Myotonic Dystrophy FOUNDATION

Request for Applications: 2026 Pilot Grant Program, Fall Cycle

Myotonic Dystrophy Foundation
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Contracting Officer:	Tanya Stevenson, Chief Executive Officer, MDF
Location:	United States, Canada, and eligible international sites
Date Issued:	April 6, 2026
Proposals Due:	July 10, 2026
Selection Notification:	by September 18, 2026
Period of Award:	November 1, 2026 – October 31, 2027
Anticipated Award:	$50,000
Number of Awards:	To be determined based on applicant mix and available funds

Synopsis

Through this Request for Applications (RFA), the Myotonic Dystrophy Foundation (MDF) acknowledges the scarcity of funding for researchers to conduct innovative investigations, generate preliminary data, and pave the way for future research endeavors. In 2024, MDF first launched a semiannual application process for a one-year Pilot Grant in myotonic dystrophy (DM) research.

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Goal

The goal of the Pilot Grant program is to fund original projects covering basic, translational, and/or clinical research in myotonic dystrophy. Through this funding, the program aims to achieve three objectives: (1) supporting new and cutting-edge, high-

risk, high-reward avenues of inquiry in myotonic dystrophy, (2) fostering collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches in DM research, and (3) attracting new researchers to the DM field. This funding provides an opportunity to have a broader impact beyond individual projects, strengthening collective efforts to understand the complexities of myotonic dystrophy and develop effective interventions for those affected by the disease.

Background

Innovative ideas and pilot studies often struggle to secure significant funding due to intense competition and stringent requirements of traditional research grants. With small, one-year grants, researchers can embark on exploratory studies, proof-of-concept experiments, or novel research approaches without the burden of extensive preliminary data or long-term commitments. This flexibility fosters creativity and risk-taking, leading to groundbreaking discoveries and promising leads for future investigations. Through this funding, the program aims to achieve three objectives: (1) supporting new and cutting-edge avenues of inquiry in myotonic dystrophy, (2) fostering collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches in DM research, and (3) attracting new researchers to the DM field.

The grant program focuses on funding DM researchers to explore innovative ideas and conduct preliminary investigations. This funding enables DM researchers to gather essential data and generate preliminary findings that can lay the foundation for larger-scale research projects, empowering them to take risks and explore new avenues of inquiry.

Additionally, the Pilot Grant Program seeks to foster collaboration and interdisciplinary approaches by incentivizing researchers from different disciplines to collaborate and pool their expertise. This multidisciplinary collaboration accelerates research and enhances the likelihood of breakthrough discoveries and novel therapeutic strategies.

Furthermore, the Pilot Grant Program hopes to attract talented researchers to the field with a commitment to supporting research efforts in DM, making it an attractive area for scientists seeking impactful opportunities. This influx of talent brings fresh perspectives, novel methodologies, and new technologies to the study of myotonic dystrophy, while also providing early-career researchers with an opportunity to establish themselves in the field.

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Grant Focus Areas

Myotonic dystrophy is a chronic and multi-systemic disease that affects the lives of individuals with DM and their families every day. There are two major types of myotonic dystrophy: type 1 (DM1) and type 2 (DM2). Both are inherited autosomal dominant disorders affecting multiple organ systems. In DM1, progressive muscle wasting and weakness primarily affect the lower legs, hips, hands, shoulders, neck, and face. In DM2, progressive muscle wasting and weakness primarily affect the proximal legs, hips, shoulders, and neck.

Symptoms may include myotonia, cataracts, cardiac conduction defects, infertility, and central nervous system involvement, which can cause fatigue, excessive daytime sleepiness, and executive function difficulties. Congenital DM, a severe infantile form of DM1, can cause hypotonia, breathing and swallowing difficulties, delayed development, and intellectual disability. Research indicates that as many as 1 in 2,100 individuals in the United States are affected by myotonic dystrophy or at risk of passing the disease to the next generation.[i]

Opportunity for DM Research

Recognizing that the symptoms and the severity of DM vary widely among affected people and often severely impact activities of daily living, mobility, and independence. To address these wide-ranging needs, MDF invites scientific proposals that explore innovative ideas and conduct early-stage investigations with strong potential to advance the DM field and improve outcomes for individuals living with the disease.

For this award, proposals that focus on the development, validation, or refinement of clinically meaningful endpoints for DM will be given priority. This includes research aimed at identifying informative, sensitive and reliable outcome measures, patient-reported outcomes, digital or biomarker-based endpoints, studies investigating phenotype-genotype relationship, or other tools that can enhance the assessment of disease progression, symptom burden, or treatment response in individuals living with DM (DM1, DM2).

Given the critical need to expand the scientific understanding of DM2, proposals that advance knowledge of DM2 disease mechanisms, clinical presentation, or measurement approaches will also be prioritized.

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Duration of the Award

Grants are awarded for a one-year period. Applicants may submit one application per funding cycle. Applications declined in previous cycles may be resubmitted but should be revised to address prior reviewer feedback.

After receiving an award, recipients are not eligible to apply for another MDF grant for three calendar years. Applicants may apply for only one type of MDF grant at a time and may hold only one active MDF grant during the award period. The Small Grants Program is an exception to this policy (see the Small Grants RFA for additional details).

Payment

Awards are made to the applicant organization on behalf of the grantee. Awards are $50,000 for salary, benefits, travel, and research support. The MDF awards may not be used to fund institutional capital cost recovery, overhead, or other indirect costs. A progress report satisfactory to the MDF is required four weeks after the end of the award year. The Foundation can cancel the award for non-compliance with any of the eligibility rules herein, or due to non-performance.

Applications

Eligibility Requirements

Applications are limited to those submitted by individuals at academic institutions or non-profit research organizations. For-profit organizations are not eligible. Applications from non-U.S. academic institutions or non-profit organizations are permitted, as long as they are accredited academic medical centers or research institutes.

Principal Investigator requirements. The submitting principal investigator must:

- Be employed at an appropriate educational, medical, or other non-profit research institution and be qualified to conduct and supervise a program of original research.
- Have both administrative and financial responsibility for the grant.
- Have access to organizational resources necessary to conduct the proposed research project.
- Hold a Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Science, or equivalent degree.

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Study Requirements. Applicants must demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to complete the proposed research project. Proposals must focus on research directly related to myotonic dystrophy and may include basic, clinical, or applied research. Eligible research areas include, but are not limited to:

- Pathogenesis of DM
- Molecular mechanisms underlying phenotype differences in DM1, DM2, and congenital DM
- Development of diagnostics or biomarkers
- Studies of disease progression or natural history
- Identification and validation of endpoints for drug development
- Standards of care and care integration, including nursing, social work, and psychology
- Epidemiology, health economics, and patient support services
- Therapeutic development, particularly early-stage projects that could leverage additional funding

Proposals focused on DM2 research are given priority for these awards.

Submission Process and Requirements

Proposals cannot exceed 6 pages in length and must be submitted in 12-point font. Proposals must be submitted via the Proposal Central application system by **July 10, 2026, at 5 PM Pacific Time**. The proposal must include the following sections:

Applicant

- Professional Profile
- ORCID Number
- NIH-style applicant bio sketches (not to exceed four pages each)

Applicant Institution Information

- Applicant Institution Profile
- IRS EIN or TIN Number
- Signing Official Email
- Financial Official Email

Abstract

- *Technical Abstract of Research Plan (one-half page).* The technical abstract should provide a concise scientific summary of the proposed research. It should briefly describe the central hypothesis, specific aims, overall approach, and anticipated

significance of the project. The abstract should be written for reviewers with scientific expertise and clearly demonstrate the rigor and feasibility of the proposed work. The technical abstract will remain part of the application and is used exclusively for the evaluation of scientific merit. Applicants should ensure that it is precise, well-organized, and fully integrated with the research plan.

- *Lay Summary (one-half page).* The lay summary should describe the purpose and potential impact of the proposed research in clear, nontechnical language appropriate for a general audience. Applicants should explain why the research is important and how it may benefit people living with myotonic dystrophy. If the project is funded, the lay summary may be published and shared publicly by the MDF in newsletters, on the website, annual reports, and other communications. Applicants should ensure that the summary is clear, accurate, and appropriate for a general audience while avoiding the disclosure of confidential or proprietary information.

Budget

- *Detailed Budget.* Applicants must submit a detailed budget outlining all proposed expenses for the grant. Authorized expenses include salary and fringe benefits for the applicant or research personnel, equipment, and supplies directly related to the project. Expenses not covered by the grant include institutional overhead or indirect costs, educational fees, payments to members of governing bodies, illegal or inappropriate expenditures, and any costs not directly related to the research project.
- *Budget Description and Justification (one paragraph).* Applicants should explain the rationale for each proposed expense and describe how any uncovered salary, fringe benefits, or research costs will be addressed. Applicants should clearly indicate any funding gaps and how these will be covered, whether through other grants, departmental support, or personal resources.
- *Other Sources of Funding (one paragraph).* Applicants must describe other sources of funding that support the project or the applicant's research program. This should include current and pending awards, institutional support, or collaborations that contribute to the feasibility and success of the proposed research.

Publications

Applicants should provide a list of their current publications relevant to project and the DM field.

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Attachments

- *Applicant Statement (one page).* Include the applicant's name and contact information, a listing of current funding, and a description of other pending applications for research funding during the funding period. Applicants should briefly describe their prior experience, relevant expertise, and how their background positions them to successfully complete the proposed project.
- *Description of Environment (two paragraphs).* Provide a brief description of the research environment in which the project will be conducted. This should include available facilities and equipment, institutional resources that will support the project, and any leveraged or complementary funding that will contribute to the work.
- *Research Plan (total should not exceed six pages).* This must include the following information:
    1. Background and Hypothesis (one page): Describe the scientific background relevant to the proposed project. This section should summarize the current state of knowledge, highlight key gaps in understanding related to myotonic dystrophy, and explain the rationale for the proposed work. Clearly state the central hypothesis that will be tested and explain how the hypothesis is supported by existing literature or prior findings. Because Pilot Grants are intended to support early-stage or exploratory projects, applicants should explain how the proposed work addresses an important unanswered question or tests a novel concept in DM research.
    2. Specific Aims of the Project (one page): Clearly state the primary objectives of the project. Each aim should describe a defined research question or objective that can be realistically completed within the proposed funding period. Applicants should briefly describe the approach that will be used to achieve each aim and explain how the aims collectively address the central hypothesis. Applicants should also very briefly describe alternative strategies.
    3. Innovation and Potential Impact (one-half page): Describe the innovative aspects of the proposed project. This may include the development or application of new concepts, approaches, technologies, or methodologies relevant to myotonic dystrophy research. Applicants should explain how the project may provide proof-of-concept evidence, generate preliminary data, or open new avenues of investigation. Emphasis should be placed on the potential of the project to advance understanding of DM biology, improve disease measurement, identify therapeutic targets, or inform future translational or clinical research.

4. Preliminary Data (one-half page): Provide any preliminary data that support the feasibility of the proposed work or the validity of the central hypothesis. Preliminary data may include pilot data generated by the applicant or relevant findings from the literature. Because this mechanism supports early-stage and exploratory research, extensive preliminary data are not required. If limited preliminary data are available, applicants should instead describe the scientific rationale, supporting literature, or other evidence that supports the feasibility and importance of the proposed work.
5. Methods and Data Analysis Plan (two pages): Describe the study design and methods that will be used to accomplish the proposed aims. This section should include details regarding experimental approaches, data collection procedures, and analytical methods. Applicants should describe how data will be analyzed and interpreted, including statistical methods when applicable. Expected results and their significance should be discussed. When relevant, applicants should include context and justification for sample sizes, power, generalizability, or feasibility considerations. Because this is a pilot mechanism, applicants should also describe how the results of the project could inform future studies, expanded datasets, or subsequent grant applications.. Potential challenges and alternative strategies should be addressed.
6. Anticipated Collaborative Agreements, if applicable (one-half page): If the project involves collaboration with other investigators, institutions, or organizations, describe the nature of these collaborations and how they will contribute to the success of the project. Include a brief description of the roles and responsibilities of collaborators and any relevant agreements or arrangements that support the work.

Support Letters

Letter of recommendation from an individual with knowledge of the applicant and preferably knowledge of the project.

Response to Reviewers

If this application is a resubmission from a previous grant cycle, include a one-page letter describing how the application has been revised in response to reviewer feedback.

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Review and Selection

All applications must be received **by 5:00 PM Pacific Time on Friday, July 10, 2026.** The MDF Scientific Advisory Committee will score and prioritize candidates based on the following criteria:

Innovation and Potential Impact (approximately 40% of total score): Reviewers will evaluate the novelty and potential impact of the proposed research on the understanding, treatment, or management of myotonic dystrophy. Because the Pilot Grant Program is designed to support exploratory, proof-of-concept, or early-stage studies, priority will be given to projects that introduce new ideas, creative approaches, or innovative methodologies.

Reviewers will consider the potential of the project to generate preliminary data, test new hypotheses, or open new avenues of investigation in DM research. Projects that address important gaps in knowledge or propose novel strategies for understanding disease mechanisms, improving clinical care, or developing therapeutic approaches will be prioritized. Proposals will be evaluated based on the strength of the impact case made in the Abstract and Research Plan sections.

Applicant Expertise and Environment (approximately 20% of total score): Reviewers will assess whether the applicant and research environment provide the expertise, resources, and support necessary to successfully complete the proposed project.

This assessment will be based on the applicant's Statement from the Applicant, prior experience relevant to the project, and the description of the research environment. The review will focus on whether the investigator and institutional setting are well positioned to carry out the proposed work rather than on a demonstrated long-term commitment to DM research.

Scientific Rigor, Feasibility, and Study Design (approximately 40% of total score): Reviewers will evaluate the scientific quality, feasibility, and rigor of the proposed research. This includes assessing whether the research question is clearly defined, the experimental design and methods are appropriate, and the analytical approach is sound.

Given the exploratory nature of pilot funding, reviewers will consider whether the proposed work can realistically be completed within the timeframe and budget and whether the approach is sufficient to generate meaningful data or insights. Reviewers will also assess whether potential challenges have been considered and whether appropriate

alternative strategies are proposed. Applicants may suggest expert reviewers for consideration. Proposals deemed infeasible or scientifically unsound will be considered a low priority for funding, regardless of their scores in other areas.

Applicants may consult with the MDF Chief Scientific Officer, Dr. Andy Rohrwasser, Andy.Rohrwasser@myotonic.org, for refinement of their proposals before submission. Technical issues should be directed to the MDF Director of Evaluation and Research Programs, Dr. Nadine Ann Skinner at nadine.skinner@myotonic.org.

After initial screening by MDF staff members, the Scientific Advisory Committee and selected experts will review applications and recommend final candidates to the MDF Board of Directors. The MDF Board of Directors will consider the Scientific Advisory Committee recommendations and determine final grant awards. Awards are made at the sole discretion of the MDF Board of Directors and are contingent upon the availability of funds. Availability of funds does not signify a commitment to award any grants. If no applicant is deemed of sufficient scientific merit, expertise, and/or skill, the MDF may choose not to award a grant during this funding cycle.

Reporting and Publications

Reporting

Progress Reports: Each recipient must submit a final report (including an abstract in lay language) submitted to the MDF no later than one month after the completion of research at the end of the year.

Expense Reports: Each recipient must submit a final expense report (including the original proposed budget and final expenses on the grant) submitted to the MDF no later than one month after completion of research at the end of the second year and should be submitted along with a check for any unexpended funds on the grant. The grantee may reallocate up to 10% of the total grant award budget between line items without prior approval.

A request for a “no-cost extension,” if required, must be submitted in writing at least two weeks before the end of the grant year for which the extension is requested and may be granted for no more than six months.

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Publications and Conferences

Pilot Grant award recipients are encouraged to submit at least one scientific manuscript for peer-reviewed publication within six months of the conclusion of the research, reporting the research findings. All publications, exhibits, and press releases directly resulting from MDF funding shall carry a credit line to the MDF.

Grant recipients must notify MDF if a press release is being prepared or if they are contacted by a journalist regarding the project. Recipients should encourage university press offices or outside journalists to contact MDF to coordinate publicity. Press releases related to MDF-funded research should be emailed to grants@myotonic.org.

MDF encourages an open-access policy that enables the unrestricted access and reuse of all peer-reviewed published research funded, in whole or in part, by the MDF. MDF shall pay reasonable fees required by a publisher or repository to effect immediate, open access to the accepted article. This includes article processing charges and other publisher fees. While not needed to fulfill the open-access policy requirements, grantees are encouraged to deposit funded research consisting of their submitted manuscript, and its subsequent versions, on a preprint server.

The title of each study funded by MDF, together with the lay language abstract of the research, the names of the grant recipient, and the institution, will be published on the MDF website, in MDF newsletters, in annual reports and wherever else MDF deems appropriate. The grant recipient will always be clearly acknowledged. The lay summary description should not contain information the grant recipient does not wish to disclose to the general public.

Timeline

Date Issued:	April 6, 2026
Proposals Due:	July 10, 2026
Selection Notification:	by September 18, 2026
Period of Award:	November 1, 2026 – October 31, 2027

[i] Johnson NE, Butterfield RJ, Mayne K, et al. Population Based Prevalence of Myotonic Dystrophy Type 1 Using Genetic Analysis of State-wide Blood Screening Program. *Neurology*. Published online January 20, 2021:10.1212/WNL.0000000000011425. doi:10.1212/WNL.0000000000011425