



Seed Funding Award for Emerging and Early Career Researchers 2025

Applicant Guidelines

Call for applications open: 29th September 2025
Deadline for Applications: 24th November 2025
Award value: €10,000
Award decision: March 2026
Award duration: To be completed one year from the project start date

1. About the Rare Disease Clinical Trial Network

The Vision of the Rare Disease Clinical Trial Network (RDCTN) is to make Ireland world-leading in patient access to high quality rare disease clinical trials. We will achieve this through our Mission - to be a support and collaboration hub for national and international rare disease expertise and innovation while keeping the patient voice at the centre of all our work. The RDCTN works with clinicians, researchers, patients, patient advocacy groups and industry to increase access to rare disease clinical trials, improve rare disease clinical trial design and educate early career researchers in rare disease research and clinical trials, while embedding the patient voice across all network activities.

2. Purpose of the Award

The Rare Disease Clinical Trial Network Seed Funding Award was established to further our Vision and Mission by supporting emerging and early career researchers in developing new rare disease research projects, in collaboration with patient partners where possible, aimed at developing an intervention or preparing for a clinical trial.

Examples of suitable projects include but are not limited to:

- Developing novel methodologies for the design and analysis of clinical trials in small populations
- Optimising rare disease clinical trial interventions
- Exploring proof of concept studies
- Building data to trial readiness

Collaboration with investigator-led studies and trials from outside Ireland is also encouraged and the funding could be used to resource the set-up of such studies/trials.



It should be noted that in this scheme the RDCTN will not support:

- Rare infectious disease research projects
- Applications which are solely or predominantly developing the infrastructure for biobanking, databases or patient registers without a predominant research element
- Applications which are solely or predominantly health service developments or implementation of an intervention without a predominant research element
- Applications from individuals applying for, holding, or employed under a research grant from the tobacco industry

3. Public and Patient Involvement

RDCTN is committed to placing the patient voice at the heart of all our work. Applicants are strongly encouraged to include early and meaningful collaboration with Public & Patient partners in their proposals. Recognised not only as a best practice but as a scientific enabler, strong Public and Patient Involvement ensures that research is relevant, accessible and aligned with the experiences and priorities of those affected.

PPI in health research means that research is carried out WITH or BY patients or members of the public rather than ABOUT, TO or FOR them. PPI occurs when individuals meaningfully and actively collaborate in any or all parts of a research project and varies depending on the project. In some cases that may include (but is not limited to) PPI in the:

- prioritisation of the research question
- design of the protocol
- determination of outcomes
- dissemination plans
- preparation of the application (in particular the lay summary)
- or having PPI contributors as part of the research team

If the applicant feels that PPI is not relevant to their project, they must include a clear rationale for why PPI is not present in their plans.

All applications will be reviewed by PPI experts as well as scientific experts and final scores will reflect the assessments from both reviewer groups.

If you have questions relating to PPI in your application please contact **Dr Cassandra Dinius**, Public and Patient Involvement Liaison Officer, email: cassandra.dinius@ucd.ie.



4. Conditions of the Call

One award to the value of €10,000 will be allocated following a competitive, peer-review selection process. Applications should be led by emerging or early career researchers and, where appropriate, involve collaboration with other researchers, including more senior academic researchers and/or external partners.

4.1 Eligibility

Applicants must be affiliated to a university, hospital, registered charity or other recognised research or educational institution.

Applications will be accepted from researchers based in institutions outside Ireland but there must be a strong collaborative link with an Irish university, hospital or patient advocacy group and a clear benefit to Irish patients.

All rare disease researchers are eligible but priority will be given to emerging and early career researchers. For the purpose of this call, emerging and early career researchers are defined as being within 2-7 years of experience since completion of PhD training. Eligibility can be extended for reasons such as maternity, paternity, or parental leave, illness, national service, clinical training, natural disasters, asylum, or for victims of gender-based violence or any other form of violence. Where researchers have not been research-active for extended periods of time this should be clearly qualified and documented in their application.

4.2 Application Process

A completed application form must be submitted to rdctn@ucd.ie by the deadline of **21st November 2025**. Applicants may submit one application only.

Proposals must include:

- Project lay summary, project abstract, keywords
- Project description
 - Research question
 - Relevance to the vision and mission of the RDCTN
 - Summary of background data
 - Specific aims
 - Overview of Study Design
 - Measurable outcome
 - Public and Patient Involvement in the research
 - Impact/future research potential
 - References
- Project budget
- CVs



4.3 Funding and Budgets

The total funding available is €10,000. If additional funding is available from another source this must be clearly stated in the application form. Funding must be used for new research - not research that has already happened or that forms part of a funded research initiative.

Budget requests may include:

- Research equipment, materials and consumables
- Pilot studies to demonstrate viability of larger projects
- Development of base data necessary for further research
- Research nurse time or other resources to support the set-up of an investigator led trial or study from outside Ireland.

Funding may not be used for:

- Personal/professional development
- Salary supplementation for investigators
- Staff buyout from teaching
- Conference attendance

4.4 Review and Selection Process

The RDCTN Research Committee will oversee the seed funding call. An independent panel of experts composed of Scientific Experts and PPI Reviewers will review and score applications.

Scientific assessment of the RDCTN Seed Funding Award is based on the [NIH scoring system](#). Projects will be reviewed and scored based on the following criteria:

- Relevance to RDCTN Vision and Mission
- Significance
- Investigator
- Innovation
- Approach
- Environment
- Overall Impact

PPI reviewers will evaluate projects based on the following criteria:

- Relevance to RDCTN Vision and Mission
- Importance
- Clarity and language
- Potential benefit



- Dissemination
- Inclusion of PPI
- Patient-friendly design

PPI reviewers will provide a rating for each criteria with a corresponding score as follows: excellent (-.5); good (-.25); appropriate (0); fair (.25) and poor (.5).

Scientific scores and PPI scores will be combined to produce final scores.

Following review and assessment, the RDCTN will contact all applicants by February 2026 to inform them of the outcome.

4.5 Output and reporting requirements for successful applicants

Essential

- A final report must be submitted no later than one month after the end of the funding period. This must be accompanied by financial records/receipts etc to satisfy auditing requirements.
- A testimonial about the project in support of the RDCTN Seed Funding Award must be submitted with the final report.
- The outcome and impact of projects must be highlighted at appropriate meetings and forums including conferences hosted by the RDCTN.
- Acknowledgement of the Rare Disease Clinical Trial Network in all project outputs.

Desired

- At least one research-related output (e.g., peer-reviewed publication, external funding application) by December 2027.

5. Contacts for further information:

General enquiries: Suzanne McCormack, RDCTN Network Manager

EM: suzanne.mccormack@ucd.ie

PPI enquiries: Dr Cassandra Dinius, RDCTN Public Patient Involvement (PPI) Liaison Officer

EM: Cassandra.dinius@ucd.ie