

# **Sands research fund**

## **Guidance for applicants**

September 2017



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Thank you for your interest in the Sands research fund. This document outlines our procedure and should answer most of your questions. If you have any further queries, however, please contact Dr Laura Price at [laura.price@sands.org.uk](mailto:laura.price@sands.org.uk)

## **1. What will we fund?**

Our total fund is expected to be over £200,000 for 2017/18. The maximum grant awarded is likely to be £200,000 over 3 years. As you can see from these figures, we will not be funding a large number of studies, and we ask you to consider carefully how well your project fits with our research priorities before applying for funding.

## **2. Our research strategy and priorities**

In order to be considered for funding, proposals must demonstrate that they focus on:

- understanding the causes of stillbirth and neonatal death, and/or
- identifying pregnancies at risk of perinatal deaths, and/or
- improving interventions to manage at-risk pregnancies, or
- optimising bereavement care.

Priority will be given to proposals that demonstrate clear potential to generate robust evidence that can lead to changes in clinical practice. For projects other than those looking at bereavement care, we will prioritise proposals according to the number of babies/families who may potentially benefit from the research. Our advisors will also consider the likelihood that the research would receive funding from other sources (i.e. a high-quality study that is unlikely to be funded otherwise, would be considered favourably compared with a similar standard of study that would be likely to attract funding from other sources).

We also ask you to consider whether your project fits within the research priorities identified by the Stillbirth Priority Setting Partnership [www.jla.nihr.ac.uk/priority-setting-partnerships/stillbirth](http://www.jla.nihr.ac.uk/priority-setting-partnerships/stillbirth), in consultation with parents, healthcare professionals, academics and charities.

To be considered for funding, the principal investigator on the project must be based in the UK.

## **3. Types of study that will be considered**

Currently, we are not being prescriptive about the type of study that we will fund. Decisions will rest on the how strongly the application meets the criteria listed in this document, and the reviewers' estimation of the quality. We aim to reduce the number of applications to a manageable number at the 'Triage' stage.

## **4. Costs that will be funded**

Our research fund comprises money raised or donated by our supporters. We have a duty to ensure that this money is spent on the costs directly incurred by carrying out the funded research. We do not cover directly allocated costs or indirect costs, and we support the position of the Association of Medical Research Charities <http://www.amrc.org.uk/publications/statement-supporting-research-universities>

Directly incurred costs are the direct costs of research and include: research staff (e.g. research assistant salaries, junior researchers at post-doctoral level); consumables and other costs directly attributable to the project; the cost equipment specific to the needs of the project; and travel and subsistence. For more information on the costs that can be covered from our research fund, contact [laura.price@sands.org.uk](mailto:laura.price@sands.org.uk)

#### **4.1. Clinical studies**

Note that Sands is as an NIHR non-commercial Partner. Appropriate research studies funded through our annual funding round are automatically eligible for NIHR Clinical Research Network (CRN) support and therefore entitled to access NHS support via the NIHR CRN. To be eligible for NIHR CRN support, a study must meet the standard study eligibility criteria, namely that it:

- Requires HRA approval
- Is a discrete structured research project with an appropriate study protocol
- Is of clear value to the NHS
- Involves NHS patients, staff, premises, facilities or resources.

See [www.nihr.ac.uk/research-and-impact/nihr-clinical-research-network-portfolio/](http://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-and-impact/nihr-clinical-research-network-portfolio/) for further information.

## **5. Applying for funding**

Please complete the outline application form and submit it, together with a 1-page CV outlining the relevant experience and publications for the **principal investigator**, to [research@sands.org.uk](mailto:research@sands.org.uk) by **17:00 hours, Monday 27 November**.

Forms and CVs should be emailed from an academic institution email address (ac.uk). Applications submitted after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

## **6. The process**

Once the deadline has been reached, we will sift out those applications that do not align with our strategy (see Our research strategy and priorities) and advise these applicants that their application has been unsuccessful. Those that pass this initial sift will go through a triage stage that aims to reduce the number of applications to a manageable number.

### **6.1. Triage**

A subgroup of the Sands Perinatal Expert Panel (PEP) will consider the outline applications for scientific excellence plus:

- the potential to answer a relevant question around stillbirth/neonatal death or bereavement care for affected parents or other groups
- value for money
- the use of robust methods
- the likelihood of delivering within projected timetable

The aim of this stage is to reduce the number of applications to a manageable number. The Chair of the PEP reserves the right to ask an applicant to consider resubmitting in the light of feedback received, but we envisage that this will rarely happen.

## **6.2. Full application**

For applications that successfully pass the triage stage, we will request full applications. This will happen in early to mid-January, and we will allow 8 weeks for submission of full proposals. We will advise applicants of the final dates nearer the time.

## **6.3. Peer review**

Any application that meets any of the following criteria will be sent for independent peer review:

- request for funding of more than £25,000 per annum
- any application that represents a significant proportion of the research fund
- all awards of more than a year's funding
- all applications from members of the PEP and researchers associated with them or their departments
- up-to-date expertise in the field in question is not available on the PEP.

There will be an opportunity to suggest peer reviewers (though we ask that applicants do not suggest anyone with whom they have collaborated or have a relationship that may jeopardise an objective review), and we will also check whether there are any potential reviewers to avoid.

Peer reviewers will be asked to consider the following points in their review.

- Timely and achievable?
- Not unnecessarily duplicating other work?
- Using appropriate methods?
- Done by researchers with the right skills and facilities?
- Value for money?
- Relevant to the charity's aims and objectives?

Applicants will be sent the peer reviewers' comments for consideration and response.

## **6.4. Sands PEP meeting**

The Sands PEP will meet to consider the applications and peer reviewers' comments and applicant responses. The PEP will recommend a short list of 'fundable studies'. PEP members abide by a code of conduct, and we have strict procedures in place to avoid conflicts of interest.

## **6.5. Sands' Board**

Sands Research Subcommittee, which is a subcommittee of the Board of Trustees, will consider the recommendations of the Sands PEP in the light of Sands' research strategy. The Research Subcommittee will recommend a final list of studies for funding to the Board of Trustees. The Board will make the final decision to award funding at the next Board meeting. For 2017/18, this is likely to be in June 2018. We will notify applicants of the decision as soon as the meeting has been held.

## **6.6. Expectations**

Although we will provide written feedback for unsuccessful applications that reach the final stages, we will not enter dialogue with the applicants. The Board's decision is final.

If successful, we expect funded researchers to provide regular written update reports (at 6 months for 1-year projects and annually for those running for more than 1 year). Funds may not be released until the update reports have been received and approved by the PEP chair.

## **7. Other documents**

Other documents relating to this process are the:

- terms of reference for the Sands Perinatal Expert Panel
- conflicts of interest policy.

Both of these documents are available from the Sands website, as is the membership of the PEP.