



Guidance for Researchers: Applying for a Research Grant from Ataxia UK

This document is aimed at researchers interested in applying for funding from Ataxia UK and contains information about grants offered by Ataxia UK and how to apply for them. Potential applicants are advised to also read Ataxia UK's Research Strategy which outlines Ataxia UK's research activities and strategic themes.

Research funded by Ataxia UK

Ataxia UK funds research of relevance to ataxia. Specifically it will only consider funding research into conditions in which ataxia is the principle symptom, and in which the ataxia is likely to be progressive. This includes conditions such as Friedreich's ataxia, the spinocerebellar ataxias and other cerebellar ataxias (including idiopathic ones).

It does not include conditions such as multiple sclerosis, ataxic cerebral palsy, or other conditions in which ataxic symptoms are present as the result of another underlying condition. Research into ataxia due to traumas such as stroke, head injury and due to toxicity (e.g. from alcohol) are also not normally considered for funding. Additionally, Ataxia UK does not fund research into ataxia telangiectasia, as there are two established UK charities that support this form of ataxia (the A-T Society and Action for A-T).

Ataxia UK's mission is to find treatments and cures for the ataxias. To achieve this, the objectives of Ataxia UK are to:

- gain a better understanding of the ataxias,
- improve diagnosis;
- develop treatments that are available to people with ataxia;
- improve physical and mental quality of life for people with ataxia.

Types of research proposal considered by Ataxia UK

Ataxia UK will consider a variety of larger proposals, including contributions towards:

- research projects;
- PhD studentships;
- research fellowships.

Ataxia UK will also consider smaller requests for funds, including:

- small grants (less than £5000);
- pilot scheme grants (less than £5000);
- contributions to ataxia meetings and conferences;
- travel awards for researchers or students presenting at conferences;
- satellite meetings at conferences.

Because Ataxia UK is a small charity:

- grants will normally last for one to three years and the total budget requested should not exceed £30,000;
- it is open to collaborative funding, and applicants are therefore encouraged to seek potential co-funding from other organisations;
- it prefers to fund a variety of relatively short projects to the point where grant-holders can realistically seek funds from elsewhere, although it may consider continuation funding.

Ataxia UK occasionally holds calls for specific projects or funding schemes. These are conducted on an ad hoc basis, are advertised by Ataxia UK, and the criteria often differs to the regular funding schemes.

As members of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) we agree with and adhere to their policy on the use of animals in research (www.amrc.org.uk/position-statement-on-the-use-of-animals-in-research). Applications involving higher species (non-human primates, cats, dogs or equines) will be referred to the NC3Rs for further expert review.

Eligibility

Proposals will be accepted from:

- academic institutions;
- private sector research companies;
- suitably qualified individuals;
- collaborative groups formed from a combination of the above.

Ataxia UK accepts applications from researchers based in any country, but the research must have relevance for people affected by ataxia in the UK. Research funded by Ataxia UK must take place in a research environment that can be monitored, and where regulatory standards are equivalent to those in the UK. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

How to apply for a grant

Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Ataxia UK to discuss their applications with the Head of Research before submitting a proposal. Application forms are available from the Ataxia UK website. Here you can access:

- preliminary application form (*projects, studentships, fellowships*);
- small grant application form (*small projects*);
- pilot scheme application form;
- conference/travel grant application form (*travel awards, conferences*).

For satellite meetings and requests for contributions towards other meetings or conferences, please email the Head of Research (research@ataxia.org.uk).

Application process

For larger grants (*projects, studentships, fellowships*), there are two stages in the selection process:

1. Preliminary application

Initially applicants should submit a preliminary application. Forms are available to download from the Ataxia UK website. Deadlines for preliminary grant applications are also available on the Ataxia UK website. Preliminary applications will be reviewed by Ataxia UK's Scientific Advisory Committee, which will decide whether an application is within Ataxia UK's remit. **Please note the limit of one preliminary application per research group as main applicant per round of grant applications.**

2. Full application

If applications pass this initial selection process applicants are invited to submit a full application (a full application form is available on Ataxia UK's website for reference only). All full research proposals for projects, studentships and fellowships will be reviewed by at least two external peer reviewers, and assessed, with the reviews, by Ataxia UK's Scientific Advisory Committee.

Smaller grants (*small projects, pilot scheme grants, travel awards, conferences and meetings*) are normally fast-tracked, with applications only going through one stage of assessment. Normally, these types of grants are not sent for external peer review but are assessed solely by Ataxia UK's Scientific Advisory Committee. Applicants submitting these types of proposals should note that the Scientific Advisory Committee will assess each application on a case-by-case basis and decide whether the fast-track scheme is suitable, or whether the application needs to be peer reviewed externally and assessed using the normal project grant application process.

Use of AI in research grant applications

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to any AI that can be used to generate new content including text, images, video, audio or code. Generative AI technologies represent a rapidly evolving field, with tools such as ChatGPT and Bard offering many potential benefits for research. These tools also pose several challenges and risks. Ataxia UK sets out below our expectations for the use of generative AI tools in funding applications and assessment.

Ataxia UK recognises that Generative AI tools bring opportunities and benefits for research, including assisting with content generation such as lay summaries of research projects, producing computer coding, and translating or modifying written content to reduce language barriers.

However, the use of Generative AI tools in the funding application process presents risks for research, in areas including rigour, transparency, originality, reliability, data protection, confidentiality, intellectual property, copyright and bias. Ataxia UK aims to protect against ethical, legal and integrity issues associated with the use of generative AI tools in order to maintain the high standards of the research that we fund.

When developing funding proposals, applicants must:

When using generative AI, applicants must do so in accordance with relevant legal and ethical standards, where these exist or as they develop. The applicant remains responsible for the content of their application

Any outputs from generative AI tools that are used in funding applications must be acknowledged. Disclosing this information will not impact the assessment process

As Generative AI tools continue to grow, we will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of our approach, and will monitor any developments.

Guidance on writing lay summaries

All our application forms include a section for a lay summary of the project. All applications will be reviewed by lay members of our Scientific Advisory Committee, so it is extremely important that these summaries are written in plain language. Lay members on this Committee are people that have ataxia, or their friends and family members, so a detailed description of ataxia often isn't necessary.

Tips for writing the lay summary:

- Clearly explain the impact of the work on people with ataxia
- Write in plain English
- Avoid jargon unless absolutely necessary and explain it if you do have to keep it in
- Ask a non-scientist to read the lay summary before you submit

Selection criteria

When selecting projects to recommend for funding, the Scientific Advisory Committee considers the scientific quality, likelihood of success and potential benefit to people with ataxia as key parameters, and takes advice from external peer reviewers. Projects need to be based on strong preliminary evidence and show a clear pathway to maximising the impact of the outputs generated, and where appropriate, for the continuation of the studies at the end of the funded project. Innovative projects involving promising new ideas are encouraged, as are projects that are close to a potential treatment. Addressing the needs identified by people with ataxia, and the gaps in the knowledge identified by healthcare professionals, are also important to Ataxia UK (see Research Strategy for details).

Ataxia UK will look favourably upon projects that:

- have the potential to involve joint collaborative funding;
- involve collaborations between research groups;
- fund younger researchers who potentially may be developing a career in ataxia research, particularly in the UK;
- include public and patient involvement activities (this is considered essential for all clinical studies involving people with ataxia as participants);
- where relevant, include statistical measures;

- involve clinical or translational research, or have a more immediate pathway to future treatments (research involving human participants within the UK are prioritised over those taking place outside of the UK);
- have strong scientific basis for implications for more than one type of ataxia.

Selection process

The Scientific Advisory Committee will provide advice to the Trustees on whether specific research proposals should be funded, as well as advising on the merits of applications involving information exchange and dissemination (e.g. travel awards). The Trustees will make the final decisions, based on the Scientific Advisory Committee's advice and the funds available.

Ataxia UK may also commission a specific researcher or research group to investigate a topic of interest. These applications will also be peer reviewed and discussed by the Scientific Advisory Committee, who will advise the Trustees.

Research monitoring and evaluation

Funded projects are appraised through the critical evaluation of annual reports and occasional site visits by Ataxia UK's research staff. As a member of the Association of Medical Research charities (AMRC), Ataxia UK also uses Researchfish; an online system for collecting information on outputs, outcomes and impact of research (see <https://researchfish.com/>).

Resubmissions policy

Ataxia UK will sometimes invite researchers to resubmit a proposal. Invited resubmissions for the same project as was originally submitted normally need to be made within six months of the Committee's decision. In exceptional circumstances uninvited resubmissions may be considered. Please note that resubmissions will not be accepted for projects that the Committee has deemed to be insufficiently focussed on ataxia or are of low scientific quality. Resubmissions will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by the Scientific Advisory Committee.

Members of Ataxia UK's Scientific Advisory Committee

Scientific members:

Dr Javier Alegre Abarrategui
Clinical Senior Lecturer in Neuropathology
Department of Brain Sciences, Imperial College London

Professor Helen Dawes
Professor of Clinical Rehabilitation
Medical School, University of Exeter

Dr Gregory Weir

Senior Research Fellow
Centre for Neuroscience, University of Glasgow

Dr Nicola Hamilton-Whitaker
Senior Lecturer
School of Neuroscience, King's College London

Dr Richard Eva
Lecturer
School of Neuroscience, King's College London

Lay members:

Yanita Oparlakova
Anna King
Dominic Jack

In attendance:

Professor Barry Hunt
Ataxia UK Trustee Scientific Advisor
Faculty of Health and Human Sciences, University of Hertfordshire

Dr Julie Greenfield
Ataxia UK Director of Research

Dr Emily Cutting
Ataxia UK Research Manager

Scarlett Parr-Reid
Ataxia UK Research Communications Officer

Members of the Committee are rotated as recommended by the Association of Medical Research Charities.

Further information

For further information on Ataxia UK's Research Strategy or any other aspects of research (such as applying for funding) please contact Ataxia UK's Director of Research (jgreenfield@ataxia.org.uk). More details can also be found on Ataxia UK's website: www.ataxia.org.uk

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