

Part A – Essential information

A1. Key dates and submitting your application

Window opens	Monday 1st June 2026
Closing date	4.00 pm, Friday 28th August 2026. No application will be accepted after this point.
Application pack	https://nichs.org.uk/research-policy/research/our-research-grants-programme/how-to-apply-to-the-srg-programme
Returns	Dr Stephanie Cathcart, scathcart@nichs.org.uk .
Queries	Dr Stephanie Cathcart, scathcart@nichs.org.uk .

- Form return: one WORD copy, one PDF copy.
- Ensure that all signatures and declarations are complete.
- Ensure required additional materials are returned with your completed application.
- Non-essential / supplementary materials are not accepted unless they evidence a section of your application (e.g. letters of endorsement, proof of ethical / regulatory approvals etc).

A2. Eligibility and exclusions (hard rules)

At top of the application form, (immediately above “Section 1. You and your team”), we ask you to confirm your study does not fall within this year’s exclusions. This is a requirement. This year’s exclusions:

1. Registries/databases, or tools that copy/adapt existing systems
2. Funding any part of a PhD or standalone doctoral study
3. Studies where chest, heart or stroke (CHS) is only secondary/incidental
4. Foundational (“from scratch”) AI model development
5. Research that directly uses animals



These are hard exclusions. They are not judged proportionately.

Clarifications:

3. Is CHS incidental in my study? To help decide this, ask yourself:
 - What is the main disease or condition being treated?
 - What is the main research question?
 - If I removed the CHS element from this study, would there still be a standalone research project? If removing the CHS element still leaves a complete research project, it was likely incidental. These are unlikely to be funded.
4. We are looking for projects that use existing AI technology to solve a clear clinical or research problem. We will consider applications with an AI element / theme, that use AI to:
 - improve care, e.g. by supporting diagnosis, treatment decisions or patient self-management
 - improve efficiency, e.g. by streamlining clinical workflows or service delivery
 - analyse data, e.g. by finding deeper insights in existing datasets
 - evaluate impact, e.g. testing safety, fairness, effectiveness of established AI tools in real-world.

Do not include AI just because it is a popular topic – whilst we will consider AI themed applications, we are not specifically calling for AI studies. You must explain:

- why AI is the best approach for your research question
- how it compares with non-AI methods
- You may use AI as a research or data assistant, in line with our AI policy.

5. NICHS will consider applications that build on previous animal research or use previously collected animal data/materials. The previous or future use of animals will not affect judgement on your application.
-

A3. Writing in Plain English



We know it can be hard to explain complex research in simple terms. But writing in Plain English makes it much more likely that reviewers will understand your proposal, see its value, and score it well. This matters because your application will be read by different people, and not all of them will be experts in your field. Most of them will be from a non-technical background.

High-quality Plain English is therefore essential.

✗ If a non-specialist cannot understand what you are proposing and why it matters, your score may be affected – regardless of study quality.

- We encourage you to write as clearly and simply as possible.
- The form is designed to be completed primarily in Plain English.
- There is a technical section for scientific detail.
- Use the Glossary section to bridge the gap between technical rigour and public accessibility.



See “Plain_English.docx” in application pack for more pointers.

A4. Proportionality

NICHS funds a range of study types (pilot, feasibility, service evaluation, early-stage and more developed studies). We ask reviewers to apply judgement in proportion to study scale, duration, risk and budget—your application should do the same. You do not need to:

- add unnecessary detail
- force any element in, including PPI or AI, if not relevant
- answer sections that do not apply (use “N/A” where appropriate and allowed)

The level of detail in your application should match the scale and stage of your study. It is important that you can justify any build decisions.

A5: Key expectation: pathway to impact and progression

Pathway to impact is critical. For pilot and feasibility studies, you should clearly describe what this study enables next and how this would realistically be achieved.



Applications without a clear and credible pathway beyond the pilot stage are unlikely to be competitive.

A6. How applications are assessed

Applications are scored against four criteria:

1. Scientific quality
2. Benefit to people living with CHS conditions (or wider population)
3. Benefit to NICHHS (the charity)
4. Value for money



A document describing scoring criteria is included in the application pack.

Reviewers will also consider:

- whether the application builds research capacity, including support for early career researchers or development of staff roles, and
- whether appropriate collaboration or partnership working strengthens the study (e.g. across institutions, sectors, or disciplines).

These are not required, but may strengthen an application where relevant, particularly where they add clear value and align with NICHHS's strategic focus on research capacity and collaboration.

Part B – Section-by-section guidance (use as needed)

- This is a section-by-section guide. It is intended to guide you through the application, but also as a “dip in, dip out” guide. Use as needed.
- Some questions will have specific clarifications or asks, but not all.
- Some parts of the application form include hover notes. These are [underlined and blue](#). Move your cursor over these links to see extra guidance.
- We hope the application form is easy to follow, but should you have any queries, please contact us, as detailed on the first page of this guidance.

Section 1 – You and your team

1.1 Principal Investigator (PI) Person applying for the research grant and the main applicant.

Eligibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The PI <u>must</u> be employed in their primary role by a local university or recognised research organisation.• This organisation will act as the Host Institution, holding the contract and providing governance, insurance, and oversight.• The PI should reasonably expect to remain in their role for the full duration of the project.

During application process	If application is successful
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• main point of contact• responds to expert reviews• is informed of the final funding decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• holds the research contract• is responsible for completing the project successfully• signs all relevant paperwork throughout the study• provides progress updates, communications, and reports• remains the main point of contact for the life of the project

1.2 Alternative PI (Alt PI) A full member of your team who has agreed to be the “back-up” PI.

Eligibility
The Alt PI must: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• work in their primary role for a local university or recognised research organisation• be a named member of the research team• reasonably expect to remain in post for the full duration of the project

Throughout, the Alt PI...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• acts as a deputy to the PI• back-up point of contact• is expected to fulfil role of PI, if named PI withdraws / can no longer fulfil that role. <p>Clarification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If PI can no longer fulfil the PI role during application process, the Alt PI can choose to withdraw the application from process. If the Alt PI decides to proceed with application, they assume role of PI, and must name Alt PI.• If a PI can no longer fulfil that role once a grant has been awarded, the Alt PI is expected to assume all PI responsibilities, and become the named PI (and must nominate a replacement Alt PI).• If the Alt PI is unable to take over in these circumstances, the study risks termination. NICHS will recover funds already provided, in line with grant terms and conditions.



Currently, a person with lived experience cannot be named as the PI or Alt PI because a Host Institution is required to hold the contract. People with lived experience can be, and where appropriate, should be included as members of the research team.

For “career stage” (PI and Alt PI), enter one of these options: Early Career; Mid-Career; Senior; PPI/other

1.3 Team members (co-applicants)

Your research team can include anyone you consider appropriate to contribute meaningfully to the study.

This may include:

- academic, clinical, or technical researchers
- statisticians or data analysts
- methodological experts
- people living with CHS conditions, patients, carers, and members of the public (PPI)

Team members may be based in Northern Ireland or elsewhere and may work in academic, clinical, third sector, or community settings.

Strong applications usually:

- give each team member a clear and meaningful role
- include suitable methodological and analytical expertise
- explain why each co-applicant is needed, especially where they are not employed as researchers

Strong applications may also:

- demonstrate how the study supports development of early career researchers or wider research capacity, and
- include appropriate collaboration across organisations or sectors, where this clearly adds value.

These are not required, but applications that make appropriate use of capacity building or collaboration align with NICHS's strategic focus, and as a result this can reflect in scoring for relevant criteria.

If people with lived experience or volunteers are part of the team, explain how they will be appropriately supported for their role.



Training, if needed at all, does not need to be in place at the application stage. It can be planned or adjusted once funding is confirmed. Detailed training plans are not required.

1.4 Conflict of Interest (COI) declaration

You must declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest that could reasonably be seen to influence the application, its review, or the delivery of the research.

Conflicts may include:

- personal or family relationships
- professional or supervisory relationships
- recent or ongoing collaborations
- financial interests
- relevant institutional affiliations

This includes conflicts involving:

- members of the research team
- named reviewers
- collaborators or third parties (including commercial partners)
- NICHS staff
- members of the Scientific Research Committee (SRC)
- members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Governance Board, or Finance Committee

List any COI within your team. What to include: declare any actual/potential/perceived conflicts and how they will be managed. Declaring a conflict does not disadvantage your application; failing to declare might. If none: state N/A.

If you are unsure whether something constitutes a conflict, you should declare it. NICHS will assess and manage conflicts as appropriate.



Declaring a conflict does not disadvantage your application. Failure to declare might.

1.5 EDI in your team (not study design)

EDI in team composition and working environment (not recruitment/design). What to include: briefly, only if relevant - how EDI shaped team make-up and how you will support an inclusive environment.



Answer this section if it applies to your team and study. Keep your response brief and relevant, and do not include examples or activities that do not genuinely apply.

CVs and Endorsements

You must provide:

- a one-page CV for academic, clinical, or technical team members, or
- a letter of support or endorsement for other contributors, including PPI team members

These should show why the person is suitable for their role, rather than seniority alone. As a guide, CVs should include:

- name and current role
- relevant qualifications and memberships
- short career history
- current and recent research funding
- up to five relevant publications

CVs [must not](#) be longer than one A4 page. For PPI members, a brief description of their experience / suitability to be part of the team will suffice.



Compliance and checks. Researchers and host institutions share responsibility for making sure appropriate background checks (such as AccessNI) are completed when required. By submitting CVs or letters of support, you confirm that you understand and will follow relevant legal and institutional requirements.

Section 2 – Abstract / summary of study

Quick, clear overview. Write in a way that it can be read separately but note it does not replace other sections of the application. Use Plain English.

What to include:

- Title, short description, dates, duration, cost request
- Re. 2.2 (description) – to ensure no ambiguity, clearly state your research question in plain English.
- Please note, we cannot guarantee start dates – these are subject to issue of contracts, and all governance / approvals being in place.
- Population size = the number of people in Northern Ireland affected by, or relevant to, the problem or issue you are studying. Depending on your study, this may include diagnosed, undiagnosed or hidden groups.
- Sample size = the number of people who will take part in your study.
- We ask for both so we can understand the size of the issue and the size of the group you will study.

Sections 3 & 4 – read together (to avoid repetition)

Section 3 explains your study in plain English (logic and value).
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use Section 3 for why it matters, who it benefits, and why NICHHS should fund it.• Core question is “why does this study matter?”• Section 3 should be fully understandable without technical knowledge.
Section 4 provides the technical detail (design and delivery).
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use Section 4 for how it will be done.• Core question is “can this study be done well?”• Should be detailed enough to show scientific credibility, but still clearly written

Both sections are read together. They must tell one consistent story. Avoid copying the same content across both. Write for a mixed audience. Your application will be read by:

- researchers
- non-specialists
- people with lived experience

What strong applications demonstrate

Strong applications typically:

- show a clear pathway to impact (what happens next and how). For pilot/feasibility studies, make clear what this study leads to next and how progression will occur.
- involve people with lived experience meaningfully and proportionately
- demonstrate capacity building and/or collaboration where this adds value

Section 3 – Non-technical description (the story)

A strong Section 3 allows a reader to understand:

- what the study is
- why it is needed
- why should NICHHS fund it
- who it helps
- what might change as a result

Cross-cutting theme: Inclusion, unmet need and EDI. Strong applications:

- show awareness of who is affected and why
- consider underserved or high-risk groups where relevant
- explain any limits clearly and reasonably

You do not need to cover everything – focus on what is relevant and justified.

3.1 What is your study about?	Explain what you will do, in simple terms, and what CHS problem/gap it addresses.
3.2 Why does it need to happen now?	Explain why this is timely and important now (not just academically interesting).
3.3 What will this study deliver?	State what the study will produce/achieve. If early stage / feasibility, explain how findings inform sensible next steps.



Keep in mind for 3.1–3.3

- Focus on clarity and sufficient detail.
- Make the need for the study obvious.

3.4 Who are the main beneficiaries?	Name the groups likely to benefit (patients, carers, services, public).
3.5 How will it benefit people living with CHS or the wider public?	Explain what changes, what outcomes/outputs, and how it improves prevention / treatment / care / understanding. If benefits are indirect, explain how this study contributes to future benefit.
3.6 When will benefits be realised?	Be realistic about timeframes. If longer-term, describe steps needed before impact (e.g., further research/trials).



3.4–3.6 Who benefits and when. What to show:

- Who will benefit:
 - people with CHS conditions
 - carers
 - services
 - the wider public
- How they benefit:

- better care
- improved understanding
- improved services or decisions
- When benefits are likely:
 - end of study
 - short-term (1–3 years)
 - longer-term

Important

- Benefits can be direct, indirect, preparatory (especially in early-stage studies)
- You do not need to promise immediate impact – be realistic

<p>3.7 Why is this a priority for funding / NICHS strategy alignment?</p>	<p>Explain why NICHS should fund this using public donations: NI relevance, strategy fit, and value to the charity.</p> <p>What to show</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear relevance to CHS conditions • Importance for Northern Ireland • Why this is a good use of charitable funding <p>Keep in mind</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You do not need to match every part of the strategy • But do state what strategic priority / action you are addressing if possible. • You do need a clear and credible case
<p>3.8-3.10 PPI in developing the study</p>	<p>Important</p> <p>PPIE is expected in all applications.</p> <p>Describe how lived experience informed the study.</p> <p>What to show</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How people with lived experience informed the study (if applicable) • Or why PPI is limited/not included (if appropriate) • Any direct participant benefit (or state “none”) <p>PPI should be meaningful and proportionate to the study.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In most cases, even early-stage or feasibility studies can include simple forms of PPI (e.g. informal discussions with people with lived experience to shape the research question or approach). • Do not include PPI artificially or “shoe-horn” in. <p>Whilst PPI is expected, you may justify <u>not</u> including PPI, but this is a high-risk approach.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of PPI must be convincingly justified. • A clear explanation alone is not sufficient: reviewers must be satisfied that this is appropriate. • Applications with no PPI, or weak justification, are unlikely to be competitive.
<p>3.11 Direct benefits to participants</p>	<p>State any direct benefits or write “none”.</p>

Section 4 – Technical description

Section 4 shows that your study is well designed, credible, and deliverable. This is where you demonstrate:

- scientific quality
- feasibility
- robustness of approach

What to show overall

- Clear objectives
- Design and methods that fit the question
- Awareness of relevant evidence
- Appropriate expertise
- Realistic delivery plan
- Risks and how they will be managed

4.1 Methodology, participants, methods, analysis plan (1,200 words)

Describe and justify your design and approach. Explain why it fits the purpose/stage and why your team can deliver it.

What to show

- Clear, specific research objectives: state your research question clearly
- describe and justify your methodology, including participants, methods, and analysis plan
- Aims that follow logically from Section 3
- A focused and unambiguous research question

Tip

- Objectives should be clear enough that reviewers know exactly what you are trying to achieve

4.2 How you identified and reviewed the existing evidence

- Show that you understand what is already known and where the gaps are.
- Summarise the most relevant evidence and explain how your study builds on it.
- The review should be clear and credible, but it does not need to be extensive.
- A full systematic review is only expected where it is appropriate to your study design.

References and diagrams

- You may include up to two additional A4 sheets for references (for Section 4 as a whole).
- Use in-text referencing (Harvard or Vancouver style)
- Include full details for any unpublished work cited (author and affiliation)

4.3 Analytical and statistical approach and expertise	<p>Explain analysis clearly and name the person responsible, or describe advice taken if not embedded in team.</p> <p>What to show</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study design appropriate to your aims • Key methodological decisions clearly justified • Sample and data approach explained • Limitations identified and addressed <p>Key principle</p> <p>Methods should fit the question – not be overly complex</p> <p>Expertise: what to show</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is responsible for design and analysis • Evidence of appropriate expertise <p>Any external advice sought (if relevant)</p>
4.4 EDI in study design (recruitment/participation)	<p>Explain how inclusion and accessibility were considered in research participation/recruitment (this is design, not team).</p>
4.5 Safe, appropriate, respectful participation	<p>Explain how you will manage participant burden, accessibility, support, remuneration, training, communication, and risk management (as relevant).</p> <p>Participant considerations: what to show</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How participation is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ safe ○ appropriate ○ accessible • Any support or safeguards in place
4.6 Feasibility and deliverability	<p>Provide evidence you can deliver within timeframe; include contingency plans and any implications if plans change.</p> <p>What to show</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence the study can realistically be delivered • Access to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ participants ○ data ○ services • Clear contingency planning <p>Important</p> <p>Even strong ideas score poorly if they are not deliverable (or you've failed to clearly demonstrate that they are).</p>
4.7 Risks/limitations and mitigation	<p>What to show</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key risks • How they will be managed • Any impact on findings or next steps
4.8 Outputs (deliverables)	<p>List specific outputs and how they link to objectives (datasets, reports, tools, publications etc.). Avoid speculative downstream outputs.</p> <p>What to show</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, tangible outputs, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ datasets ○ reports ○ tools

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ publications <p>Important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outputs must be specific and realistic • Avoid vague or speculative outputs <p>Anticipated outcomes: what to show</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term outcomes (1–3 years): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ new evidence ○ improved understanding ○ readiness for next steps • Longer-term contribution (5–10 years): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ improved care ○ better services ○ reduced burden of CHS conditions <p>Key principle</p> <p>Show a plausible pathway, not guaranteed impact</p>
4.9 If successful, what happens next?	<p>Explain what this study will allow you/others to do or decide next, and why that's appropriate for this stage. Describe how this study leads to the next stage, including:</p> <p>What to show</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the study enables next • How findings could be used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ in practice ○ in services ○ in further research • how you will get there (e.g. funding route, partnerships, development work) • why this is a realistic progression • Who needs to use the findings and how they will be reached <p>Important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be realistic • Do not assume progression must mean “bigger” • Focus on credible next steps <p>Applications that describe outputs but do not show what happens next are unlikely to be competitive. Even early-stage studies should outline a plausible pathway forward.</p>
4.10 Use and adoption / knowledge exchange	<p>Who needs to use your findings, and how will they be reached? Explain how this supports real-world use.</p>

Final check (Sections 3 & 4 together)

Before submitting, ask:

- Is the problem clear?
- Is the study needed now?
- Is the design appropriate?
- Can the study be delivered?
- Who benefits, and how?
- What will be produced?
- What happens next?

If these are not clear, reviewers may question the study's value or feasibility. Strong applications:

- are clear
- are realistic
- tell one coherent story
- and make it easy to understand why this study should be funded

Sections 5–8 – Costs (staff, consumables, travel, other + justification)

What reviewers look for across all cost sections

Costs should be clearly linked to the work, realistic for scale/timing, and well justified. Value for money does not mean cheapest; it means appropriate and explainable.

Section 5 – Staff costs

- List staff funded by NICHS (type, grade, salary, on-costs, hours/week, effort).
- Unless a PPI team member is formally employed on the project, they should not be costed as staff.
- PPI costs should be included in "other" costs (unless travel related)
- Provide cost by year and total.
- Justify roles by linking them to activities, milestones and deliverables.
- If no staff costs: enter N/A



You do not need to include detailed job descriptions. Focus on purpose, necessity, and proportion.

Section 6 – Consumables

- List each item, cost, and when it occurs; justify why needed and how it supports the study.
- Standard equipment (ordinary laptops/phones/tablets/general IT) is not funded;
- specialist equipment (e.g. laptop)/software requires strong justification.
- You will need to demonstrate the study cannot proceed without this equipment
- If none: enter N/A

Section 7 – Travel

- Only include necessary travel linked to delivery, involvement, collaboration, or dissemination.
- Travel/subsistence for PPI/volunteer contributors belongs here where relevant.
- If none: enter N/A

Section 8 – Other costs

- Use “other” for costs not covered elsewhere (including honoraria/vouchers and participation-related costs beyond basic travel/subsistence for volunteers/PPI).
- NICHS will consider remuneration for volunteer contributors and PPI members.
- Like all costs, these should be realistic, proportionate, and clearly justified.

8.4 Justification of all costs

Important points to keep in mind

- Public accountability matters. Every cost must justify the use of charitable funds.
- Proportionality matters. Costs should match the scale, duration, and aims of the study.
- Clarity matters. Reviewers value clear explanations over overly detailed costing language.
- Alignment matters. Costs listed here should clearly relate to:
 - the study design,
 - milestones and deliverables,
 - and the project management plan.
- Value for money does not mean “cheap”. It means that costs are reasonable, necessary, and well justified in relation to expected benefits and respectful involvement

Specific guidance re. staffing.

A strong justification:

- links each role to specific activities, milestones, and deliverables,
- explains why the grade and level of effort are appropriate,
- and shows that staffing is neither excessive nor insufficient for the work proposed.

Reviewers will consider the staffing pattern, not just each post in isolation.

- If one person is funded at or near full-time, it should be clear what they are doing day to day and why additional roles are still needed.
- Equally, if effort is spread thinly across many people, reviewers may question whether the study is under-resourced, overly fragmented, or dependent on work that has not been properly costed.

A simple sense-check for applicants. Before submitting, ask yourself:

- Is there at least one role with enough time to deliver the core work?
- Is every named role doing something that only they can do?
- Is any role carrying nearly everything—or almost nothing—without good reason?

If these questions are hard to answer, the staffing plan usually needs refinement. You should also demonstrate awareness of staffing risks, for example:

- delays in recruitment,
- staff absence or turnover,
- or temporary gaps in capacity.

Briefly explaining how such risks would be managed strengthens confidence in delivery.



Reviewers assess both over-staffing and under-resourcing



COMMON PITFALL. One role doing “everything” or many roles doing “very little”.

Section 9 – Project management

9.1 Project management plan

Explain how the project will be managed day-to-day: roles, decision-making, progress monitoring, and how you will handle common delays/risks (approvals, recruitment, staffing, data access). Keep it proportionate.

What this section is about

- Can the study be delivered successfully?
- Is it realistically planned? Well-managed?
- Is the timeline realistic?

What to show

- Logical sequence of activities
- Clear milestones and deliverables
- Clear responsibilities
- Who is responsible for what
- How progress will be monitored
- How risks/delays will be handled

Good project management is essential for:

- protecting participants,
- delivering value for public donations,
- and ensuring studies complete on time and to plan.

Reviewers will want to see a clear management approach, sensible milestones and deliverables, and confidence that the team can deal with risks or delays if they arise.

9.2 Milestones and deliverables (plus Gantt chart)

Milestones are key checkpoints used to track progress during the study. They should describe important achievements, not just ongoing activity.

- For each milestone, make clear what will be achieved, when it will be achieved by project month, and who is responsible.
- The timing should line up with the overall study plan.
- Good milestones are specific, realistic, and meaningful (i.e. SMART)

SMART element	How it applies to milestones
Specific	Clearly states what is achieved
Measurable	You can tell when it is complete
Achievable	Realistic for your study
Relevant	Linked to study progress
Time-bound	Has a clear time point (month/date)

Examples might include ethics approval in place, first participant recruited, data collection complete / database locked, analysis completed, or final report submitted. Not every task needs to be a milestone. Focus on the points that show the study is moving forward as planned.

Deliverables are the tangible outputs of the project.

- These might include reports, publications, datasets, tools, intervention materials, briefings, dissemination resources, or other outputs that arise from the study.

- Deliverables should be SMART, but the emphasis is on “Specific, Measurable, and Relevant (useful)” rather than just timing.
- For each deliverable, say what will be produced, when it is expected, and who is responsible. Deliverables should be realistic, clearly linked to the study aims, and meaningful in terms of learning, impact, or dissemination.

SMART element	How it applies to deliverables
Specific	Clearly defines what will be produced
Measurable	You can confirm it exists / is complete
Achievable	Realistic for study scale
Relevant	Directly linked to study aims and value
Time-bound	Has a delivery point (optional but good practice)

One final note on milestones and deliverables:			
Ask for milestones:	“Can I put a date on this and say it’s DONE?”	(“Did we reach this step?”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics approval • Recruitment completed • Data collection complete • Analysis complete • Draft report complete
Ask for deliverables:	“Can I point to something concrete and show it to someone?”	(“What did we produce?”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final dataset • Analysis outputs • Research paper • Policy briefing • Final report

Key points to keep in mind

- Keep the level of detail proportionate to the size and complexity of the study.
- Be clear about who is responsible for what.
- Use milestones to show achievement, not just activity.
- Make sure timings, staffing, and deliverables all align with the study plan.
- Show that you have thought about realistic risks and how you would manage them.

Provide a Gantt chart showing activities, milestones and deliverables over time (does not need to be complex, but must be clear and coherent).

Section 10 – Dissemination, open access, registration

Explain who needs the findings, what you will share, how and when you will share it, and how NICHS will be acknowledged and supported in communications. Open access: show awareness of requirements and a realistic plan (you do not need final journal choices). Study registration is encouraged where appropriate; if not applicable, say why.

What this section is about

Will results be used?

What to show

- Who needs the findings
- How you will reach them
- Realistic plans for sharing outputs

Strong dissemination plans typically include:

- **who** the key audiences are (e.g. patients, practitioners, services, policymakers, communities),
- **what** will be shared (e.g. findings, learning, tools, interim updates),
- **how** this will be shared (e.g. reports, events, briefings, publications, digital channels),
- **when** dissemination is likely to take place (e.g. during the study, at completion, post-study).

You should also briefly explain:

- how you will acknowledge NICHHS's role as funder,
- and how you will support NICHHS communications or publicity activity where appropriate

Dissemination does not need to be complex or large-scale. Reviewers are looking for thoughtful, realistic plans that fit the study and audience.

Open access publication

If you expect to produce publications, reports, or outputs suitable for publication, please explain:

- where you plan to publish,
- how open access will be achieved,
- and whether any costs (e.g. publication fees) are anticipated.

NICHHS requires that publications arising from funded research are made openly accessible, in line with its Open Access Policy. You do not need to have final publication details at this stage. What matters is demonstrating:

- awareness of open access requirements,
- and a realistic plan to meet them.

Study registration

Registration of studies on publicly available databases is strongly encouraged, where appropriate.

If registration is planned:

- name the database (e.g. clinical, service, or research registries),
- indicate when registration will take place,
- and provide a registration number if available.

Some study types (e.g. exploratory or service-based work) may not require formal registration. Where this is the case, a brief explanation is sufficient.

Important points to keep in mind

- Dissemination is about reaching the right people, not just publishing. Clear, targeted communication is valued more than volume.
- Plans should be proportionate. A small study does not need a complex dissemination strategy.
- NICHHS visibility matters. Applicants are expected to help promote the role of NICHHS as funder in outputs and communications.
- Transparency builds trust. Open access and registration (where appropriate) support good research practice and public confidence.



YOU DO NOT NEED TO Have final journals or registration numbers at application stage

Section 11 – NICHS involvement

If your study needs NICHS staff or service users, this must be discussed before submission and cannot be assumed. Funding does not guarantee capacity or access. Describe what involvement is needed, why, when, and the commitment required.

Key requirement

Must be discussed before submission

What to show

- What involvement is needed
- Why it is necessary
- Evidence it is feasible

If you have indicated any NICHS involvement, please describe:

- what role NICHS service users or staff would play,
- why their involvement is necessary for the study,
- when involvement would be needed,
- and what level of time or commitment would be expected.

Strong responses demonstrate that involvement is:

- well thought through,
- proportionate to the study,
- and respectful of people's time and circumstances.

Critical requirement: prior discussion with NICHS

You must confirm that you have contacted us in advance to discuss any proposed involvement of:

- NICHS service users, and/or
- NICHS staff.

This discussion is essential to confirm:

- feasibility,
- appropriate timing,
- capacity,
- and whether the proposed involvement is suitable in the context of NICHS services and recovery-focused support.

Dr Stephanie Cathcart is your point of contact in the first instance. Do NOT contact other NICHS staff or service users directly, until advised to do so.



Whilst we prioritise research we fund, funding does not guarantee availability of staff or service users for research activities. Applicants should not assume that:

- NICHS staff will deliver recruitment, facilitation, or data collection,
- service users will be available or appropriate participants,
- or that NICHS will adapt services or processes post-award to meet study needs.

Section 12 – Resubmissions, follow-on, other funding

Be transparent. Declaring prior submissions, follow-on studies, or overlap with other funding will not disadvantage you; omission might. Describe what changed, what you learned, and how the current version is stronger. If applying elsewhere, state overlap and how you will handle any dual offers.

What this section is about

Context and transparency.

What to show

- What has changed (if resubmitted)
- Any related applications elsewhere
- How this version is improved

If you are resubmitting an application (including a reworking of it), tell us when you applied with the first application, and what changes you have made to the current version: how and why does this version differ from the previous submission? This may include:

- changes to the research question or design,
- refinements to methods or feasibility,
- strengthened justification or evidence base,
- or explicit responses to previous feedback.

You do not need to restate the full previous application. Focus on:

- what has materially changed, and
- how this version represents a stronger, clearer, or more appropriate study.

Please note:

- Resubmissions are assessed on their own merits, alongside all other applications in the round.
- Seeking or receiving feedback on a previous submission does not guarantee success on resubmission.
- Clear evidence of learning and improvement is valued more than persistence alone.

Follow-on studies from previously NICHS-funded research

Please indicate whether this application arises from a previously NICHS-funded study.

If yes, provide:

- the completion date of the previous study, and
- a concise summary of key outputs or outcomes to date.

This may include:

- publications or reports,
- evidence of feasibility or impact,
- learning that explicitly informed this new proposal.

The aim here is to demonstrate:

- continuity of thinking,
- appropriate progression,
- and that the proposed study represents a logical and justified next step.

Follow-on studies are welcome, but must still:

- address a clear need,
- offer additional value,
- and justify the use of further charitable funding.

Other funding applications and overlap. Please indicate whether this proposal (or a significantly overlapping version) is currently under consideration by another funding body.

If yes, provide:

- the name of the organisation,
- the amount applied for,
- and when a decision is expected.

Please note:

NICHHS welcomes appropriate co-funding and partnership working, where this is planned, transparent, and coherent. However, duplicate funding for the same work is not permitted.

NICHHS reserves the right to withdraw an offer if:

- duplicate funding is secured, or
- the applicant is unable to commit to the grant promptly.

If NICHHS would be the smaller funder, applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss this with NICHHS prior to submission.

Important points to keep in mind

- Transparency matters more than perfection. Declaring resubmissions, follow-on studies, or other applications will not penalise you.
- Resubmissions are common, but competitive. Improvement and clarity matter more than history.
- Follow-on studies must add value. They should clearly build on, not repeat, earlier work.
- Parallel submissions are acceptable if disclosed. What matters is clarity about overlap, priority, and commitment.

In summary

This section helps us understand:

- the development journey of your idea,
- how it relates to previous or ongoing work, and
- whether the proposed study represents an appropriate and responsible use of charitable funds.



Transparency will not disadvantage you. Omission might. Clear, concise, and honest responses help reviewers assess your application fairly and confidently.

Section 13 – Partnership funding arrangements

- If other organisations fund part of the project, explain the arrangement, NICHHS share, whether the study can proceed without other funds, and contingencies. Confirm compatibility of funders' terms (especially IP/revenue).
 - You must discuss partnership funding arrangements prior to submitting. This is particularly the case if NICHHS is the smaller funder. This allows all parties to discuss practical and contractual arrangements.
-

Section 14 – Third party delivery and commercial involvement

If subcontractors/third parties are used, explain who, what they will do, why needed, and cost/justification. Written agreements must be in place before subcontracted work starts. If commercial partners are involved, explain role and confirm this will not restrict open access publication and aligns with NICHS IP terms. If using third-party data/algorithms/AI assets, confirm permissions/licences will be in place by start date and note any restrictions.

What this section is about

This section identifies whether external funders, subcontractors, or commercial partners could affect the delivery, governance, value for money, or independence of your study.

Does your study involve

- partners
- subcontractors
- AI or digital tools
- Are there any risks from any of these?

What to show

- Be clear and transparent
- Only include AI where it is clearly needed

If a commercial company is involved in the research in any capacity (e.g. funding, in kind equipment, software, or expertise), please:

- name the company,
- describe the nature of the involvement,
- and outline any potential commercial interest or gain.

NICHS does not normally fund research with chiefly commercial aims, but applications are considered on their merits.

You must confirm that:

- commercial arrangements are compatible with NICHS policies,
- commercial involvement will not delay or restrict open access publication of results,
- IP and revenue arrangements comply with NICHS terms.

Third party data, algorithms, or AI assets

If your study relies on data, algorithms, or AI models owned by a third party, confirm that:

- appropriate legal permissions or licences will be in place by the study start date.
- Briefly describe any conditions that may affect use, access, or dissemination.

Key reassurance for applicants



- Answering “No” is entirely acceptable. Many strong applications involve no partners, subcontractors, or AI. You do not need to say “yes” to any of these unless they genuinely apply. AI is not expected and does not strengthen an application unless clearly justified.
- Proportionality matters. These questions are designed to identify genuine risk, not to create complexity.
- Transparency protects you and NICHS. Clear disclosure helps studies start on time and publish without restriction.

Section 15 – Governance, ethics, and other approvals (“No Approval, No Funds”)

- Identify required approvals, status, reference numbers (if available), realistic dates, and contingency plans.
- Applications may be rejected if approvals are missing and there is no credible plan.
- NICHS operates “No Approval, No Funds” (hard requirement).
- Include sponsor details and identify the data controller where relevant; explain data management at an appropriate level.

Regardless of whether participation offers direct benefit, you must:

- identify all ethical, regulatory, and governance approvals required for your study,
- state the status of each approval (e.g. approved, in preparation, yet to be submitted),
- include reference numbers where available,
- provide realistic anticipated dates, and
- outline contingency plans where approvals are not yet in place.

This should be proportionate to the study type. For example, a low-risk service evaluation will require a different set of approvals than a clinical or interventional study. We recognise that approvals can take time.

However, applications must include a clear and credible plan for securing approvals, including:

- when submissions will be made,
- who is responsible,
- and what steps will be taken if timelines slip.

Applications without approvals or a clear plan to obtain them by the proposed start date may be rejected. Where you have yet to secure ethical approval, NICHS reserves the right to withdraw any grant awarded where changes stemming from ethical review significantly modify the structure of your proposal.



“No Approval, No Funds” is a hard requirement.

Research Sponsor

Please provide details of the formal Research Sponsor for this study. The Sponsor is responsible for:

- overseeing the conduct of the research,
- ensuring appropriate governance arrangements,
- and confirming that the study meets all regulatory and ethical requirements.

The Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring that:

- an appropriate Sponsor is in place,
- Sponsor approval is obtained,
- and Sponsor requirements are met throughout the study.

If relevant to your study, outline how data outputs will be stored, managed, and accessed. If possible, please provide a name of the designated Data Controller for the study. This is the organisation legally responsible for:

- how personal data are collected, stored, used, and protected,
- compliance with data protection legislation (e.g. UK GDPR).

You should ensure that data management arrangements are:

- appropriate to the sensitivity and volume of data,
- clearly documented,
- and aligned with Sponsor and institutional policies.

Section 16 – Suggested expert reviewers

- You may nominate up to five reviewers.
- They should be suitably qualified and ideally outside NI. Avoid current/recent close collaborators (guidance suggests recent = last 12–18 months).
- NICHS may use none or at most one nominated reviewer. Declare any conflicts between your team and nominees; manageable “soft” conflicts can be declared, but avoid “hard” conflicts (current collaborators, supervisors, close personal ties, direct benefit).
- Typically, we secure two external reviewers, and a (non-conflicted) Committee member acts as third reviewer. We reserve the right to secure additional external reviewers, e.g. where study requires multiple perspectives, or where the financial ask is over £250,000.

You will not be penalised if:

- a. nominated reviewers are unavailable or unsuitable,
- b. NICHS chooses different reviewers,
- c. or you decide not to suggest reviewers at all.



NICHS is not required to use nominated reviewers.

NICHS recognises that the Northern Ireland research community is small, and not all professional connections automatically prevent someone from acting as a reviewer. Conflicts are considered proportionately on a case-by-case basis.

Hard conflicts (not permitted)

- current collaboration on this project or closely related work
- named on the application
- same team / department as a named applicant
- current supervisory or reporting relationship
- close personal relationship

Soft conflicts (may be manageable)

- same institution, different department
- past collaboration (typically within the last two years)
- previous supervisory relationship (typically within the last two years)
- informal input into the proposal, but not named

NICHS Research Department staff and/or SRC will determine whether a conflict exists, whether it is hard or soft, and how it should be managed. Declaring a conflict does not disadvantage your application. Failing to declare a relevant conflict may raise concerns.

Refer to the Conflict of Interest Policy for full details.

Sections 17–18 – Institution details and declarations

- Provide host institution details and signatures. Grants are awarded to host institutions, not individuals.
- The application must be submitted through and signed by relevant institutional authorities (e.g., Head of Department and CFO/authorised finance lead).
- Applications cannot be progressed without complete institutional sign-off.



Applications cannot be progressed without all sign-off, declarations, and signatories.

Section 19 – PI declarations and signatures

Use of AI in your application

You may use AI tools to support your application (e.g. to develop ideas or improve clarity), but you remain fully responsible for the content. Further detail is available in the NICHS Generative AI Policy.



You may use AI tools to support your work, for example:

- developing ideas;
- improving writing clarity; and
- overcoming language barriers.

You may use AI outputs in your application, if:

- they are checked, edited, and genuinely reflect your own thinking, and
- they are declared appropriately.

You must:

- check all AI-generated content to ensure it is accurate and reflects your own work;
- clearly declare any use of AI in your application;
- protect confidential and sensitive information;
- ensure your use of AI complies with your institution's guidance on AI use and with NICHS policy; and
- ensure your use of AI complies with data protection and intellectual property requirements.

You must not:

- rely on AI to write your application in full;
- include inaccurate, misleading, or plagiarised content; and
- enter confidential or sensitive information into AI tools

Failure to comply may lead to:

- rejection of the application
- removal from a project
- funding being withdrawn or reclaimed
- exclusion from future funding opportunities.



The PI must take full responsibility for the application content, including AI content.

Other declarations

- Read declarations carefully and ensure the form is signed as required (typed names may be accepted as signatures where stated).



Applications cannot be progressed without sign-off, declarations, and signatories.

Final checklist (quick)

Before submitting, check:

- The study is clear and easy to understand
- Beneficiaries and benefits are clear (and timeframes realistic)
- Methods match the question and stage
- Feasibility, risks, and contingencies are credible
- Costs are justified and aligned with the workplan
- Eligibility/exclusions and approvals requirements are met
- All declarations and signatures are complete