

MARCH Network Plus Fund Grants

Application Guidance Notes

OVERVIEW

The MARCH Network is inviting proposals for research projects in one of two categories: (1) grants of up to £50,000 addressing one of two specific priority research questions, or (2) grants of up to £20,000 for innovative research on two further broad questions. This pack provides information for those interested in submitting an application. Applicants should submit proposals by 5pm on Sunday 24 May 2020.

1. BACKGROUND

The 'MARCH' Network is one of 8 new national networks funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) as part of the 2018 Cross-Council Mental Health Plus call to further research into mental health. MARCH proposes that Assets for Resilient Communities lie at the heart of Mental Health (M-ARC-H) and is dedicated to advancing research into the impact of these assets in enhancing public mental health and wellbeing, preventing mental illness and supporting those living with mental health conditions. By 'mental health', MARCH refers to mental illness (e.g. depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder etc), positive mental health and wellbeing. Following UKRI's definition of mental health as set out for the mental health networks, this does not include cognitive impairment, dementia, or other conditions such as autism. MARCH refers to 'social, cultural and community assets' as including the arts, culture, heritage sites, libraries, green spaces, community centres, social clubs, community associations and volunteer groups. There are an estimated 1 million of these assets in the UK.

Over the last few decades, cross-disciplinary research has provided compelling preliminary evidence as to the fundamental importance of communities to mental health. Assets and community activities, that embrace and grow community capital are receiving growing recognition in mental health policy, and are being used increasingly within healthcare to support individuals living with mental health conditions.

However, a number of significant research gaps remain. Over the past year, the MARCH Network has been co-producing a research agenda with members to identify the most pressing questions that research needs to answer to support our understanding of the role community assets and activities play in enhancing mental health. This has involved crowd-sourcing research questions from our members (which number over 1,200 and include researchers from a range of academic disciplines, individuals with lived experience of mental illness, community organisations, policy makers, clinicians and funders), consulting our Disciplinary Expert Panel (which comprises 40 academics from across the UK from different disciplinary backgrounds working on community assets and mental health), and inviting MARCH members to vote on which questions are of the most immediate relevance to their fields of work.

Overall, this process has identified a number of research questions that are of high priority across different sectors (i.e. research, policy, practice and amongst individuals). Two specific high-priority questions have been selected for larger investment this round of Plus Funding (outlined below in 'Scope'). For each question, a single grant of up to £50,000 is available. Two additional broader priority questions have been selected as the focus of a further 5-8 innovation grants of £20,000. It is anticipated that some innovation projects will develop from ideas developed at previous Sandpit events, but involvement in a previous sandpit is not a prerequisite for applying.

2. SCOPE

Up to £250,000 is available in total for this Plus Fund call to be split across the grants outlined below. **Applicants should submit proposals by 5pm on Sunday 24 May 2020.**

The £50,000 grants

Two grants of up to £50,000 will be made, one grant addressing each of the two questions below.

Research Question 1: What are the core skills and knowledge required by community practitioners and organisations to co-design and deliver suitable and effective programmes for individuals with mental illness?

Proposals are invited for a project that will map the core skills and knowledge required by community practitioners and organisations required to co-design and deliver suitable and effective programmes for individuals with mental illness.

This work is anticipated to cover topics such as (i) principles of co-design of projects involving individuals with lived experience, (ii) core skills, including emotional and interpersonal skills, required by practitioners, (iii) central ethical and safeguarding issues when designing and delivering interventions for individuals with mental illness. However, it need not be limited to these factors; the team may also identify other skills or knowledge that are important to include. A central aim of funding this project is to provide content that will help support the design of training courses that will develop the skills and knowledge of individuals and organisations such that they are able to lead appropriate and effective community programmes for individuals with mental illness.

It is anticipated that the project will involve consultations or research with key stakeholders such as practitioners, researchers, healthcare professionals (such as psychologists, psychiatrists or therapists), and individuals with lived experience (amongst others). It will need to lead to a publication (whether a report or journal publication or similar) that will be made publically and freely available. The team should also prepare a detailed dissemination plan that will engage key stakeholders to support the use of the resource.

Research Question 2: What are the factors that determine the potential of a community asset or activity to be 'sustainable'?

Proposals are invited for a project that will identify the core factors that support community assets or activities in becoming 'sustainable'. The definition of sustainability will be open to interpretation from applicants but could include financially sustainable (i.e. the ability to be robust to challenges in securing funding or changing economic climates), environmentally sustainable (i.e. the protection and maintenance of assets and the resources they draw on), or socially sustainable (i.e. the ability to adapt and work with changing processes, systems and structures within different sectors including the health, social care and community sectors). In particular, proposals are encouraged that consider multiple different aspects of sustainability.

The factors considered could include micro-level factors (such as factors within community organisations) as well as meso- and macro-level factors within society. They could include protective factors that help to build sustainability, as well as risk factors that threaten sustainability. The research process could involve consultations or research with key stakeholders such as community or third sector organisations, funders, and policy makers (amongst others). The team may also want to develop the research findings into a series of recommendations targeted at different stakeholders. The project will need to lead to a publication (whether a report or journal publication or similar) that will be made publically and freely available. The team should also prepare a detailed dissemination plan that will engage key stakeholders to support the use of the resource.

The £20,000 grants

A further 5-8 grants will be made that take an innovative and cross-disciplinary approach to addressing either of the two following research questions:

1. Can community assets and activities help to prevent the onset of mental illness?
2. What are the effects of community assets and activities on individuals with mental illness?

In particular, projects are encouraged that move beyond evaluations of particular programmes to produce generalisable research. It is anticipated that applicants will focus on specific types of community assets or particular mental health conditions. It is essential that projects are cross-disciplinary in their methodological approach and priority will be given to projects that make use of under-utilised research designs, data sets, data collection methods or tools, or analytical approaches. Further, each project will need to involve cross-sectoral partnership working with one or more stakeholders (such as community or third sector organisations, individuals with lived experience or policy makers).

These grants are specifically designed to act as 'seed' awards: enabling teams to gather pilot data or test novel ideas ahead of applications for larger grants from other funders. As such, applications for these Plus Fund grants should show a clear planned progression from this award to future research questions and funding applications. Further, these grants have a priority aim of supporting early career researchers (ECRs), so there should be a prominent role for one or more ECRs embedded within the project and clear plans for how the project will support their career development.

3. ELIGIBILITY

Applications must be from individuals working within a UK higher education institution (HEI) or a UKRI-recognised research organisation (RO). For a full list of eligible independent research organisations, please see <https://www.ukri.org/files/funding/tcs/eligible-independent-research-organisations-pdf>. Organisations that are not UKRI-recognised can be included as co-applicants or collaborators within an HEI-led application. Individuals from non-UK organisations are not eligible to be investigators on these applications but can play advisory roles.

All applications require an early career researcher (ECR) to be either principal investigator or a co-investigator. ECRs are defined as PhD students, individuals who are within eight years of the award of their PhD or equivalent professional training, or individuals who are within six years of their first academic appointment. 'Award of PhD' is defined as the date of successful PhD viva. 'First academic appointment' is defined as the first paid contract of employment, either full-time or part-time, which lists research and/or teaching as the primary functions. Time taken for career breaks does not need to be counted in the overall time since PhD award.

All applications also require the involvement of one or more individuals with lived experience of mental illness or a group or organisation that directly represents individuals with lived experience.

Awards will not be made retrospectively: this means that the research for which support is requested must not have already been carried out before the award is announced. For work that involves secondary analysis of existing data, the data can already have been collected, but the analysis should not yet have taken place and it will need to be declared that funding is not already in place to support the analysis of these data. Individuals are allowed to be part of multiple applications if they wish but are only permitted to be principal investigator on one application.

4. WHAT COSTS WILL GRANTS COVER?

Proposals will need to show 100% of full Economic Cost of the proposed research. In line with UKRI funding policies, funding will be provided to meet 80% of the full economic costs on proposals submitted. So if an application is made for £20,000, we will be able to fund £16,000 and your institution will cover the remaining 20% (just like in an application to ESRC or any other research council). Therefore your institution should treat this application in the same way it treats all UKRI (research council) applications. The UKRI has produced the following factsheet explaining their funding structure: <https://www.ukri.org/files/legacy/documents/fecfaq-pdf/>

With a view to building capacity in this area, we would particularly welcome applications which focus expenditure on the time of staff who do not have permanent university contracts. This can include hourly time or short-term contracts for postgraduate students and/or contract extensions for postdocs on fixed-term contracts. We will permit up to 10% of the overall budget to be spent on the time of directly allocated staff (i.e. staff with permanent contracts). However, if directly allocated staff are costed, there will need to be a clear rationale for why this expense is required (e.g. buy-out of teaching duties). Investigators who are on permanent contracts can still be listed as investigators even if they are not formally costed. The time of staff in non-HEI organisations is not subject to the same 10% limit as for HEI staff, but should nonetheless be carefully justified when it pertains to the time of staff already employed on permanent contracts.

Funding may be sought to cover costs of running the research project, including but not limited to:

- The cost of directly incurred staff (including providing or extending contracts for postdoctoral staff)
- The cost of directly allocated staff (but only up to 10% of the overall project cost and with justification)
- The cost of the time of staff within partner organisations (e.g. community organisations)
- Costs of any required intervention (e.g. the delivery of an activity for individuals with mental illness)
- Consumables (e.g. travel, licence costs for validated scales)
- Public engagement or dissemination plans (e.g. round tables, printing of reports)
- Conference costs (to cover travel, accommodation and registration up to a maximum of £2,000).

The following items are not eligible for funding for this sandpit call:

- Computer hardware or software including laptops, electronic notebooks, digital cameras, statistical programmes etc
- Books and other permanent resources
- Publication costs (e.g. open access costs)

5. HOW TO APPLY

All applications must be prepared as a single document, on the MARCH Sandpit application form <https://www.marchnetwork.org/funding> and emailed to v.james@ucl.ac.uk before the closing submission date. Emails

should carry the subject line: Funding Proposal [applicant surname]. Budgets should be calculated on the MARCH budget excel form (also available at the link above) and then be copied and pasted into the application form.

6. ASSESSMENT

Proposals submitted to this call will initially be reviewed by a peer review panel made up of researchers with expertise in social, cultural and community engagement and mental health. Those applications that score the highest will be considered in a peer review meeting consisting of members of the MARCH Investigator team, some representatives from the peer review panel, individuals representing the views of community and third sector organisations, and individuals with lived experience of mental illness. Funding decisions will be communicated to applicants by the end of July 2020. All projects must start by the end of September 2020.

The reviewers and panel members will assess proposals against the following criteria:

For the £50,000 grants

- Fit to target research question:
 - To what extent does the proposal answer one of the two questions proposed?
 - How innovative and thorough is the approach proposed to answer the question?
 - Is the project appropriately cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral in its approach and partnerships?
- Research impact:
 - To what extent does the proposed project have the potential to produce generalisable data or outputs that have a relevance beyond a single project or an immediate context?
 - Will the project support the future work of other researchers or stakeholders?
 - How strong are the plans for engagement and dissemination?
- Feasibility:
 - Is the project realistic, given the time constraints and budget?
 - Are the funds requested essential and justified by the size, scale, and likely outcomes of the research?
 - Do the applicants have appropriate research experience and the necessary balance of disciplinary expertise?

For the £20,000 grants

- Innovation:
 - To what extent is the proposal relevant to the core focus of the MARCH Network?
 - Does it address one of the two research questions in an innovative way?
 - Is the project appropriately cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral in its approach and partnerships?
- Research potential:
 - Will the research provide data or outputs that support the development of understanding on social, cultural and community assets and mental health?
 - To what extent does the project support the development of early career researchers?
 - Does the project have the potential to support a feasible large grant application to another funder in the future?
- Feasibility:
 - Is the project realistic, given the time constraints and budget?
 - Are the funds requested essential and justified by the size, scale, and likely outcomes of the research?
 - Do the applicants have appropriate research experience and the necessary balance of disciplinary expertise?

7. ADDITIONAL AWARD CONDITIONS

Successful applicants will be expected to:

- Provide a monthly update to the MARCH Network on their progress relative to project milestones
- Acknowledge the MARCH Network and UKRI as the funder in any publications and project outputs
- Produce a publicly-accessible journal article or report
- Present a project evaluation report within 1 month of the completion of the project

- Complete a Research Fish report of project outputs for submitting to UKRI at period intervals as requested by the MARCH Network team

In addition, all research involving human participants must comply with all relevant legislation and we require that all relevant ethics committee approvals, risk assessments, and regulatory requirements (including the General Data Protection Regulation; GDPR) are met for all grants funded. Applications for ethics approval should be submitted as soon as possible after notification of funding, to avoid delays in starting the project and the timeline for ethical approvals should be clearly detailed in the application form along with details of mitigation plans for any potential delays that could occur. For some project proposals ethics approval may already have been granted.

8. TIMETABLE

- Call for proposals opens – February 2020
- Call closes – 5pm on Sunday 24 May 2020
- Panel shortlisting – w/c 26 May - 22 June 2020
- Applicant outcomes communicated and contracts issued – from w/c 13 July 2020
- Projects must start by – 30th September 2020
- Projects must be completed by –13 July 2021
- Report completed by – 13 August 2021.

9. CONTACT

If you have any queries regarding this call, please email v.james@ucl.ac.uk

We will include all anonymised queries and answers within an FAQ document. This FAQ document will be updated every few days and added to the MARCH website for applicants to view. Please check the FAQ document prior to submitting a query to ensure your query has not already been answered.