

# The Australian Epilepsy Research Fund Grant Scheme

## Guidelines for Applicants

### 1. AERF Grants

1.1 The Australian Epilepsy Research Fund (AERF) Grant Scheme seeks to fund projects that will have a lasting beneficial impact on the lives of people living with epilepsy. The AERF prioritises projects that will make a significant impact in the lives of people living with epilepsy, whether this be in the short-, medium- or longer-term.

1.2 The Epilepsy Foundation's mission is to reduce the impact of epilepsy on people's lives. Reflecting this, the AERF's mission is to promote and fund patient-focused research, with the ultimate aim of finding a cure for epilepsy, and supporting those living with epilepsy in the meantime. The AERF strongly encourages multidisciplinary, collaborative projects, as well as applications from early career researchers (ECRs).

1.3 Requests may be made for up to \$1 million for projects spanning up to 5 years in duration. The level of requested funding and project duration must be explicitly justified in the application.

### 2. Funding Cycle

2.1 The inaugural Funding Round will occur in 2018, and the AERF will issue one request for project proposals. These will be assessed in late 2018 and funding allocations will be announced in early 2019. Subsequent Funding Cycles will be determined following review of the initial Funding Round.

2.2 The AERF was initiated in 2018, with the assistance of the Australian Government Department of Health's Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) scheme. As such, a substantial portion of the early funding cycles will have a specific focus on supporting research into the genetic underpinnings of epilepsy and/or treatment for rare genetic epilepsy disorders.

### 3. Priority Areas

The following overarching priority areas reflect the AERF's focus on advances that have the potential to transform and save lives.

Prevention, disease modification/ elimination, as well as psychosocial research into the impact of living with epilepsy are critical goals and consistent with our overall mission.

### 3.1 General goals:

- Reduction in seizures
- Reduced impact of epilepsy on people's lives
- Dissemination of best practice/ new knowledge
- Increased knowledge base of a specified target group or population
- Increased skill base
- Improved service system/ sector collaboration

### 3.2 Priority areas of research:

1. Pre-clinical
  - a. Understanding the causes, risk factors and genetic basis of epilepsy
  - b. Prevention and/ or cure of epilepsy
2. Applied/ translational
  - a. Translating progress made in research into treatments in clinical practice
  - b. Improving research infrastructure to facilitate translation
3. Clinical
  - a. To improve health care, including access to health services and treatment
  - b. Risk factors for injuries, status epilepticus, avoidable death, SUDEP and suicide
  - c. Epilepsy and important comorbidities, specifically depression/ anxiety, acquired brain injury, autism and intellectual disability.
  - d. Understanding the experience of patients undergoing genetic testing
  - e. Limit or prevent adverse consequences of seizures and their treatment across the lifespan
4. Social/ community
  - a. Improving public knowledge, awareness and attitudes towards epilepsy
  - b. Improving education for patients and family for health professionals
  - c. Mobility issues, e.g., driving

3.3 As noted in Section 2.2, the AERF commenced in 2018 with the assistance of the Commonwealth MRFF scheme. A grant of \$2 million was awarded to the AERF, specifically intended for research into rare genetic epilepsies. As such, researchers who are allocated funds from this grant will be required to present Projects aimed at understanding or treating rare genetic epilepsy conditions and will also be required to follow the reporting requirements of the MRFF scheme.

3.4 In some instances, philanthropic individuals donate to the AERF through the Epilepsy Foundation with the intent of supporting specific areas of research, such as research into KCNQ2, Dravet Syndrome, or SUDEP. Particular areas of interest and levels of funding available for these topics will be advertised through the Epilepsy Foundation website ([www.epilepsyfoundation.org.au](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org.au)).

## 4. Eligibility Requirements

Grants are available to both established and early career investigators. International collaborations are welcome but all materials must be submitted in English and the following eligibility criteria must be met.

4.1 Researchers who serve on the AERF Scientific Advisory Council are ineligible to be named as Chief Investigators on a Proposal or to sponsor a grant for the duration of their term on the committee. They must also abstain from participating in the review process where a Conflict of Interest arises.

4.2 Staff of The Epilepsy Foundation who are involved in the management of the AERF, namely the Research Lead and CEO, are also ineligible to be named as Chief Investigators on a Proposal or to sponsor a grant for the duration of their term on the committee. They must also abstain from participating in the review process where a Conflict of Interest arises.

4.3 In order to be eligible to apply for an AERF grant, applicants must meet the following criteria;

- The Administering Organisation is an entity incorporated in Australia (applicable for recipients of AERF-managed MRFF funding)
- An incorporated trustee applying on behalf of a trust
- The Project Leader must be eligible to work in Australia and be residing in Australia for a minimum of 80% of the Project Activity Period.

4.4 All Chief Investigators (CIs), Associate Investigators (AIs) and candidates in a proposal must:

- satisfy the eligibility criteria for the role they are to perform as at the Project Commencement Date and for the Project Activity Period;
- take responsibility for the authorship and intellectual content of the Proposal, appropriately citing sources and acknowledging significant contributions where relevant;
- make a serious commitment to carrying out the Project and cannot assume the role of a supplier of resources for work that will largely be undertaken by others; and
- have met all obligations, including submitting satisfactory Progress and Final Reports, for previously funded Projects through the AERF.

4.5 A maximum of five CIs and ten AIs can be named on a single Project Proposal. CIs may be on a maximum of five Project Proposals per Funding Cycle and may only hold up to five AERF grants at any one time. PhD Candidates can only be named as CIs in exceptional circumstances, but may be named as AIs or required personnel in the Proposal Budget.

4.6 Applicants who are not Australian Citizens must obtain a legal right to work and reside in Australia for the Project Activity Period.

4.7 Projects may include international researchers or collaborators as consultant AIs on Project Applications. These collaborators will not be required to reside in Australia for the Project Activity Period, however, their specific contribution and relevant expertise must be documented in the proposal and funding from the AERF will not support salaries, equipment or materials at international sites.

4.8 Applicants must provide the AERF with enough information to be able to assess their eligibility. A project cannot commence until all CIs, AIs, and investigators meet the above eligibility criteria.

4.9 Applications that do not meet eligibility requirements may be ruled ineligible and may be excluded from further consideration. An eligibility ruling may be made by the AERF at any stage following the close of applications, including by the appointed peer reviewers.

## 5. Project Proposals

5.1 Project Proposals must contain all the information necessary for assessment by reviewers, including eligibility assessment, without the need for further written or oral explanation, or reference to additional documentation. The AERF may request additional information but is not obliged to do so.

5.2 All details in the Proposal must be current at the time of submission. A Proposal may only be submitted once in the same funding scheme round regardless of any variation in the proposed research, the named participants and/or Administering Organisation. Additions, deletions and modifications will not be accepted after submission, unless requested by the AERF.

5.3 Project proposals should include the following sections;

*5.3.1 Research Proposal:* This section should clearly and succinctly outline the specific aims and hypotheses, and provide a brief description of how the proposed research plan aligns with AERF's mission. This section should be no more than two pages, with one page of references. **NB** Applications seeking over \$250,000 are allowed up to four pages, with one and a half pages of references. Details should be laid out as follows;

1. Aims
2. Background research. Any pilot or feasibility data should be mentioned here
3. Research plan, including proposed recruitment, methods and data analysis techniques. Clinical trials and cohort studies need to provide details of recruitment, control groups and randomisation or blinding procedures.
4. Project timeline

5. Outcomes and the future significance. Proposals should also describe any next steps once the goals of the proposed project have been achieved.
6. References

*5.3.2 Team Quality and Experience.* This should include a brief overview of the expertise of the team or lab group undertaking the Project, and describe why they are best suited to undertake the current Project. This should be a maximum of one page for all Project Proposals. The roles and contributions of each CI and AIs included on the Proposal should be detailed. Salary contributions requested should match the roles and responsibilities, not the expertise of the CI. AIs cannot apply for Salary support.

*5.3.3 CI Track Records.* This section should include information pertaining to the qualifications and expertise of up to five CIs named on the Project Proposal, including details of their top five publications over the last five calendar years. This section should also include details of career disruptions as well as achievements relative to opportunity (ROPE). Each CI's Track Record is allowed a maximum of two pages.

5.4 It is important to keep in mind that a key factor that reviewers consider when assessing applications is feasibility. Lower scores will be given to proposals that are not realistically achievable within the proposed timeframe.

5.5 *Formatting Requirements* are as follows;

- Type font: 12-point, Calibri
- Spacing: Single-spaced between lines of text, no more than five lines of type within a vertical inch.
- Margins: Minimum of 0.5-inch top, bottom, right, and 1-inch left.
- Graphs and charts do not count towards the two-page text description of your project.

5.6 *Conflict of Interest (COIs).* The AERF has procedures in place for managing organisational and personal COIs for assessors and board members. Details of these procedures are available on the Epilepsy Foundation website. Any and all COIs must be declared in a separate page accompanying the Project Proposal for assessment by reviewers.

5.7 *Withdrawals.* Upon receipt of a written request with justification from the Administering Organisation the AERF may approve the withdrawal of a Proposal.

5.8 *Rejoinder.* The Administering Organisation may be given the opportunity to provide any additional information requested by the AERF. Names of reviewers will not be provided to the Administering Organisation or to Proposal participants.

5.9 *Complaints.* Applicants or grant recipients seeking to lodge a complaint about an AERF administrative process should do so in writing, within 28 days of the relevant AERF decision or action. This process is designed to ensure that the Proposal has been treated fairly and consistently in the context of selection procedures.

5.9.1 Complaints will be considered only against the administrative process and not against committee decisions, assessor ratings and comments or the assessment outcome. Applicants must identify the specific clause, policy or procedure which they believe has been incorrectly applied.

Inquiries and complaints must be submitted to the Epilepsy Foundation electronically to the Research Lead [research@epilepsyfoundation.org.au](mailto:research@epilepsyfoundation.org.au).

## 6. Funding Rules and Requirements

These Funding Rules and the supporting documents may be amended by AERF at certain time points. Applicants and grantees should refer to, and must comply with, the latest versions as published on the Epilepsy Foundation website.

6.1 Requests may be made for up to a total of \$1 million paid over 5 years. Applicants must provide the total value of requested items on a yearly basis for the duration of the project and justify all budget items, paying particular attention to any requests which may be atypical for the relevant field of research.

6.2 *Budget Items Supported.* Project funding may be sought for budget items that directly support a research program contained in a Proposal, including:

1. Salaries for CIs and Project investigators including Post-Doctoral Fellows, as well as RHD stipends/ scholarships
2. Animal costs
3. Access to technical services (including machine tools and qualified technicians) linked to and justified explicitly against the Project
4. Expert services of a third party if the services are directly related to and essential for the proposed project. These may include:
  - a. Language translation services
  - b. Transcription services
  - c. Data collection and/ or analysis services
  - d. Equipment and consumables essential for the Project. Funding will not be provided for equipment or consumables that are thought to be for broad, general use.
5. Specialised computer equipment and software essential to the Project
6. Web hosting and web development specific to the Project

7. Workshops, focus groups and conferences that are essential for the conduct of the proposed research (including reasonable hospitality costs)
8. Travel fees to a relevant conference for the purpose of presenting AERF-funded research

6.2.1 All budget items must be justified in the Proposal to the satisfaction of the AERF. For items of equipment that are unique to the project and essential for the project to proceed;

- Applicants must clearly outline the total value of all items of equipment for each year, why the equipment is required for the proposed research and why the equipment cannot be provided by the Administering Organisation.
- For each item of equipment requested, a written quotation must be submitted.
- The AERF will not pay for maintenance, including service and repair costs in relation to equipment funded.

6.4 *Budget Items Not Supported.* The following items should not be requested in the budget are infrastructure-related costs, including:

1. Bench fees
2. Teaching materials
3. Descriptive data compilations, catalogues or bibliographies
4. The purchase of computers except where they are an integral component of a piece of laboratory equipment or are of a nature essential for work in the research field.
5. Costs not directly related to the project
6. Fees for international students or the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), and Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) liabilities for students

6.4.1 The following basic facilities must be provided and funded by the Administering Organisation, where relevant, and are not funded by the AERF:

- a) access to a basic library collection;
- b) access to film or music editing facilities;
- c) accommodation (for example, laboratory and office space, suitably equipped and furnished);
- d) basic computer facilities and standard software; and
- e) standard reference materials or funds for abstracting services.

## 7. Recommendations and Offer of Funding

7.1 External reviewers contracted by the AERF will submit funding recommendations to Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) the Board of the Epilepsy Foundation. The Board will determine which Proposals will be funded and the amount and timing of funding to be paid to Administering Organisations for approved Proposals.

7.2 In all cases, the AERF reserves the right to recommend funding levels which are less than those requested in the application, and a duration of funding which differs from that requested.

7.3 Subject to these Funding Rules, Funding for a Project will commence:

- On the Funding Commencement Date for the scheme;
- after Board approval; and
- in line with other arrangements approved by the AERF, whichever is later.

7.4 Any funding awarded will be subject to sufficient funds being available for the Project, the provisions of the AERF and continued satisfactory progress of the Project.

7.5 All amounts referred to in these Funding Rules are to be read as exclusive of GST (if any), unless expressly stated otherwise. The Administering Organisation is responsible for any and all financial and taxation implications associated with receiving funds.

7.6 The Board must not approve for funding any Proposal that fails to meet the eligibility criteria set out in this document.

7.7 Administering Organisations whose Proposals are approved will be notified in a letter of offer and will be required to enter into a Funding Agreement. Outcomes, funding allocations and other relevant information about the successful Proposals may be published on the Epilepsy Foundation website. The AERF may vary the funding approval if, in the opinion of the AERF, the particular circumstances of the Project warrant variation.

## 8. Reporting Requirements

The Administering Organisation will be required to follow the below reporting requirements;

8.1 *Mandatory Progress Reports.* All Awardees of an AERF grant are required to submit the following progress reports;

8.1.1 *Annual Progress Reports.* This should include enough information to assess the progress of the Project, including; (i) the use to date of the funds granted, detailing all expenditures made from the grant (including travel, salaries, and supplies), and (ii) progress made towards achieving the purposes for which the grant was awarded.

8.1.2 *Final Progress Report.* The final written report should include information pertaining to the final allocation of the funds received, as well as the progress made on the study at the Project Completion date. If the Project involves creation of a written product, a copy of

such written product must be submitted with the final report, including all relevant academic abstracts and publications that arise as a result of the Project. A Plain Language Summary of the findings should also be attached to the Final Report, so that the Epilepsy Foundation may advertise the outcomes of AERF funded research. The final progress report should be submitted within 9 months of the Project Completion date.

**8.1.3 Recipients of MRRF Funding.** AERF Awardees who have received part of the \$2 million awarded through the MRFF scheme for genetic research must present their progress reports in a manner compliant with MRFF requirements. Templates for MRFF progress reports can be found on the Department of Health's website:

<https://beta.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/medical-research-future-fund>.

**8.2 Financial Acquittal Reports.** Awardees of an AERF grant may be independently audited and required to provide a financial acquittal report verifying that the grant has been spend in accordance with the agreement. As such, all Administering Organisations are required to keep detailed records of the grant separate to their general accounts and records.

**8.2.1 Recipients of MRRF Funding.** All AERF Awardees who have received part of the \$2 million awarded through the MRFF scheme for genetic research will be required to provide this information should the Commonwealth independently audit the MRFF grant as a whole.

## 9. Fundamental Principles of Conducting Research

**9.1 Ethics.** The AERF expects the highest levels of research conduct and integrity to be observed in the research that it funds. Therefore all Proposals and AERF-funded research Projects must conform to the principles outlined in the following documents:

- a) *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007);*
- b) as applicable, the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007, updated 2015);*
- c) as applicable, *NHMRC Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research (2003);*
- d) as applicable, *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (2012);*
- e) as applicable, the *Australian Code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (2013);*
- f) as applicable, the *Freedom of Information Act (1982).*

**9.2 Misconduct, Incomplete or Misleading Information** All information submitted to the AERF must be complete, current and accurate at the time of submission. If the AERF considers that a Proposal

is incomplete, inaccurate or contains false or misleading information, the AERF may in its absolute discretion decide to recommend that the Proposal not be approved for funding.

9.2.1 Administering Organisations are required to notify the AERF of research misconduct matters. Examples of misleading information and misconduct include:

- a) plagiarism;
- b) providing a dishonest statement regarding time commitments to the research for which funding is being sought;
- c) providing incomplete or inaccurate information regarding other sources of funding;
- d) providing fictitious Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence;
- e) making false claims in relation to the authorship of the Proposal;
- f) failing to make adequate acknowledgement of intellectual, design or other significant contributions to the Proposal;
- g) making false claims in publications records (such as describing a paper as accepted for publication when it has only been submitted);
- h) making false claims in relation to qualifications and/or appointments;
- i) making false certifications; or
- j) failure to the existence, and nature, of actual or potential Conflicts of Interest of any of the parties involved in the Proposal/Project (such as any affiliations or financial interest in any organisation that has a direct interest in the matter or outputs of the Project).

9.2.2 A decision regarding misconduct, incomplete or misleading information may be made by the AERF at any stage during the assessment of the Proposal and may result in non-progression of the Proposal through the assessment process.

9.3 *Confidentiality.* The AERF will treat information contained in a Proposal as confidential. The AERF will not be taken to have breached its obligations to the extent that it discloses confidential commercial information for a purpose directly related to the enforcement or investigation of a possible breach of any Commonwealth, State, Territory or local law.

9.3.1 The AERF may disclose applicants' personal information to overseas entities, Australian, State/Territory or local government agencies, organisations or individuals where necessary to assess an application or to administer a grant.

9.3.2 Where information contained in a Proposal is made available to third parties for evaluation, assessment or audit purposes the AERF will require the third parties to maintain the confidentiality of the material, including any Intellectual Property contained in the Proposal.

9.3.3 Administering Organisations should ensure that information contained in the Proposal title and summary descriptions would not, if released, compromise their own requirements for confidentiality (such as protection of Intellectual Property).

9.3.4 In making public information about a Proposal which has been approved for funding, the AERF may use a Project description, including title and summary, which differs from that provided in the Proposal.

9.4 In addition to the exemptions listed above, the AERF may publicise and report offers or awards of funding, including the following information about the proposed Project:

- a) the name of the Administering Organisation and any other parties involved in or associated with the Project;
- b) named participants and their organisations;
- c) the proposed research program (the title and summary descriptions of the Project);
- d) classifications and international collaboration country names; and
- e) the level and nature of financial assistance from the AERF.

9.5 *Dissemination of Research Outputs, Data & Intellectual Property.* To maximise the benefits of research for improving the wellbeing and care of people living with epilepsy, and to allow access by other researchers and the community, publications resulting from research activities funded through the AERF must be disseminated as broadly as possible. The AERF acknowledges that researchers take into account a wide range of factors in determining the best avenues for dissemination of findings and/or publications arising from their research.

9.5.1 Alongside the Final Written Report, Awardees of an AERF grant are required to submit a plain language summary of their findings for the quarterly newsletter, Epilepsy Matters. This will help to ensure that those living with epilepsy in the community are connected with some of the latest research, as well as providing AERF donors with updates of the research they are supporting. Funding recipients may request a delay in publicising the findings if there is a justifiable reason (e.g., findings may not be publicised until academic journal articles have been accepted).