



# CALL FOR RESEARCH PROPOSALS 2024

## Launch Document

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## FUNDING PRIORITIES 2024

SMA Europe is pleased to announce its 12th international Call for SMA Research Projects.

This new Call for SMA research projects is open to research proposals that address the needs of people who live with SMA and demonstrate a clear pathway to impacting those in the short or longer term. In particular, priority will be given to projects concentrating on the following areas:

1. Reviving the motor unit in patients with SMA with a specific interest for the role of NMJ (dys)function (including skeletal muscle and development/developmental vulnerability of motor neurons in the spinal cord/brain stem).
2. Biomarkers within and beyond the neuromuscular system.
3. How metabolism is affected in SMA and how this might influence peripheral organs.

SMA Europe strives for earlier diagnosis, effective treatments and optimal care for people who live with SMA. We do this by elevating the patient's voice, by empowering member organisations to advocate and campaign at a national level and through harnessing that network to advance research and influence stakeholders at European level.

## AWARDS

Two types of research grants will be awarded:

1. Operating Grants
2. Postdoctoral Fellowships

It is anticipated that notification of Awards will be made in November 2024 with funding to start as soon as possible thereafter, subject to contracts being fully executed between the relevant parties. It is recognised that timelines will be affected by project specifics.

Grant applications should be made in Euros. Payments to subsidiary institutions involved in the research must be made by the institution to which the award is given. SMA Europe cannot enter into contracts and agreements with partners involved in a project.

## Eligibility

To be eligible as principal investigator to apply for an operating grant, an individual should have the skills, knowledge and resources to carry out the proposed project and coordinate a multi-team project. A principal investigator must:

1. be a professional or faculty member at an appropriate educational, medical or research institution or SME (small or medium enterprise) biotech located within Europe and be qualified to conduct and supervise a programme of original research
2. have access to institutional resources necessary to conduct the proposed research project
3. hold a Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Science or equivalent degree
4. have a track record of collaboration with others

To be eligible to apply for a postdoctoral fellowship, an applicant must:

1. be a member of a research team in the laboratory of a senior investigator under whose guidance the applicant will conduct the research project, within Europe.
2. hold a Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Science or equivalent degree and demonstrate an intended commitment to SMA research in the long term.

## Project duration & Budget

Awards are for up to two years. Under exceptional circumstances they can be for longer periods.

Funding for a second year will be strictly dependent on receiving a detailed and satisfactory annual report for consideration by members of SMA Europe's Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), latest by month 13 from the effective date.

Standard operating grants will not usually exceed €150,000. Budgets covering only salaries will not be considered and Fellowship salaries (PhD and post-doctoral fellowships) cannot be included.

The grant for a Postdoctoral Fellowship must be within European norms and will not exceed 150,000 Euros.

## APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Applications are made in two formats:

1. A scientific application is made through a portal kindly provided by AFM-Téléthon.
2. A lay (plain English) application - ***please complete the form in the appendix of this document and send back to Vanessa Christie-Brown, Research Manager, at [vanessa.christie-brown@sma-europe.eu](mailto:vanessa.christie-brown@sma-europe.eu)***

## Timeline

- The online application portal will be accessible from **14.03.2024** on <https://sis.afm-telethon.fr/>
- The application deadline is **17.00 CET on 13.05.2024**
- External reviews: June to August
- Internal reviews: September to October
- Notifications: November/ December 2024

## Evaluation process

The Calls for Projects is managed by our Research Programme Manager, together with AFM-Téléthon's International Affairs Manager and AFM-Téléthon's Scientific Direction.

The evaluation process will consist of external and internal scientific peer-reviews, as well as a lay review performed by SMA Europe's Patient Panel.

### Scientific evaluation

AFM-Téléthon's Scientific Direction will select experts in the field to carry out the external reviews of applications submitted to SMA-Europe's 12th Call. Only SMA Europe's Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) members, the Research Programme Manager, AFM-Téléthon's International Affairs Manager and his staff will have access to the applications and their external and internal evaluations.

A dedicated meeting of SMA Europe's SAB members will take place in October 2024. The final evaluation of applications and the selection of projects to be recommended for funding will only be made by the Scientific Advisory Board of SMA-Europe.

Each project will be peer-reviewed according to the following criteria:

**1. Relevance and significance:** how is this research relevant to a better understanding of SMA, its causes, treatment and/or prevention? Does this study address an important problem or a bottleneck? Is there a sufficient body of high-quality fundamental, pre-clinical or clinical

research that supports the rationale for the proposed study? What is the potential impact of the proposed project on health care and quality of life?

**2. Project quality/ scientific rigour:** are the rationale and experimental design adapted to the study objectives?

**3. Innovation:** are the aims of the study original? Does the proposed study design represent advancement in the field? Does the project advance international cooperation in the field?

**4. Feasibility:** are the conceptual framework, design, methods and analyses adequately developed, well integrated and appropriate to the aims of the project? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternative strategies? Is the principal investigator well suited to carry out the proposed study? Is the scientific environment adequate? Is there evidence of institutional support? Have appropriate agreements with collaborators been established?

**5. Reasonableness of the budget:** is the budget reasonable in relation to the proposed research?

Whilst there are many inherent problems with the peer review process, we believe that this process constitutes the fairest and most consistent way to assess grant applications. We shall endeavour to ensure that the process is as open and transparent as possible and that we maintain the best possible communications with all our applicants.

The evaluations of reviewers are an important element in the decision-making process, but these are not the sole criteria for deciding the success or failure of an application. In practice, only projects which attract the best scores are likely to be successful. We expect to provide feedback to both successful and unsuccessful applicants in the form of reviewers' comments plus any relevant points arising from the SAB meeting discussions, but this may not always be practical.

## Lay evaluation

Working alongside its expert scientific advisory board, the Patient Panel plays an important role in allocating research grants, ensuring patients' priorities and needs are addressed.

Each project will be reviewed according to how clearly a pathway to addressing patient need and impact is demonstrated. A representative of the Patient Panel will feed their recommendations to the SAB.

## Decisions and notifications

Final funding decisions are made by the funding members of SMA Europe, after recommendations by its SAB and Patient Panel. Official notifications are sent by e-mail to the applicant only, within approximately 1 months after the formal decision.

Please note that the selection process is very competitive. As a result, some projects might not be funded despite positive reviews. The comments and reviews are available as soon as possible after the official notification is sent. Applicants who obtain financial support are required to

state their acceptance or refusal of the award, within one month following the reception of the official e-mail notification.

### **Contracting and grant administration**

SMA Europe will hold contractual, financial and administrative responsibility for awarded projects. The contracting period must be completed within 6 months of the award. The official starting date of successful projects is the effective date on the contract. For each funding period (one year), no-cost extensions may be granted if authorised by SMA Europe's SAB.

## **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

Contact SMA Europe's Research Manager, Vanessa Christie-Brown at [vanessa.christie-brown@sma-europe.eu](mailto:vanessa.christie-brown@sma-europe.eu)

# APPENDIX

## LAY GRANT APPLICATION FORM

### GUIDANCE NOTES

All grant applicants are required to complete this form in order to provide an overview of the proposed work to SMA Europe's Patient Expert Panel. This panel will meet and discuss all applications received. Their recommendations will be presented to the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB).

The information you provide in this form will form a significant part of the awards process. As the members of the Patient Panel do not necessarily have a relevant scientific background, please:

1. do not use scientific terminology or jargon
2. refrain from including references to material that is not available to the general public
3. avoid the use of abbreviations where possible. You may find it helpful to ask a non-scientist friend or relative to read your application prior to submission to check readability
4. please visit the [research section of our website](#) to see the level of lay English we would expect you to use.

Your lay application will be screened by our Research Manager. You will be asked to rewrite the application if it is too technical. Information contained in this form will be treated as confidential. Please email the completed document in Word format to our Research Manager at [vanessa.christie-brown@sma-europe.eu](mailto:vanessa.christie-brown@sma-europe.eu). If you have any questions, please contact her.

Your lay application is structured as follows:

1. **Objectives (200-250 words):** What are the objectives of your research? Please put your objectives in context of other ongoing research and describe collaborations that will facilitate your proposed project.
2. **Outcomes (200-250 words):** What are the expected outcomes of your research? Please specify how your proposed project addresses the needs of and achieves positive impact for people living with SMA, either in the shorter or longer term.
3. **Research approach (150-200 words):** The Patient Expert Panel will not judge the scientific merit of the proposed project; however, a general understanding of the research approach is helpful. Please provide a brief overview of what you plan to do. If applicable, this overview should include information about the experimental approaches to be employed, the types of samples to be analysed and how they will be sourced, a rationale for the use of animal models and, if applicable, how human subjects will be used.
4. **Next steps (100-150 words):** After successfully completing your proposed project, what are the next steps you will take to address the needs of and achieve positive impact for people living with SMA?
5. **Budget (100-150 words):** Please fill in the budget table, justify the requested funding and declare if you have applied for funding for all or part of the proposed project elsewhere.
6. **Involving people living with SMA (100-150 words):** Are people living with SMA directly involved in your research (in designing the study, defining patient-relevant outcomes, etc.)? If so, please provide details and describe how you will feed back the results of your proposed project to those involved.
7. **Impact for participants (100-150 words):** If the proposed project involves a clinical trial, how will this study impact the participants? Please specify the number of visits required, what happens at each visit, the potential risks for participants and how these risks are mitigated.
8. **Engaging supporters (80-100 words):** Much of the funding for SMA Europe's Call for Research Proposals comes from affected families from across Europe. Please explain how

you will engage with people living either directly or indirectly with SMA in your proposed project and how you will disseminate your findings in a user-friendly way.

## APPLICATION FORM

### 1. Grant details

Full name:

Institute:

Type of Award (Operating Grant or Fellowship):

Title of Project:

Length of Project:

Total cost of project (in Euros):

### 2. Objectives (200/ 250 words)

### 3. Outcomes (200/ 250 words)

### 4. Research Approach (150/ 200 words)

### 5. Next Steps (100/ 150 words)

### 6. Budget (100/ 150 words)

Category (Running costs, personnel etc)	Budget item (e.g. animals, technician)	Description (e.g. mice, salary FTE)	Year 1	Year 2	Total (€)

Have you applied for funding for all or part of this project elsewhere? If yes, please explain:

### 7. Involving People who live with SMA (100/ 150 words)



8. Impact for participants (100/ 150 words)

9. Engaging supporters (80/ 100 words)

10. Signature

X

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First name, surname:

Title: