

# Research Facilitation Funding - Round 1 2025 - Call for applications

## Summary

Versus Arthritis has provided 'infrastructure' funding in a variety of ways, from the centre of excellence and experiment treatment centre funding models to clinical studies groups and smaller scale initiatives supporting training summer schools, networking, collaboration management and scientific meetings. The value of such 'soft infrastructure' support (beyond buildings, facilities, equipment, data platforms and portals) has been convincingly emphasised to the charity by the research community.

Versus Arthritis recognises and understands the value of the charity as a facilitator of arthritis research as well as a direct funder of hypothesis-led science.

We appreciate how support for activities and resources that are hard for investigators to obtain improves the pace of the wider research agenda. Our Research Facilitation funding is offering such support across the research spectrum.

This investment provides support for a variety of activities across the research pipeline environment including for example key personnel across technical and administrative support roles, research cohorts and biobanks. Over two years, we will invest approximately £1.5 million pounds over three rounds of funding. The second round of funding will be dedicated to support of patient and public involvement activity.

Applications are invited between £50,000-£250,000 in value, for up to five years duration.

This ring-fenced funding is about facilitating research and gaining access to hard to obtain resources with intent to leverage the speed of research delivery and allocation of funding to arthritis research. Investments will only be made where realistic impacts are sought towards bringing through ground-breaking scientific discoveries to people with arthritis at pace and with precision.

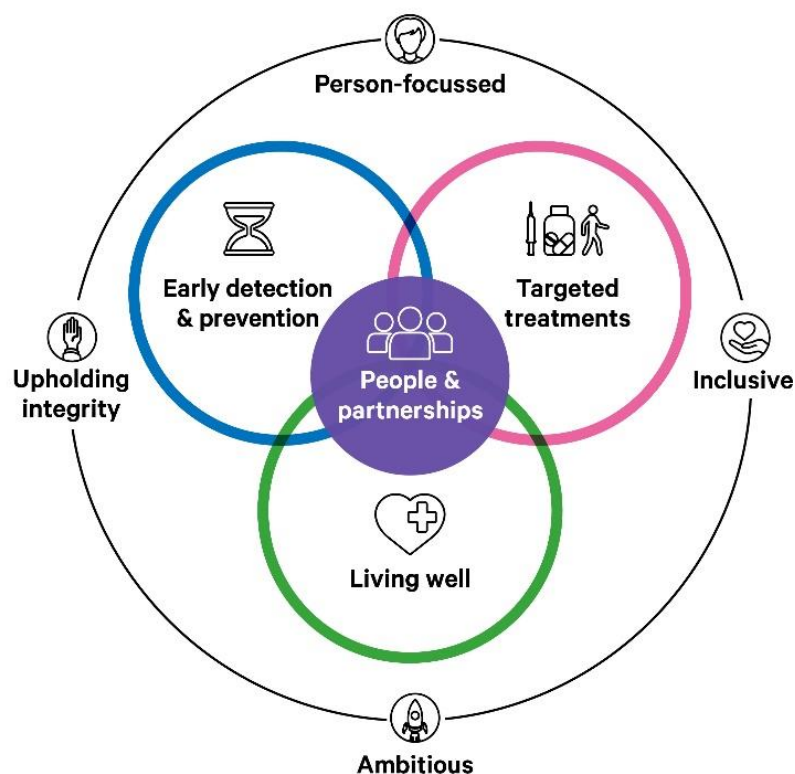
We want there to be better understanding of the causes and risk factors (biopsychosocial) for arthritis and other musculoskeletal disorders. We want to take the uncertainty out of clinical practice and improve policy around the diagnosis, prevention and treatment options for these debilitating conditions. We want to harness biological data and an individual's lived experience to predict disease development and prognosis, identify the most effective, new interventions and minimise the risk of side-effects from long-term treatment.

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

Applicants are invited to submit applications to this one-stage process through [GrantTracker](#). The deadline for the receipt of applications is **16:00 on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2025**.

If you have any questions about this call document, eligibility or would like to discuss your research proposal with the office please email [awards@versusarthritis.org](mailto:awards@versusarthritis.org)

## Context and Purpose



Over 10 million people in the UK are living with arthritis. As well as pain, people living with arthritis commonly experience high levels of fatigue, stiffness and loss of mobility and dexterity.

We want to bring about more precise and faster early detection and diagnoses, more effective and targeted treatments, and more holistic care. These are the key priority areas in our [Better Lives Today, Better Lives Tomorrow Research Strategy 2022-2026](#). We are striving to bring groundbreaking scientific discoveries to people with arthritis at pace and with precision.

Over the last two decades, Versus Arthritis has provided infrastructure funding in a variety of ways, from the centre of excellence and experiment treatment centre funding models to the clinical studies groups and smaller scale initiatives supporting training summer schools and networks for epidemiology and allied healthcare professionals, collaborative networking and scientific meetings and distinct collaboration manager roles. This funding has provided support for a variety of activities including research cohorts and biobanks, for pump-priming projects, patient involvement and key personnel across technical and administrative support roles.

We recognise the value of Versus Arthritis being a facilitator of arthritis research as well as a direct funder of the hypothesis-led science. We appreciate how support for activities and resources that are hard for investigators to obtain improves the pace of the wider research agenda. Reflecting our understanding of the charity's role as a facilitator and contributor to underpinning resources and services, our Research Facilitation funding is offering such support across the research spectrum.

Investments will only be made to provide necessary additional resource to build, join up or drive musculoskeletal components or activities in given areas. 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.

Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) - The second round of funding will be dedicated to support improved involvement in musculoskeletal research. Much good PPI practise has been established via Versus Arthritis funding. We have explored what researcher's needs are around PPI and how and where Versus Arthritis support can provide best value across what has been generated. We wish to evolve and extend the knowledge bases, networks and resources that have been created in the PPI landscape for forward use by the entire research community.

## Research Impact

The Versus Arthritis Research Impact framework focuses on the seven areas of research impact listed below. We anticipate that the Research Facilitation fund can bring impacts across any of these areas potentially.

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

## Scope and Requirements

### Key Features / Fundamental Elements

- Applications do not require contributions from host/member organisations.
- Investments will only be made to provide the necessary additional resource to build, join up or drive musculoskeletal components or activities in given areas. 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.
- Patient and Public Involvement network support is excluded from Rounds 1 and 3.

### Scope

Funding applications should be made with reference to the detailed inclusions / exclusions table below. Some notable potential areas for support are:

- Networks (brand new or re-energising) - meetings, manager role
- Creating or maintaining a research pipeline environment
- Further sustaining or evolving Centre of excellence and Experimental Treatment centre resources
- It is not to fund a PhD programme.

Networking		
Scientific Exchanges	✓	Costs for travel and accommodation
Setting up and maintaining a network	✓	Not travel costs
Setting up symposiums, seminars, workshops, think tanks / sandpits	✓	Not travel costs

Sponsorship of meetings	x	
<b>Involvement</b>		
Patient and Public Involvement costs (payment of time)	✓	Where directly associated with the nature of the activity within the application.
<b>Core Management Roles</b>		
PPI Management and Administration	✓	Patient and Public Involvement Network support is excluded from Rounds 1 and 3. Such support for registries and biobanks is allowable
Network Managers	✓	
Administrators	✓	Only for dedicated key areas – where time can be charged to the award
Contracts support	✓	Only for dedicated key areas – where time can be charged to the award
Regulatory support	✓	Only for dedicated key areas – where time can be charged to the award
Commercialisation / technology transfer / translation support	✓	Only for dedicated key areas – where time can be charged to the award
Patent applications fee / Licencing cost	x	
<b>Resources (creation / maintenance)</b>		
Patient (Longitudinal) cohort studies	✓	Support considered for existing collections not new collections
Biobank/Sample collections	✓	Support considered for existing collections not new collections
Data structures / Databases	x	Directly Incurred costs – apply within a project/programme/study
Licences	x	Directly Incurred costs – apply within a project/programme/study
Disease model support (in vitro/vivo/silico)	x	
Large equipment purchase	x	
<b>Capacity - expertise, techniques &amp; skills</b>		
Statisticians	✓	Only for dedicated key areas – where time can be charged to the award
Data Informaticians / Analysts	✓	Only for dedicated key areas – where time can be charged to the award

Histologists	✓	Only for dedicated key areas – where time can be charged to the award
Study Coordinators	✓	Only for dedicated key areas – where time can be charged to the award
Sample Managers	✓	Only for dedicated key areas – where time can be charged to the award
Data Managers / Officers / Assistants	✓	Only for dedicated key areas – where time can be charged to the award
Research / Scientific / Laboratory Technicians / Officers	✓	If need specialist skills to support development of full applications Not for a technician in a group = Directly allocated
<b>Skills and Training and Career Development</b>		
Researcher mobility - inc international and industry	✓	Travel costs allowable Not for conference attendance
Bridging funding	✓	For contract continuity whilst sorting start date gaps on known secured awards Not for when a person has no apparent next step
Mentoring	✓	
Leadership Development	✓	Capacity building in areas of unmet need e.g. an internship programme
Clinical time buy out for research training	✓	For project development in key areas
Multi-person training development programme / skills training	✓	
PhD studentships	x	
Post-doc training fellowships	x	
<b>Funding Springboard</b>		
Coordination of funding applications to funders / Business Development / Funding support	✓	
Capacity building in strategic areas via pump priming (pilot) data/evidence gathering projects	✓	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.

## General Requirements, Inclusions and Exclusions

### ➤ Patient and Public Involvement

In rounds 1 and 3 of funding, the nature of the development and delivery of the work proposed to be supported with Research Facilitation funding may preclude there being true value and relevance of involvement of people with arthritis. Applications should involve people with arthritis only as relevant. 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 research related activities, such as maintenance of a cohort or how a pump priming fund would be defined assessed and monitored.

### ➤ Diversity and Inclusion (Research Strategy Principle - Inclusive)

Applications must demonstrate careful consideration of appropriate representation and diversity (ethnicity, socioeconomic, gender, age, geography) as relevant to the request.

### ➤ Four Nations (Research Strategy Principle - Inclusive)

We encourage applicants to consider and articulate how the proposal can benefit some/all four UK nations. As relevant to the scope of the work, the use of funding should consider differences in local environments, and particularly, that specific needs of devolved healthcare and research funding contexts can require tailored solutions.

### ➤ Data and Sample resources

We encourage researchers to make use of established, pre-existent cohorts, collections, bioresources and registries; notably the BSR registries, NIHR Bioresource, the IMID Bioresource and, IMID Bio UK.

## Who can apply

The lead applicant must be based at an eligible UK institution, for further information see the guidance document. At least one applicant must have a permanent position within the lead institute. People with lived experience may be included as co-applicants.

## What you can apply for

The purpose of this response mode funding is to fund hard to obtain resources, that underpin leverage of arthritis and other musculoskeletal disorders activity and funding.

We plan to invest up to £1,500,000 across 3 rounds over 2 years, making 6-30 awards.

Each round we expect to award up to a total of £500,000 across 2-10 awards.

Each application can be between £50,000 and £250,00 in value and can be for up to 5 years duration.

We expect this funding to be highly competitive. Investments will be made only to provide the necessary additional resource to build, join up or drive musculoskeletal components or activities in given areas. 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.

Costs for salaries, expenses and small items of essential equipment can be requested. For details on what you can apply for, please see the application form and guidance document.

## How to apply

There is a one-stage application process.

### ➤ Application submission through GrantTracker

Applicants should submit applications through [GrantTracker](#), where the form will be available.

Applicants must carefully read the application form and guidance document before starting an application.

Please ensure that the most appropriate language is being 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 26<sup>th</sup> February 2025**.

Submissions after 16:00 will not be accepted.

**Please allow time for management of appropriate reviewers and signatories to access the Grant Tracker system and provide their approvals.**

## How will applications be assessed

An assembled Assessment Panel of relevant expert members will review applications and make funding recommendations.

We intend to apply a test and learn approach to the involvement of people with arthritis in the assessment of these applications. Therefore, there will be no review in this round by people with arthritis. If your application includes activities that require patient involvement, we will undertake a post award review with you. Please ensure that sufficient information is included within your application. Our research partners will help inform us how to approach future rounds.

If the volume of applications makes it necessary, the Panel may triage applications.

Applications will be reviewed and assessed on:

- Importance and potential impact
- Relevance and scope
- Feasibility
- Value for Money
- Leadership and Management
- Patient and Public involvement – will be reviewed post award rather than being part of the formal assessment process

## Award management

There will be an annual review of finances and progress.

It is expected that all awards will report annually via Researchfish.



All original peer-reviewed articles published as a result of this research must comply with our open access policies. You should tell us directly about all articles in peer-reviewed literature or disseminated publicly (for example, press releases) as soon as the article has been accepted for publication or dissemination.

Versus Arthritis must be notified of any information relating to intellectual property and commercial activity arising from this award.

Versus Arthritis is dependent on funds raised from public donations and receives no funding from the Government, therefore it is important that you join us in raising the awareness of our charity. Our logo should be used on all documents/presentations relating to this award.

## Timelines

Deadline for applications	16:00 Wednesday 26 February 2025
Rebuttal deadline for applicants	Late May 2025
Notification of award	August 2025
Project start	From late August 2025 at earliest

## Contact details

For all enquiries, please contact [awards@versusarthritis.org](mailto:awards@versusarthritis.org)