**Sands research fund**

**Guidance for applicants**

2018

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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 email [research@sands.org.uk](mailto:research@sands.org.uk)

# What will we fund?

This year we are inviting applications for grants to a maximum of £40,000. We anticipate inviting a shortlist of around fifteen full applications and awarding up to five grants. Additionally we will give preference to applications which are ready to start in the same financial year funding has been agreed, which will be 2019-20.

We ask you to consider carefully how well your project fits with our research priorities before applying for funding.

# 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.

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](file:///\\sands-dc01\Shared\Research%20&%20Prevention\Research%20(Janet%20Scott)\Research%20funding%20round%202016\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.

# Types of study that will be considered

This year we are inviting applications for grants to a maximum of £40,000. These may for example be pump priming or seed awards. We will also consider applications for joint funding where part funds have been secured from elsewhere.

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.

# 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, please email [research@sands.org.uk](mailto:research@sands.org.uk).

## 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.

# 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, 3 December 2018.**

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.

# 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.

## 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.

## Full application

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

## Peer review

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

* request for funding of more than £15,000 per annum
* 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.

## 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.

## 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 2018/19, this is likely to be in June 2018. We will notify applicants of the decision as soon as possible after the meeting has been held.

## 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 to an agreed schedule appropriate to the duration of the study. Funds may not be released until the update reports have been received and approved by the PEP chair.

Please note that we will not be able to provide feedback to applicants who are unsuccessful at the outline application stage.

# 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.