

NIHR Maternity Disparities Consortium: Pre-Application Support Fund Guidance

Introduction and Background

The [National Institute for Health and Care Research \(NIHR\) Maternity Disparities Consortium \(MDC\)](#), the first NIHR Inequalities Challenge, has a focus on finding new ways to tackle inequalities in maternity care. The consortium brings together a diverse range of organisations with expertise in research, capacity building and working with people and communities. It aims to deliver a step change in maternity outcomes, access to maternity services and experience of services and develop future research leaders in this area of need. The research carried out by the consortium will focus on inequalities before, during and after pregnancy and is structured around [three themes, two workstreams and two core functions](#).

About the Funding

The Pre-Application Support Fund are awards specifically designed to "level the playing field," offering dedicated support with preparing and submitting a fellowship application at either a pre-doctoral, doctoral or post-doctoral stage tailored to specific career goals, aligned with the MDC research. Every award is intended to equip individuals with the necessary skills, experience, and protected time to successfully transition to the next stage of their research career. A primary expectation is that the award holder will produce a high-quality fellowship funding application submitted to an identifiable external funder. Applications that do not name a specific target scheme from an identifiable funder will not be considered. Award holders are also expected to participate and engage with the NIHR Maternity Researchers Network (MATResNet) and provide updates on progress.

What is the Pre-Application Support Fund?

Preparing a high-quality fellowship, career development award application is a significant undertaking. This fund provides up to a maximum of **£30k** to support applicants on a flexible WTE basis. We plan to fund up to ten awards in total for this scheme.

The goal is to give you the "breathing space" to refine your research questions, engage with stakeholders, and solidify your methodology before you submit your more substantial career development application. The award allows you:

- Protected time from professional or caring responsibilities to prepare your planned application for a career development funding award
- Access additional support to remove barriers you would otherwise face because of a disability or health condition
- Gaining access to necessary research training resources directly related to your future application, for example, in research methods or working with people and communities, previously referred to as patient and public involvement
- Opportunities to further develop and broaden your collaborations, as well as get supervisor or mentor input on your application
- Become a member of the Maternity Researchers Network (MATResNet) and have access to any training organised by the MDC.

Scope of Funding

Funding can include:

- Funding towards salary costs for individuals to buy out time from current responsibilities to enhance or prepare an application for a Career Development

award. This could be for a block of time, for example, 12 weeks, or it could provide support to buy someone out for one or two days a week for up to 12 months. Please note, the scheme will pay 100% direct costs only and will not provide any overhead costs.

- Funding for an individual's training and development associated with enhancing a planned application for a Career Development award.
- Costs associated with Public Involvement on an application for Career Development award. All support should be in line with the Funders public contributor payment policy.
- Costs associated with accessibility and any reasonable adjustments required to support the development of an application, because of a health condition or disability, or caring responsibilities (beyond usual care costs).
- This award does not include provision for direct research costs; nor does it cover fees for conferences.

It is anticipated that support will be funded for up to 12 months on a flexible WTE basis and cost up to a maximum of £30k. **You must approach the MDC Capacity Development Lead aligned to the relevant theme / workstream / core function before preparing and submitting an application. A list of the leads can be found [here](#).**

You must approach a Finance Officer associated with your employer to discuss costing and to ensure you get approval prior to the deadline.

Timeline

Monday 1 st June	Call opens
Wednesday 24 th June 10.00-10.45	Information webinar
Thursday 30 th July	Deadline for applications
By 4 th September	Outcomes announced
From 1 st October	Awards can start

Eligibility

- Applicants must meet the eligibility criteria of the subsequent career development award they intend to apply for following the pre-application support award.
- Applicants can be existing members of the consortium or be external to the consortium. However, the award must be held at an [MDC member organisation](#). Applicants who are not currently based at an MDC member organisation, would need to be hosted at an MDC member organisation for the award.
- The applicant's main supervisor must be from within the MDC, but additional supervisors can be either internal to the consortium or external depending on the needs of the project.
- Applicants research interests must align with MDC themes, workstreams or core functions, and this must be discussed and agreed with a theme, workstream or core function lead / co-lead and theme capacity development lead.
- Applicants must have agreed how their current position will be covered and have support from their line manager/ supervisor.
- The funding is available for individuals at all career stages with subsequent career development awards at a pre-doctoral, doctoral or post-doctoral stage.
- Applicants may be based in any of the four UK nations, and we particularly welcome applications from those working in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

Core Expectations and Outputs:

- A fellowship funding application submitted to an external funder, at either a pre-doctoral, doctoral or post-doctoral stage. This application may be submitted during, or shortly following the pre-application support award.
- Any offer is subject to robust supervision arrangements. Applicants must provide details of their committed supervisors, with at least one supervisor based within the MDC.

An application for a career development is an expected output of this award. Applications not including a named scheme from an identifiable funder will not be considered.

It is requested that you provide details of the funding scheme that you intend to apply for, including an estimated timeframe linked to your application for this funding. You will be expected to provide updates about your progress at regular time points of your award period. Following completion of your Pre-Application Support Funding award you will be contacted by members of the MDC Capacity Development group to request an update on the progress and outcome of your future onward application(s). Please note: this Pre-Application Support Fund is administered by the NIHR MDC. It is a separate scheme from the central NIHR Pre-Application Support Fund, details of which can be found [here](#).

How to Apply

Before you begin your application, it is essential that you:

- **Read this Guidance Document**
- Consult the [Capacity development Lead](#) aligned to your relevant theme / workstream / core function
- Consult your [relevant theme/workstream/core function lead/co-lead](#)

Submit your application along with your CV and a timetable/Gantt chart to nihr.mdc.capacitydevelopment@newcastle.ac.uk by **12.00 Noon on Thursday 30th July 2026**

Webinar

We will be holding a webinar on the scheme on **Wednesday 24th June, 10.00-10.45**. There will be opportunity to submit questions in advance or ask questions at the webinar. If you would like to attend, please register to attend by completing: [NIHR Maternity Disparities Consortium Pre-application Support Fund Webinar – Fill in form](#). A recording of the webinar will be shared after the event on the MDC website.

Our Commitment to Equity

In line with our mission to tackle maternity inequalities, we particularly encourage applications from individuals from underrepresented backgrounds and those working in underserved clinical or community settings. We want to ensure that the best research ideas and researchers, no matter where they come from, have the support they need to succeed.

Deadline for Applications: 12 Noon on Thursday 30th July 2026.

If you have any questions regarding your eligibility or the application process, please email nihr.mdc.capacitydevelopment@newcastle.ac.uk.