support my doctoral studies. Should I include my supervisor as a co-applicant?

A: It isn’t necessary to have your doctoral supervisor included as a co-applicant, although it is possible. However, your supervisor’s time can’t be costed into the application. **At a minimum** we expect them to have peer reviewed the proposal, and they must give their support via a signature on the application form.

**Q: Should I consider the implications of the COVID pandemic when submitting my application?**

A: We’re still encouraging applicants to continue to think creatively and consider new ways of working and how people are adapting their research and methods after the impact of the COVID pandemic. If you are proposing online or virtual engagement with participants, you should show that you have considered aspects of digital poverty and equitable access. If you are proposing in-person data collection, it is worth having some flexibility and contingency planning.

**Q: What funding aspects can be included within my costings for a proposed Research Starter Grant?**

A: We expect the funding section of the application form to include actual costs related to undertaking the project – for example, staff time costs, administrative costs and materials. As a registered charity we don’t expect to fund institution overheads. Doctoral students may apply for support towards future course fees. The Research and Innovation Fund Panel will discuss whether the costs proposed seem reasonable for the work planned.

**Q: Should inflation be included in the costs for a RCOT Research and Innovation Fund grant? If so, at what rate?**

A: Yes, inflation should be accounted for at your institution’s standard rate.

**Q: Can I include attendance at a conference as part of my costs?**

A: Yes, subject to an overall maximum of £1k for a Research Starter Grant.

**Further help and advice**

If you’d like to discuss your project proposal, particularly if you are unsure if it is the right time to submit a grant application or if you have a question about the application process, please contact Angie Thompson, RCOT Research and Development Officer, in the first instance at: angie.thompson@rcot.co.uk or telephone: 020 3141 4615.

**Finally ….**

You can find other funding opportunities through the R&D Bulletin and discuss research opportunities and issues with other RCOT members via our online community Research Connect. You can find out how to access both [here](https://www.rcot.co.uk/practice-resources/research-and-development#research-networking).