

# HRCI-HRB Joint Funding Scheme 2026

Supplementary\* Guidance Notes for Charities

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\* Please read in conjunction with HRCI-HRB Joint Funding Scheme 2026 Guidance Notes

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## 1 Charity Eligibility, Funding Level and Limits

- All participating charities must be approved as a co-funding partner in line with the HRCI-HRB Co-funding Partner Policy<sup>1</sup>.
- Should an application be recommended for funding a charity must agree to enter into a legal multi-party agreement between the HRB, the HRCI co-funding partner and the research performing organisation (RPO) such that all funding will go directly to the RPO and reporting and award management will be performed by the HRB. The HRB Terms and Conditions will govern the award in its entirety.
- Charities with an annual gross income of €150,000 or above can request 50% co-funding from HRB while charities with an annual gross income of less than €150,000 can request 75% co-funding from HRB. Charities requesting 75% co-funding from HRB will be required to provide evidence of eligibility.
- Where a project is successful charities are required to pay HRCI a 5% levy on the amount of funding contributed to the project by HRB.
- Co-funding of a single project by two to four charities with common interests is allowed. In this scenario the combined charity contribution will be 50% of the project cost regardless of the charities' gross annual income. Charities will agree themselves the division of funding contributed by their organisations. All charities will be partners in the multi-party agreement, if successful.
  - All Irish charity partners must be HRCI members and approved HRCI-HRB co-funding partners.
  - Each co-funding agreement may include arrangements where Irish charities co-fund with international charities which are not a member of HRCI.
  - If co-funding applications involve more than one charity, the charities will nominate one contact point for the HRB. This contact point will coordinate any communication with the other charities co-funders in a timely manner.
- Each HRCI-registered charity can put forward for panel review one more application than they can afford to fund, up to the limit of four in total.
- Each charity can have a maximum of three applications funded. Should the charity have submitted one more application than they can afford to fund and all are recommended for funding at joint panel stage, the lowest ranking application as judged by the committee will not be funded.
- Each charity must adopt the HRB "Conflict of Interest Policy" (Appendix I), sign the conflict of interest declaration (Appendix II) and sign the confidentiality agreement (Appendix III).

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<sup>1</sup> Available at [HRB Grant Policies](#)

## 2 Call Process, Review and Charity Responsibilities

### 2.1 Charity Call

- The HRCI member charity will inform HRCI of their intention to participate in this round of the scheme. Participating charities will be required to confirm to HRCI
  - That for all applications successfully funded the charity will pay HRCI a 5% levy on the amount of funding contributed to the project by the HRB (excluding the HRB overhead contribution), payment of which will be required in Q1 of 2027. Further that they acknowledge that failure to pay this levy or a significant delay to payment, not agreed to by HRCI, will exclude their organisation from future participation in the JFS.
  - If the charity is requesting 50% or 75% HRB funding. If requesting 75% HRB funding this must be based on the income and reserves detailed in the charity's most recent statutory accounts and the statutory accounts must be provided to HRCI to confirm eligibility.
  - That the charity acknowledges that as a co-manager of this scheme, HRCI will have full, confidential access to applications and related documents.
- HRCI will send details of all participating charities to HRB along with statutory accounts of any charities requesting 75% co-funding from HRB.
- Participating charities will open calls outlining their strategic priorities, the maximum funding limit and the closing date for applications to their charity. It is recommended that charities open their call between July and September.
- Charities may choose to first run an expression of interest phase in advance of opening their call for full applications. This will be outside of GEMS. The expression of interest phase can be used to reduce the numbers of full applications received and ensure applications align with the charity's strategic priorities. Following review by the charities internal selection process which ideally includes PPI review, charities will invite selected applicants to submit a full proposal through GEMS.
- HRB will open GEMS (HRB's online Grant E-Management System) for application submission on 01 September with the final deadline for full applications to the scheme **26 November 2025**. When an applicant starts an application, they will be invited to select and notify the co-funding charity via an email from the system. The co-funding charity will automatically have read access to the application form on GEMS.
- Charities may set an earlier deadline for applications if they require more time for peer review.
- Charities will be required to approve the applications via an e-mail to HRB to go forward for HRB eligibility check and if eligible to peer review.
- Where the charity rejects an application, the charity will notify and provide justification for the decision to the Lead Applicant, copying HRB.

## 2.2 Eligibility

The following criteria will be assessed by the HRB on the charity approved applications. Should an application not meet all eligibility criteria it will be deemed ineligible and HRB will inform the applicant and the charity.

### Lead Applicant and Team Eligibility

- Lead Applicant holds or will hold a post that covers duration of award
- Lead Applicant has the required funding and publication record
- HI confirmation of support for lead applicant or co-applicants in contract positions seeking their own salary
- PhD student **not** involved in the project
- Host Institution on the island of Ireland must be an approved HRB Host Institution; Host Institution outside of the island of Ireland is not required to be an approved HRB Host Institution

### Duration and Funding Eligibility

- Project duration is between 12 and 36 months
- Budget requested does not exceed €300,000
- Charity has been approved as a co-funding partner under the HRCI-HRB Co-funding Policy.

### Supporting Documentation

- Gantt chart provided
- Signed collaboration agreement form uploaded and required details for all collaborators
- Signed infrastructure agreement form for biobanking and access to clinical research facilities if applicable

**Where an application is outside the scope of the scheme, the application may be deemed ineligible by the HRB at initial eligibility review or the review panel at the panel meeting.**

## 2.3 Peer Review

- All eligible applications will move to the review phase.
- The peer review process will be co-managed by the charity and HRB. HRB will set up a file share where the charity and HRB will collaborate on progress. An excel tracker template will be used to record and share application and peer review process details.
- Charities will identify and invite suitable peer reviewers to review shortlisted applications as outlined in Appendix IV and V. Charities can start to search for suitable peer reviewers from when they first encounter the application; invitations can be sent early but peer reviewers

will not be given access to the application and review form on GEMS until after HRB eligibility check is complete. HRB can provide some support for the peer reviewer search to charities on request where needed. Please contact the HRB to explore.

- Charities will record details of peer reviewers who have accepted the invitation in the shared tracker file.
- HRB will check again for conflict of interest and where no conflict of interest is identified will set up access to the GEMS system and send link with instructions on how to complete the review to the reviewer. Actions will be recorded in the shared tracker.
- The reviewer will access the application and complete the review form on GEMS. Once reviews are submitted, they will be validated by HRB, the shared tracker file updated, and a copy of the review sent to the charity.
- Where a reviewer has not completed a review and their deadline for submission is approaching, HRB will send reminders to the reviewer and record these in the shared tracker file.
- If a reviewer does not complete the review by their deadline, HRB will record this in the shared tracker file. The charity can contact the reviewer to extend the deadline or provide a replacement peer reviewer.
- At least three international peer reviewers are required for each application.
- The peer review must be complete by **27 February 2026** to allow time for applicant response and final shortlisting by the charity.
- Applications must receive an **average peer review score above 6 to be eligible to be put forward to the joint selection committee**. Where the average peer review score has been skewed by an outlier these applications can be brought forward as well. For an average score to be considered skewed all but one of the scores should be above 6 and an individual outlier is bringing the average down below 6. An outlier score is defined as a score that is two scores or more below the next lowest score, removal of which will bring the average above the threshold of 6. In this scenario the HRB should be contacted to confirm the application meets the scoring threshold. All peer reviews received must be considered.

## 2.4 Applicant Response

- Once at least three peer reviews have been received, with an average peer review score above 6 (including those deemed to have an outlier), the application will move to the applicant response phase.
- The HRB will give the applicant team a time-limited opportunity (10 working days) to respond to the peer review comments via GEMS (with maximum word count of 2000 words). Once applicant response is submitted, it will be validated by HRB, the shared tracker file updated, and a copy of the applicant response sent to the charity.

## 2.5 Charity Endorsement and Short-listing

- Each charity will have its own final selection or endorsement step (e.g. bring to their research committee for approval or hold a charity selection panel meeting) to agree the applications which will be submitted to the HRCI-HRB Joint Selection Panel. The peer review comments and score as well as the applicant response will be used to inform discussion. The charity committee or panel must adopt the HRB Conflict of Interest Policy (Appendix I) and sign HRCI-HRB Conflict of Interest Declaration (Appendix II) and Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix III) in advance of any discussions. **Charities are encouraged to include the perspective of the public and patients as relevant into their selection process.** Note: see the HRCI research governance guide<sup>2</sup> for health research charities, if you require guidance on how to manage this.
- The charity will communicate to HRB by **28 March 2026** via form in the shared tracker file
  - details of individuals participating in selection of applications
  - signed conflict of interest and confidentiality agreements for each
  - details if any conflicts arose and how it was dealt with
  - if the charity is submitting one more application than they can afford to fund (maximum number of applications that can be funded per charity is three, however, there is an option to submit one additional application up to a maximum of four)
  - the final shortlist of applications to go forward for panel review and
  - The charity representative communicating the final shortlist of applications to go forward for panel review must confirm on behalf of their organisation that the charity is in a position to co-fund all endorsed applications or in the case that an additional highly rated application has been submitted the charity is in a position to fund any combination of applications except one.
- Where an application is rejected by the charity, the charity will notify and provide justification for the decision to the Lead Applicant, copying HRB.

## 2.6 Panel Review

- Short-listed applications will move to panel review.
- Whilst the HRB aims to secure scientific panel members who are generalists, we also need to have a sense of the balance of research expertise necessary to cover the spectrum of applications.
- Participating HRCI charities will be given an option to propose appropriate scientific panel members to the HRB.
- Public panel members represent the view of the general public and are not expert in any of the areas under discussion.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://hrci.ie/a-governance-guide-for-health-research-charities/>

### 3 Timeframe

The overall call duration is aligned to the academic year. Charities have flexibility to open and close calls on dates of their choosing while being cognisant of the call timeline. Most dates in the table below are meant to guide charities in setting their own timetable; however, those indicated as a **deadline** (in pink) **may not be missed** if you wish to participate in the call.

Activity	Date
Charity Information Session	02 July 2025
Charity Call Open	Varies (from July 2025)
HRB Call & GEMS Application Open	01 September 2025
<b>HRB Application Deadline</b>	<b>26 November 2025 @ 13:00</b>
<b>Peer Review Deadline</b>	<b>26 February 2026</b>
Applicant Response	27 February – 13 March 2026
<b>Charity Endorsement &amp; Shortlisting Deadline</b>	<b>03 April 2026</b>
HRB assign applications to panel for review	10 April 2026
Pre-panel review	10 April to 08 May 2026
Joint Funding Committee Meeting	Late May 2026
HRB Board Decision	Late June 2026
Applicant Notification	July 2026
Contracts Issued	Sep/Oct 2026
Earliest Research Project Start Date	01 October 2026

### 4 Contacts

For further information on the HRCI-HRB Joint Funding Scheme 2026, contact:

Sarah Delaney

Research Support Manager

HRCI

[sarah@hrci.ie](mailto:sarah@hrci.ie)

Patricia O'Byrne

Research Strategy and Funding



Health Research Board

[hrci-hrbjfs@hrb.ie](mailto:hrci-hrbjfs@hrb.ie)

**The HRB reserves the right to reject any application that does not meet the terms of this call. The HRB's Policy on Appeals on funding decisions is available at <https://www.hrb.ie/funding/funding-schemes/before-you-apply/all-grant-policies/hrb-policy-on-appeals/>.**

## Appendix I: HRB policy on Conflicts of Interest for External Reviewers<sup>3</sup>

### Introduction

In the context of this policy, external reviewers are defined as everybody except HRB staff who reviews funding applications or interim review documentation on behalf of the HRB. This includes expert reviewers, public reviewers, knowledge user reviewers and other reviewers.

Independent external review of applications/interim review reports prior to any funding decision is a cornerstone of HRB decision making processes. A potential conflict of interest by anybody involved in these decisions which is not declared and managed may result in undue influence or bias and put the credibility of the HRB and external reviewers at risk. Disclosing and managing conflicts of interest protects the fairness and impartiality of the review process and the public interest.

### Policy

This document sets out the policy for identifying, disclosing and handling conflicts of interests irrespective of the medium used (such as written only, face to face meeting or virtual meeting). The policy applies to all external reviewers engaged in the HRB's funding processes. It ensures transparency and consistency in the way conflicts of interest are handled and promotes public trust and a positive research culture.

#### 1. The HRB requires all external reviewers to:

- Confirm on GEMS absence of a conflict of interest before accessing an application.
- Sign a declaration confirming no conflict or identifying potential conflicts of interest if acting as a panel member tasked with making a funding or interim review outcome recommendation to the HRB.

#### 2. The HRB requires an external reviewer who has a conflict of interest to:

- Disclose to the HRB the nature of their interest in advance of any review.
- Alert the HRB at the earliest opportunity should it become clear that a potential conflict arises upon accessing an application.
- Take no part in any consideration of the application and withdraw from the meeting for when the application is being discussed.
- Refrain from influencing or seeking to influence a decision in relation to an application where a conflict exists.

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<sup>3</sup> Policy available: [HRB Policy on Conflicts of Interest for External Reviewers](#)

3. A disqualifying conflict of interest exists if an external reviewer:

- Was involved in the preparation of the application.
- Stands to benefit directly should the proposal be accepted or rejected.
- Is in some way related to the applicant, co-applicant, collaborator or sponsors (where applicable) at a personal or professional level.
- Is a former supervisor of the applicant, co-applicant or sponsor (up to 5 years previously) or is a collaborator of the applicant (up to 5 years previously). There may be exceptions in the case of joint publications from large collaborative teams/consortia where neither reviewer nor applicant, co-applicant or sponsor were the senior or corresponding author.
- May benefit financially should the proposal be accepted or rejected (for example if involved with a company acting as a project partner or involved with a competitor).

4. A potential conflict of interest may exist in some cases that are not covered by the disqualifying conflict of interest rules indicated above. In particular external reviewers with close links to industry should carefully consider any potential for conflict of interest/perceived commercial interest that may exist.

5. A person will not be regarded as having a conflict of interest if the interest is so remote or insignificant that it cannot reasonably be regarded as likely to influence a person in considering, discussing or in voting on, any question relating to the application.

6. If an external reviewer is in doubt as to whether a conflict of interest exists, they should consult with HRB staff. Typically, the decision whether something constitutes a conflict of interest is made by a HRB Programme Manager. The Chair of a panel will be briefed about any disclosed conflicts of interest of panel members ahead of the meeting and plays an active role in supporting HRB staff to manage conflict of interest.

7. A separate Conflict of Interest policy exists for HRB staff and Conflicts of Interest of members of the HRB Board are dealt with in the HRB's Governance Handbook.

## Appendix II: HRCI-HRB Conflict of Interest Declaration



### Declaration of Conflict of Interest for Committee Members

A disqualifying conflict of interest exists if a reviewer or panel member:

- Was involved in the preparation of the application
- Stands to benefit directly should the proposal be accepted or rejected
- Is in some way related to the applicant, co-applicant, collaborator or sponsors (where applicable) at a personal or professional level
- Is a former supervisor of the applicant, co-applicant or sponsor (up to 5 years previously)
- Is a collaborator of the applicant (up to 5 years previously). There may be exceptions in the case of joint publications from large collaborative teams/consortia where neither reviewer nor applicant, co-applicant or sponsor were the senior or corresponding author.

A potential conflict of interest may exist in some cases that are not covered by the disqualifying conflict of interest rules indicated above. In particular reviewers with close links to industry should carefully consider any potential for conflict of interest/perceived commercial interest that may exist.

**Where a conflict of interest exists, a committee member must leave the room when the application is being considered and cannot score the application or take any part in its assessment.**

Please sign below as appropriate:

**A. I declare that no conflict of interest arises in relation to any research proposal being considered by the Committee of which I am a member**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name in Capitals: \_\_\_\_\_

**OR**

**B. I declare that a conflict of interest arises in relation to the following research proposals (please list reference number(s) of proposal(s))**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name in Capitals: \_\_\_\_\_

Proposal reference numbers: \_\_\_\_\_

Details of conflict of interest: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix III: HRCI-HRB Confidentiality Agreement



### HRCI-HRB Confidentiality Agreement

1. External peer reviewers, review panel members, panel meeting observers or any other person engaged by HRB or a HRCI member charity for the purpose of peer review, are required to respect the confidentiality of the review process, which is designed to protect and preserve the integrity of the HRB and HRCI's advisers and processes. This agreement dictates that peer reviewers, review panel members and panel meeting observers may not discuss any aspect of the scoring and assessment of external reviews, or the deliberations or recommendations of review committees with applicants, Principal Investigators or their colleagues, and that they must refuse any requests for information as to how a particular decision was reached. All such requests must be referred to the HRCI member charity.
2. The **HRB and HRCI** expect external peer reviewers, review panel members, panel meeting observers or any other person engaged by HRB or a HRCI member charity for the purpose of peer review, to adhere to the highest standards of integrity during the peer review process.
3. This agreement requires that peer reviewers, review panel members and panel meeting observers must respect the intellectual property of applicants and Principal Investigators and should not appropriate and use as their own or disclose to any third-party confidential information contained in the proposals and reports they review. **Confidential information** means all information whatsoever, irrespective of the means, mode or medium of storage, representation or presentation of same together with all modifications, adaptations and derivations thereof, including but not limited to:
  - (a) investigative studies, research and development activities, reports and findings, clinical trials, consultations, methodologies, proposals, systems, programs, techniques, strategies, improvements, discoveries, processes, innovations, inventions, trade secrets, technical drawings, know-how, formulae, concepts not reduced to material form, designs, plans and models, financial and marketing information and knowledge, business plans and information regarding the affairs of an applicant or PI generally, source and object code, arrangements and agreements with third parties, whether given orally, in writing or otherwise;
  - (b) any derivations of any information or data which embodies, contains or describes the Confidential Information;
  - (c) any other data or information designated by either the applicant/PI or the HRCI-HRB to be confidential or relating to the current or prospective research, activities or business of that Party;
  - (d) information regarding the existence or progress of any negotiations or agreement relating to the application or project;

4. Peer reviewers, review panel members, panel meeting observers or any other person engaged by HRB or a HRCI member charity for the purpose of peer review should take all actions necessary to keep confidential the Confidential Information supplied to them as part of the peer review process.

This Confidentiality Agreement should be completed by all individuals participating in discussion and selection of applications to go forward to the HRCI-HRB Joint Funding Scheme 2026 Selection Panel Meeting.

Completion of this Confidentiality Agreement indicates that you:

- Undertake to abide by the HRCI-HRB's Confidentiality Agreement.
- Undertake not to reveal any details of the review process or its outcomes or of any other proposal submitted for review/evaluation without the express written approval of the HRB.
- Undertake to be personally responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of any documents or electronic files sent to you and for returning, erasing or destroying all confidential documents or electronic files upon completion of the review process, unless otherwise instructed by the HRB.

**I accept the above conditions and undertake to abide by the Confidentiality Agreement of the HRCI-HRB:**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

Name in Capitals: \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation : \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix IV: Guidance for identification of Peer Reviewers

### 1. International Peer Review Criteria

The potential reviewer **should**:

- Be an expert in the application topic or have some expertise relevant to the application (for example if it is a multidisciplinary application)
- Have a strong publication record and be either a senior author (i.e. last author) or co-published a sufficient number of articles (~6) in the area of interest in the last 5 years. They may also have written books, book chapters, reports or any other health-related publications. In the areas of Health Services Research and Population Health Sciences Research a minimum of 3 publications in the last 4 years is sufficient.
- Be associated with a respectable research institution outside of Ireland\*. They may be an active researcher, a lecturer, research fellow etc in the specialty area of interest.
- Have an institutional email address

**\*An exception to the requirement of peer reviewers being based outside of Ireland applies where the Host Institution for the research project is based outside of Ireland. In this case peer reviewers based in Ireland may be used. All other peer review selection criteria must still be met.**

The potential reviewer **should not**:

- Have co-published with the lead applicant or co-applicant in the past 5 years. PubMed has useful features to investigate this.
  - Go to the 'Advanced Search' tab in PubMed.
  - Set the Search Builder to 'Author' and 'OR'
  - Add each member of the applicant team in the following format 'Surname Initial' e.g. 'Moore A'. Click 'Add to search box' until this is complete for each member of the applicant team. Remove individual brackets and insert brackets around entire team and add 'AND'
  - Insert the potential reviewer's name – 'Surname Initial'
  - Finally, click search! This action will bring up any publications an applicant team member and the potential reviewer have been involved in. If no results are found, you can be reasonably confident in this person as a potential reviewer. You can copy the code in the search section and save it to your spreadsheet and use this as a template for checking other possible reviewers.
- Currently or recently been working in the same organisation/department as any member of the applicant team.
- Be industry employees or have any apparent links with the pharmaceutical industry or commercial organisation.



## 2. Steps for each application

1. Make a list of all members in the applicant team (Lead Applicant, Co-Applicants, and Collaborators) and their host institutions.
2. Read through the application to get a sense of what the applicant team proposes to do. The project abstract and project lay summary are especially helpful for this.
3. Look at the keywords suggested by the applicant team. These should provide a snapshot of the area of research.
4. Look at the bibliography/reference section of the proposal. This will allow you to identify other people working in this area of research.
5. Note Universities/hospitals/organisations where the applicant team have studied and worked to avoid asking reviewers from the same place, especially those with whom the applicant was recently connected.
6. Identify and ask at least 10 potential reviewers for each application. This will help to secure at least 3 peer reviewers.

Where to look for reviewers/Check their Suitability

The following websites are very useful in identifying potential reviewers:

- PubMed: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed/>
- Cochrane Library: <http://www.cochrane.org/>
- Biomed Experts: <http://www.biomedexperts.com/>
- Google

## Appendix V: Email templates

### Peer reviewer invitation (From charity)

#### Reviewer Salutation

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My name is { } and I work for {charity name}. We are currently sourcing international peer reviewers to inform the funding decision for a research proposal which we are considering co-funding with the Health Research Board, the lead agency in Ireland that supports health research. From the literature, I identified you as someone with expertise relevant to the application: {Insert **Application Title**}. Please see the abstract and applicant details at the bottom of this email.

I invite you to review the application and provide a short, written review. If interested, the HRB will credit your ORCID account in recognition of your contribution to the peer review process. I would appreciate if you could respond to this invite before {insert date - typically approx. three days}. If you agree to review, the deadline for review is three weeks from the date of acceptance and we will send you a link (from [hrbgrants@hrb.ie](mailto:hrbgrants@hrb.ie)) where you can access the full proposal, along with peer review guidelines and review form.

If you are unable to review on this occasion, we would be grateful if you could suggest a suitable colleague or other expert in the field who may be able to do so. Please forward an email address, if available.

Thank you in advance for your assistance and we look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

**Abstract:**

**Applicant details:**

**Funding Scheme:** HRCI-HRB Joint Funding Scheme 2026.

**For more information see:** <https://www.hrb.ie/funding-category/research-funding/funding-opportunities/grant-schemes/>.