Discovery Research Grants
Call and guidelines – 2026 scheme

RNID funds research into hearing loss and tinnitus to speed up the discovery and development of medical treatments to protect and restore hearing and silence tinnitus.

Our Discovery Research Grants support projects that will generate knowledge to underpin the discovery of treatments for hearing loss or tinnitus or improve how treatments are developed and tested. We also fund research to improve current treatments for hearing loss, such as medical devices like hearing aids and cochlear implants.

In addition, we support research to provide a better understanding of the link between hearing loss and dementia, to help us find better ways to treat and prevent both conditions.

This year, we are working with Cystic Fibrosis Trust to co-fund research that will lead to new ways to protect hearing from the ototoxic side-effects of aminoglycoside antibiotics and particularly welcome applications in this area.

Why encouraging research to protect hearing from ototoxic aminoglycoside antibiotics is important

Aminoglycosides are a class of broad-spectrum, life-saving antibiotics, and often the only effective treatment for several multi-drug resistant bacterial infections. However, they are also both ototoxic (with irreversible effects) and nephrotoxic (with reversible effects). Aminoglycosides damage sensory hair cells in the cochlea of the ear. Damage to these cells causes permanent hearing loss, as these cells cannot be regenerated.

This limits the use of aminoglycosides in the UK and other high-income countries to the treatment of severe infections that do not respond to other antibiotic treatment, such as to treat chronic *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* infections often seen in people with cystic fibrosis. They are also used to treat serious bacterial infections and sepsis in premature babies who require intensive care.

In lower- and middle-income countries, they are used more widely as they are cheap and effective against a wide range of bacterial infections. However, the resulting hearing loss is a significant burden on these populations.

At least 1 in 10 people who are treated with aminoglycosides will develop permanent and often severe hearing loss, with the risk and severity of hearing loss increasing with duration and repetition of treatment. As people with cystic fibrosis are often treated repeatedly with aminoglycoside antibiotics, the risk of developing hearing loss in this group of people increases to more than 50%. There are also known genetic risk factors that increase an individual's risk of developing hearing loss if treated with these drugs.

It is therefore crucial to find effective ways to protect hearing from the ototoxic side effects of these medicines, so they can be used safely without causing permanent hearing loss.

Call for Proposals

We request research projects in the following areas:

1) **Research to underpin the development of treatments for hearing disorders, including tinnitus**

   Any research that underpins the development of treatments, including but not limited to medical devices, pharmacological treatments, genetic or cellular therapies, will be considered under this category.

   Treatments should aim to prevent hearing loss, restore auditory function or silence tinnitus. This can include treating hearing loss within the context of dementia.

   Examples of research topics included in this category:
   - identifying the causes of hearing loss, including central auditory processing disorders
   - improving understanding of the molecular and/or cellular changes associated with different types of hearing disorders
   - improving the interface between a cochlear implant and the auditory nerve
   - catalysing the development of novel medical devices to aid or restore auditory function

- contributing towards the development of therapies to prevent loss of auditory function
- identifying biological pathways that could be targeted to trigger the regeneration of damaged cell types in the auditory system
- advancing drug or gene-based approaches to restore hearing function or trigger cell regeneration
- advancing cell-based therapies to repair damage to the auditory system
- identifying the causes of tinnitus
- improving understanding of the biological basis of tinnitus
- contributing towards the development of treatments to silence or alleviate tinnitus
- identifying common biological mechanisms that underlie dementia and hearing loss, and how they lead to both conditions
- advancing our knowledge of any causal link between hearing loss and dementia
- leading to the development of interventions that can delay or prevent the progression of hearing loss and/or dementia, or prevent one condition from exacerbating the other

Research proposals that underpin the development of treatments to protect hearing from aminoglycoside antibiotics will be considered for joint funding with Cystic Fibrosis Trust.

2) Research to improve how new treatments for hearing loss and tinnitus are developed and tested

Any research that improves how new treatments are developed or tested is encouraged under this category.

Research proposals to improve how new treatments to protect hearing from aminoglycoside antibiotics are developed and tested will be considered for joint funding with Cystic Fibrosis Trust.

Improving measurement of auditory function or tinnitus, including in the context of dementia

Research to improve how hearing or tinnitus is measured or monitored:

- to improve diagnosis or prognosis
- to identify the type and location of damage underlying a person's hearing difficulty or tinnitus

- to provide new and robust measures for use as clinical trial endpoints to evaluate interventions
- to allow for patient stratification into clinical trials
- to help select the most appropriate treatment

Such measures include, but are not limited to, genetic, physiological, or behavioural approaches.

Developing models of human hearing disorders, including tinnitus

Research to develop models of human hearing disorders, including tinnitus, to allow for robust pre-clinical validation of treatments:

- *in vivo* animal models
- *in vitro* animal or human cellular models
- computer models of human hearing loss or tinnitus

Additional notes for applicants

- Please note that you may only submit **one** preliminary application as the lead applicant. You may be named as a co-applicant or collaborator on other applications.
- Projects must be defined pieces of research with clearly stated objectives, experimental plan and expected outcomes. Applications to cover solely, or mainly, equipment costs, will **not** be accepted.
- Projects should be able to demonstrate a route by which outcomes could be exploited for the benefit of people with hearing loss or tinnitus.
- **Resubmissions:** we accept resubmissions of previously unfunded projects through this scheme – no invitation to resubmit is required. The resubmission must be updated to take into account any feedback given (or to provide any additional data). **You may only resubmit a substantially similar application up to two times i.e. three submissions total**.
- A summary of our current terms and conditions is included on our website for your reference – please note that these are subject to change.
- **Please note that we do not fund social research, or research focussed on the design or evaluation of healthcare services.**

Summary of grant

Duration:	Up to 3 years.
Eligibility:	Applicants can be from any university or research institute in any country

Value: Up to £225K in total, funding will not exceed £75K in any one year

Application and selection procedure

There is a two-stage application process for the Discovery Research Grant (an overview of the process, and timings, is shown at the end).

Preliminary application
All applicants are required to submit a preliminary application. Preliminary applications will be considered by our Discovery Research Grant review panel[1], who will identify the best proposals to take forward to the full application stage.

They are asked to rate proposals according to the following criteria:

- Clarity of the research question and relevance to the aims of the scheme
- Quality of the background information provided
- Feasibility and design of the project – its likelihood of success in answering the research question
- Potential benefit and relevance of the research outcomes to people with hearing loss and/or tinnitus

The process of selecting preliminary applications to move forward to the full application stage is competitive, and we therefore ask that you do not submit speculative applications. It is important for this process to work and to be fair to other applicants that preliminary outlines accurately reflect any later invited applications. As such, all full applications will be checked against preliminary applications.

Full application
Successful applicants will be invited to submit a full application.
Full applications will be sent to at least two (ideally three) external referees in the field, who are asked to rate the scientific value and feasibility of the project. They are asked to assess the proposal against the following criteria:

- Relevance to people with hearing loss or tinnitus/potential to lead to significant benefit for people affected by hearing loss or tinnitus in the short- or long-term
- Novelty and originality/likelihood of leading to significant new understanding
- Quality of background information and preliminary data provided
- Appropriate project design, methodology, analysis and ethical considerations (for research involving people or animals)

[1] The Discovery Research Grant Review Panel is comprised of Professor Ronna Hertzano (University of Maryland/NIH) (chair), Professor Sally Dawson (University College London), Dr Conny Kopp-Scheinpflug (Ludwig-Maximilians University, Munich), Dr Zoe Mann (King's College London), Professor Berthold Langguth (University Hospital of Regensburg), Dr Alexander Galazyuk (Northeast Ohio Medical University), Dr Erik de Vrieze (Radboud University Medical Center), Dr Amber Leaver (Northwestern University), Dr Nishchay Mehta (University College London), Dr Catherine Weisz (University of Maryland/NIH) and Dr Alan Sanderson (Brighton and Sussex Medical School) as well as members of Cystic Fibrosis Trust's Research Grants Review Committee (to be confirmed).

- Feasibility – timescale and budget
- Research team – expertise and resources
- Adequate justification of costs requested

Applicants will be given the opportunity to respond to external peer review feedback in advance of the final review panel meeting. Proposals, reviews and rebuttals will then be considered and rated by members of our Discovery Research Grant review panel.

The top-rated applications will be funded. Applicants will be notified as soon as possible following the final decision. Feedback from the panel will be provided.

All external peer reviewers must agree to abide by our code of conduct for conflicts of interest and confidentiality for peer-reviewers. Applicants will be given the opportunity to respond to the external peer reviews.

The reviews, rebuttals and original full proposals are then considered and rated by members of our Discovery Research Grant review panel. All members of the panel must agree to abide by our code of conduct for conflicts of interest and confidentiality for panel members, at all stages of the assessment process.

How to apply:
Preliminary and full applications must be submitted through our online grants management system, Flexi-Grant, before the deadline. There is further guidance on Flexi-Grant about how to complete your application. Please contact us with any queries about the scheme at least three working days before the deadline.

Please note that full applications will have to be approved by an authorised representative from your institution, on Flexi-Grant, before you can submit – ensure you allow enough time for this before the deadline.

All preliminary applications must be received on or before Thursday 10 September 2026 (5pm UK time).

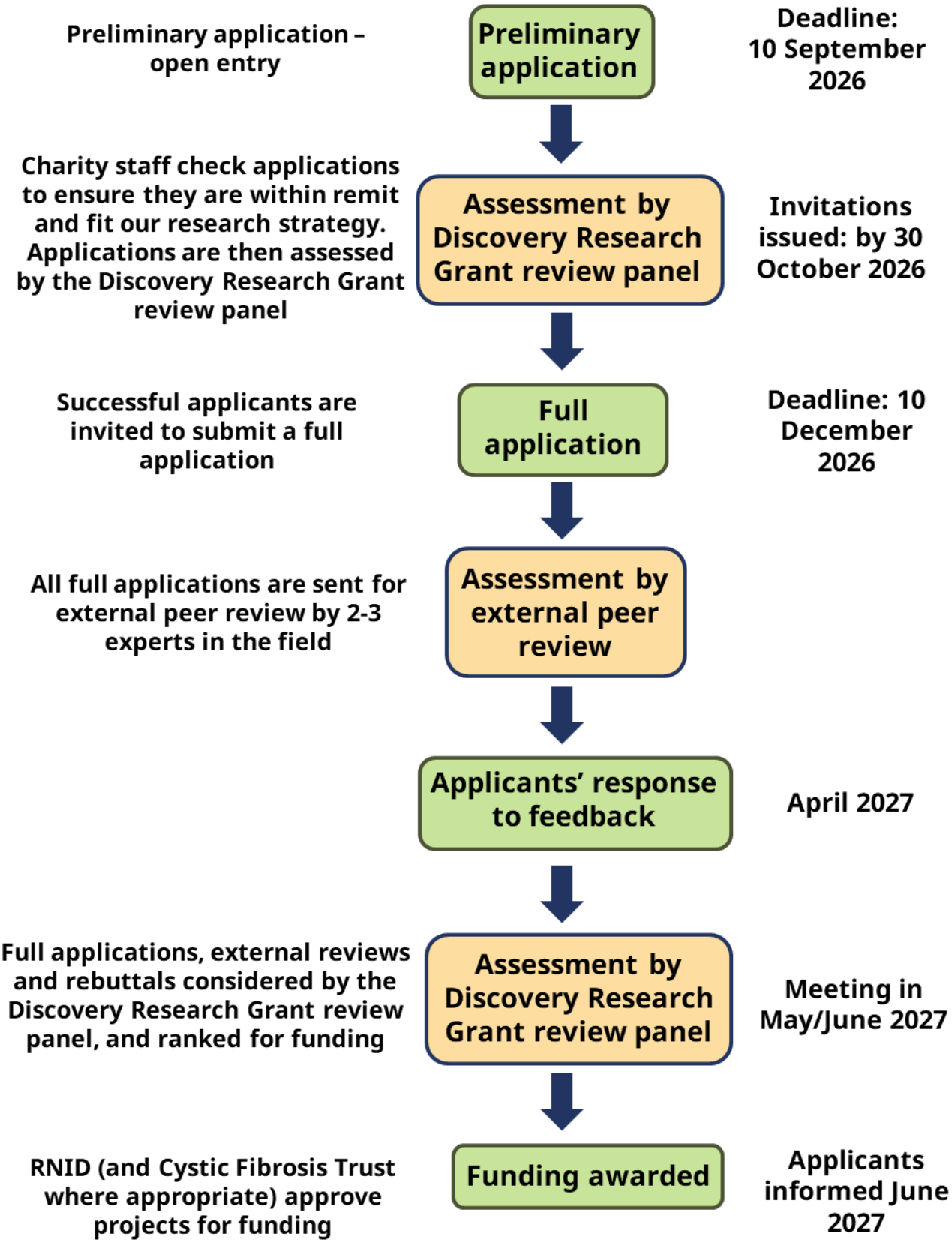
For further details:

Email: **research@rnid.org.uk**
Web: www.rnid.org.uk/discovery

Deadlines

Preliminary applications:	10 September 2026 (5pm UK time)
Invitations to full application stage:	By 30 October 2026
Full applications:	10 December 2026 (5pm UK time)
Final decision:	June 2027

2026 round


Preliminary application – open entry
Preliminary application
Deadline: 10 September 2026
Charity staff check applications to ensure they are within remit and fit our research strategy. Applications are then assessed by the Discovery Research Grant review panel
Assessment by Discovery Research Grant review panel
Invitations issued: by 30 October 2026
Successful applicants are invited to submit a full application
Full application
Deadline: 10 December 2026
All full applications are sent for external peer review by 2-3 experts in the field
Assessment by external peer review
Applicants' response to feedback
April 2027
Full applications, external reviews and rebuttals considered by the Discovery Research Grant review panel, and ranked for funding
Assessment by Discovery Research Grant review panel
Meeting in May/June 2027
RNID (and Cystic Fibrosis Trust where appropriate) approve projects for funding
Funding awarded
Applicants informed June 2027