



MY NAME'S DODDIE FOUNDATION

# Discovery Network

## Discovery Network: Request for Applications 2025

This Request for Applications (RFA) applies to researchers who wish to submit an application for consideration under My Name's Doddie Foundation's ("Foundation") Discovery Network funding programme. Applicants will be asked to acknowledge that they have read and understood this RFA when making a submission. Submission of an application under the conditions of this RFA does not guarantee that an application will be successful, even where such application is within scope.

### Key dates

<b>RFA Released</b>	24th March 2025
<b>Expressions of Interest due</b>	Midday 21st May 2025
<b>Full application invitations</b>	End of June 2025
<b>Full applications due</b>	Midday 9th September 2025
<b>Reviewer comments shared with applicant</b>	w/c 10th October 2025
<b>Response letter due</b>	24th October 2025
<b>Decisions communicated</b>	December 2025
<b>Research begins</b>	March-April 2026

### Executive Summary

People living with MND urgently need effective treatments. To develop these, we need to identify new therapeutic targets. A target is a protein, gene or system in the body that can be acted on by a treatment to slow, stop or reverse the progression of MND.

The Discovery Network will provide the substantial funding and innovative environment needed to encourage breakthroughs in our understanding of MND that could lead to fundamentally new approaches to treating the disease. Multi-institutional and interdisciplinary teams will take on bold ambitious projects to better understand MND biology with a focused goal of identifying new targets for treatments.

Teams will collaborate in an open transparent network to stimulate innovation, spark discoveries and speed up progress. They will work with My Name's Doddie Foundation and our partners to develop Target Assessment Packages (TAPs) for identified targets, which will be reviewed by an independent committee aligned to the UK MND Research Institute, to identify those with the most promise. To ensure rapid and efficient translation, teams will be supported to identify additional funding or establish new partnerships to take their research forward.

The Discovery Network is about more than grant funding. It will create a new community, a new way of working and collaborating, and serve as a platform for others to invest alongside us, to grow and evolve the programme.

We are looking for teams with a commitment to collaborative working and open science, and the determination to find effective treatments for MND. Together we'll discover more, faster, and accelerate the search for effective treatments and ultimately, a cure.

The open-science and team approach of the Discovery Network is modeled after the [Aligning Science Across Parkinson's Collaborative Research Network](#) and [BD2 Discovery Research](#).

## 1. Remit and offer

The Foundation exists to fund research in support of our vision; a world free of MND. To catalyse the development of effective new treatments for MND, the Foundation launched the Discovery Network in 2024. Through this award, the Foundation provides grants to teams undertaking research to better understand the biology of MND, with a focused goal of identifying new therapeutic targets. You can read about the 2024 cohort of teams funded through the Discovery Network on the Foundation's website.

Successful teams must adopt a collaborative, open science approach. They will act as a network, sharing knowledge and expertise, and jointly developing strategies and frameworks for target identification and assessment. They will work with My Name's Doddie Foundation and our partners to assess potential targets, prioritise those with the most promise and secure additional support to translate their findings through robust validation studies.

Through alignment with the [UK MND Research Institute](#), the work of the Discovery Network will be joined up within the UK MND research ecosystem, enabling access to expertise and capabilities, and creating a national translational pipeline.

Teams can apply for up to £1 million funding over a 3-year period. Funding will cover:

- Staff time: salaries for early career researchers and technical staff. Please note that the Foundation **will not** contribute to tenured staff salaries, unless it is justified (for example to buy back time from clinical work). In cases where a principal investigator or co-applicants' salary is dependent on grant funding, we would require a letter from the institution confirming this.
- Research costs (consumables and equipment)
- Project management support (each team must hire a 0.2 FTE minimum project manager, see section 3 below)
- Costs associated with collaboration\* e.g. travel and shipping costs, researcher placements between institutions, conference attendance, team meetings, attendance at the Discovery Network's annual showcase meeting
- Costs associated with open science\* e.g. publication costs, data dissemination, sharing of tools and other resources

\*We expect significant costs to be allocated to these activities, demonstrating the team's commitment to these principles and ways of working. The budget **should** include around (and up to) **£50,000 per year** for costs associated with collaboration and open science activities.

Other costs can be requested, with prior approval from the Foundation. Get in touch with us to discuss your needs before application at [research@myname5doddie.co.uk](mailto:research@myname5doddie.co.uk).

The Foundation does not cover indirect costs of research (no overheads). All grants will be made in £GBP, the Foundation is not responsible for changes in conversion rates. We are happy to explore co-funding projects with other funders. Applicants can apply for funding for the same research proposal from other funding bodies concurrently but the Foundation must be informed of this at the time of application, where possible, or at the point of application to another funding body. If the application to another funding body is recommended for award, the Foundation must be informed immediately.

## 2. Scientific scope

Projects will employ innovative approaches and bold ideas to better understand the biology underlying MND, with a goal of identifying new targets for future treatments. Each project will focus on a specific area of MND biology and build on existing expertise, knowledge and tools already developed and accessible within the team. Examples of areas of MND biology may include: autophagy, ageing, the immune system, lysosomal function, mitochondrial function, protein homeostasis, RNA metabolism and vesicle transport, although this is not an exhaustive list. Successful applications will provide preliminary data linking the focus of their project to MND development or progression and outlining the potential to reveal new therapeutic targets. The Foundation welcomes proposals in new or emerging areas of MND research if supported by robust scientific evidence.

Due to the previously successful teams' focus on TDP-43 and ribonucleoprotein biology, other areas may be prioritised by the Advisory Board for funding to diversify the projects within the Discovery Network. Applicants are advised to contact the research team before submission to discuss their ideas.

Successful projects will employ a range of innovative techniques, methodologies and expertise to gain new disease insights. This may include new approaches in omics technologies, functional genomics, imaging, complex cell models, artificial intelligence and data-driven research. Projects will have a strong focus on the identification of novel targets that can slow, stop or reverse disease progression. Throughout projects, as new targets are identified, TAPs will be produced and presented to an expert Independent Committee to identify those with the most promise for future treatments.

We encourage the use of a range of different models including human induced pluripotent stem cells, animal models (where absolutely needed - see the [AMRC's position statement on the use of animals in research](#)) and human tissue samples. Use of high quality patient datasets are also encouraged.

### Flexible co-development approach

Throughout the application process, it may be suggested that alignment or synergies between teams are created to take advantage of specific expertise, tools or resources, to give the highest chance of groundbreaking research being possible. Applicants are encouraged to keep an open mind throughout the application process.

Once funded teams are in place, they will work together to establish joint frameworks and ways of working. For example, agreement of what a good target looks like and a framework for developing robust target assessment packages. Teams may be encouraged to seek additional advice and expertise from outside of the network.

### Open-science approach

The Discovery Network is committed to an open science approach to ensure rapid and efficient sharing of knowledge, development of collaborations and sparking of new discoveries. Funded teams must review and adhere to our [open science policy](#), including:

- Submission to pre-print servers
- Publishing results (positive and negative) in open access journals
- Sharing protocols and datasets to pre-approved repositories
- Making every effort to ensure new tools developed under this award are made available freely

Researchers funded through the Discovery Network will use an online data sharing tool to track and develop a catalogue of research outputs to enhance access to these resources within the network. Use of this platform will be a factor for future follow-on funding decisions.

### 3. Eligibility

- Teams must be multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional (minimum 2 separate research institutions)
- The lead applicant must be based within a UK academic institution, but collaborators can be based elsewhere in the world
- We encourage senior postdoctoral researchers (ECRs) such as senior postdoctoral researchers working towards independence, to apply as lead and/or co-applicants; they must provide a letter of support from their research institution and head of laboratory for their application. Depending on the experience of the ECR applicant, the [Advisory Board](#) may request that the head of laboratory/mentor and ECR be co-lead investigators on the project to ensure adequate support and mentorship for the ECR lead.
- Commercial companies (such as pharmaceutical and biotech companies) can be named as co-applicants but will not receive grant funding and must adhere to our policies including our open science policy

#### Lead applicant

The lead applicant is responsible for submitting the application and will be the key point of contact for My Name's5 Doddie Foundation during the application, review and, if successful, award setup process. They will be responsible for scientific and technical leadership and lead on contractual, financial and other operational matters throughout the life-cycle of the project. We encourage early career researchers to be named as lead applicant and co-applicants.

Please note that you may only submit one application as the lead applicant. You may be named as a co-applicant or collaborator on other applications.

#### Co-applicants

The lead from each institution within a team should be listed as a co-applicant on the application. They will be responsible for liaising with the lead applicant to support development of the application and award setup. Throughout the lifecycle of the award, they will actively participate within the team and wider network.

#### Project manager

Each team will recruit a part-time project manager to manage administrative activities, coordinate with other teams in the Network and work with My Name's5 Doddie Foundation to achieve the goals of the Discovery Network. The project manager will usually be an ECR (a postdoctoral researcher or research assistant) already working within the team, and must devote at least 20% (and up to 40%) of their time to this effort. They must be based within the same institution as the lead applicant (but must not be the lead applicant) and should be appointed within three months of the award beginning.

The project manager will:

- Oversee the management of their teams research, ensuring it is on track according to agreed aims
- Lead and organise a monthly meeting for their team
- Coordinate collaboration with other teams
- Liaise with Foundation staff to communicate updates, challenges or any other feedback
- Manage reporting to the Foundation
- Work with the Foundation and the other project managers to ensure a highly engaged Network, support the open science ethos of Discovery Network by helping develop blogs and webinars, and support organisation of events such as the annual showcase meeting

- Manage any other administrative tasks on behalf of the team, such as ensuring the Foundation's open science policy is met

### Sub-contractors

Teams may enlist commercial organisations to provide services on a sub-contract basis and this should be stated in the expression of interest and full application.

### Collaborative working

Teams are expected to collaborate transparently, sharing knowledge, tools and expertise. Teams must embrace this way of working. Successful teams will need to provide a fully signed Collaboration Agreement outlining ways of working together. **At the full application stage, we require a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the research institutions confirming that they intend to enter such a Collaboration Agreement should the funding be successfully secured. If an MOU is not possible at the full application stage, we require at the very minimum that the teams provide a Letter of Intent signed by the institutions confirming they are aware of the requirement and will support the applicants to have the Collaboration Agreement ready in a timely manner.**

## 4. Application and review process

The application process for the Discovery Network is as follows:

1. Applicant completes an expression of interest form
2. Foundation staff assess whether the application is in scope (see scientific scope and eligibility above) and review the lay summary. Please note the Foundation may return the application to applicants and ask for the lay summary to be updated before the application is sent for review if it is judged to be unsuitable for a non-scientific audience.
3. Review by the [Advisory Board](#) is conducted on in-scope applications and it is expected that 4-6 proposals will be invited to full application stage
4. Full applications will be subject to external peer review and applicants will have the opportunity to provide a brief response to address reviewer comments
5. Assessment and scoring will then be carried out by the Advisory Board at an in-person meeting
6. The overall area of focus of top ranked projects will be taken into account by the Advisory Board and some teams may be asked to participate in new collaborations with other teams or slightly modify the scope of their application to ensure the grant portfolio can achieve the overarching goals of the Discovery Network
7. The Advisory Board will review any project amendments and recommend a funding decision to the Foundation's board of trustees
8. Final funding decisions are made by the Foundation's board of trustees

### Application submission

All applications must be submitted via the Foundation's online grant management software, [Flexi-Grant](#). Applicants must acknowledge that they have read and understood this RFA and the other relevant policies including our open science policy, as prompted in the application form. Following the submission of an application, applicants will receive an email confirming receipt of their application. Applications submitted not using the approved procedure will not be considered.

### Expression of interest (EOI) stage



EOI applications must be submitted before an applicant is invited to the full application stage. The lead applicant must create a [Flexi-Grant](#) account and submit the application on behalf of their team.

The EOI will ask for the following information:

- Lead applicant and co-applicant(s) details (including contributions to the project)
- Project details (including scientific and lay abstracts, brief background information with chosen area of MND biology and hypothesis, preliminary data, brief project plan with aims and costs overview, and a description of the team's commitment and approach to open science and collaboration)

The Foundation executive will check applications for completeness, quality of uploaded documents, eligibility, eligible costs and review lay summaries.

EOIs will be assessed by the Advisory Board on:

- Scientific robustness of the proposal including strength of existing evidence, methodology proposed, level of scientific innovation and suitability of costs applied for
- Potential impact of the project, based on its ability to reveal promising new targets for future MND treatments
- Suitability of the team to carry out the research, including access to relevant expertise and capabilities
- Ability of the team to bring valuable expertise, tools, capabilities and resources to the Discovery Network
- Commitment of the team to open science and collaboration

Following EOI applications, it may be suggested that alignment or synergies between teams are created to take advantage of specific expertise, tools or resources to give the highest chance of groundbreaking research being possible. Applicants are encouraged to keep an open mind throughout the application process.

### **Full application stage**

The lead applicant must submit the application on behalf of their team using the Flexi-Grant system. The teams will be asked to expand on all the information provided at the EOI stage, including full details on why they are poised for successful collaboration, their open science approach, and what they would bring to the other teams and wider Network. For the project, full breakdown of the scientific background, hypothesis, and experimental aims will be required, along with preliminary data, methodology, a Gantt chart, a risk mitigation strategy, and a detailed budget table with justifications.

Full applications will be assessed by the Advisory Group on:

- Scientific merit of the study including ambition of the aims and objectives, proposed methodology, resources and equipment and level of scientific innovation
- Technical feasibility of the project plan and likelihood of study aims and objectives being reached
- Potential impact of the project, based on its ability to reveal promising new targets for future MND treatments
- Suitability of the team to carry out the research, including access to relevant expertise and capabilities
- Suitability of the risk mitigation strategy
- Ability of the team to bring valuable tools, capabilities or resources to the Discovery Network
- Likelihood of a successful collaboration across the team
- Commitment of the team to open science and collaboration
- A cost-effective and realistic budget

### **Award stage**

Projects that are successful in receiving grant funding will work with My Name's Doddie Foundation to develop an initial work plan, outlining key milestones which will be reviewed by the Advisory Board throughout the project lifecycle. These milestones can be subject to change as we acknowledge that discovery science is not linear.

## **5. Confidentiality and conflict of interest**

All information shared under the Foundation grant scheme shall be handled as confidential and used only to evaluate the relevant application. Information provided in application forms will be shared with our Advisory Group and other independent experts as required, according to the criteria set out in section 4. Throughout our peer review process, information is kept strictly confidential. All reviewers must accept our [conflict of interest policy](#) before they agree to review a grant application. If an individual has a conflict of interest, they are not involved in reviewing that application. We work closely with our Chair to ensure funding decisions are fair, objective and transparent.

## **6. Personal data**

All information, including any personal data, submitted to the Foundation will only be used for the processing of and communication regarding the application.

Details of successful applications, including names of grant holders, institutions, funding value, start and end dates and plain language summaries will be published on the [Research Portfolio](#) page of our website; grant holders will have final approval of the information published.

As part of our commitment to membership of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC), we are required to report to them details of our funded projects to enable sector analysis.

All information, including any personal data, will be processed, stored, shared and retained securely and per the Foundation's [Privacy Policy](#). Applicants should refer to the Foundation's privacy policy for more details on the processing, storage, sharing and retention of personal data.

## **7. Research policies**

We endorse the Association of Medical Research Charities' (AMRC) position statements on the Use of Animals in Research and the Importance of Involvement in Medical Research and Supporting Research in Universities.

For further information on our research policies, please visit our page on [How We Invest in Research](#).

## **8. Our acknowledgements**

The team and open science approach within the Discovery Network is underpinned by a model born out of the [Milken Institute](#) and applied in [Parkinson's](#) and [bipolar disorder](#). We would like to thank the teams for sharing their expertise and approach with us.