Royal College of Occupational Therapists

Research guide: developing a Specialist Section grant

Introduction
This guidance aims to help our Specialist Sections who are interested in offering a research, development or innovation grant to their members. It provides information and principles on the process of developing grants including:

1. Business plans, finance and resources
2. Scope and criteria of the grant
3. Application documents
4. Data Protection
5. Promoting the grant
6. Application review process
7. Contractual agreement
8. Liaison with the RCOT R&D Manager

Specialist Sections may offer financial support for other activities, including continuing professional development and attending conferences. While this guidance does not specifically cover these types of awards, we expect Specialist Sections to follow principles of good governance, such as ensuring a fair application process, maintaining an audit trail and defining expected outcomes in relation to any funding support provided to members.

1. Business plans, finance, and resources
The Specialist Section may offer a grant to commission or support research and development or innovation activities in a specific area of practice. This should be included within the Specialist Section's business plan and budget projections. Funding for research grants should not come from RCOT's capitation fee.

The Specialist Section National Executive Committee (NEC) needs to dedicate enough time and resources to develop and administer a grant. A typical list of activities included in a grant process can be found in Appendix 1.

To continuously improve, the Specialist Section NEC should evaluate any current grant scheme as part of its annual review. The evaluation should consider elements such as the number and quality of applications, feedback from applicants or reviewers and outcomes or impact of completed projects.

2. Scope and criteria of the grant
Consider the following questions in determining the scope of the grant and application criteria:

- What is the purpose of the grant (for example, to commission a piece of research, support a research activity related to post-graduate course, service development or innovation).
- Is there a specific topic or focus for the grant or is it applicable to the wider Specialist Section?
- What is the maximum amount of funding available?
- Are the expectations/outputs realistic for the funding that is available?
- What is the timescale for when the activity must be completed?

- What specific experience, qualifications, or competence do applicants need to have?
- What outcomes do we need to see from the activity?
- Would a collaborative partnership be appropriate? If so, who are the relevant partners? (for example, other professionals, people who access services, charitable sector).
- If it is a research grant, does it align with the RCOT Top 10 priorities for research in the UK and is it aimed at meeting the Specialist Section's research priority areas?
- What measures will be implemented to ensure that applicants comply with research governance frameworks, ethics approval and GDPR?
- Have other funding and grant options been explored that can contribute to the project?

3. Application documents

The Specialist Section NEC must create a call document and an application form for the grant. The call document should provide important details about the grant, such as the available funding, specific criteria, the application and submission process, and the deadline. You can obtain examples of grant application documents currently used by RCOT from the Research and Development Administrator.

The application form should demonstrate how the grant criteria has been met. For a research grant, a research proposal should be requested as part of the application (2-4 sides of A4 or maximum word count).

3a. Service development or innovation grants may include:

- title of project
- background/rationale (including references if appropriate)
- aims and objectives
- project plan
- ethical considerations
- benefits to people who access services and carers
- personal development and wider benefits to the service or profession
- funding requested with breakdown of intended use
- timeframe and main milestones of project
- dissemination plans – publications, conferences, presentations at local, national, or international level.

3b. Research grant applications should include:

- title of research project
- background and literature review
- research question, aims and objectives, hypothesis (as appropriate)
- research design
- patient and public involvement
- sample (source, method of sampling, and sample size)
- methods of data collection
- methods of data analysis
- ethical considerations
- funding requested with breakdown of intended use
- timeframe and main milestones of project
- benefits to people who access services, and carers
- personal development and wider benefits to the service or profession
- dissemination plans – publications, conferences, presentations at local, national, or international level
- list of references.

Applicants find section word counts helpful. Clear section headings within the application form can avoid the need for additional guidance notes to help complete the form, although 'top tips' for completion can be useful.

Consideration should be given to data protection and confidentiality as well as the administrative resource required to process the applications, obtain peer reviews etc. Applicants should be advised in advance of the feedback process and of the timeline for receiving notification of the outcome of their application.

The Specialist Section NEC should consider data protection and confidentiality, as well as how much time it will take to process the applications and obtain peer reviews. They should tell applicants in advance of the feedback process and when they can expect to hear if their application was accepted.

4. Data Protection

All Specialist Section NEC members are required to read, understand and to follow RCOT's Privacy Policy and procedures that relate to the personal data they may handle during the grant application and review process. Personal information on the application forms must be kept to a minimum and only requested if it is directly relevant to the application process.

All forms must be anonymised before distribution to peer reviewers. All unsuccessful application forms (paper and electronic copies) must be destroyed after the peer review process is complete and personal data must not be retained (see section 6).

5. Promoting the grant

There are different channels which could be used to promote the grant without incurring costs. Some examples are Specialist Section newsletters, journal, webpage, social media, the monthly R&D Bulletin, *OTnews*, Research Café and RCOT Research Connect network.

6. Application review process

The review process for assessing the grant applications should be established in advance and applicants must be aware of how the applications will be judged. Applications are normally assessed through a peer review process. Initial screening to identify applications that don't meet any essential criteria should be carried out to avoid unnecessary peer review.
Peer reviewers should have relevant expertise and experience within the topic/field and/or research methodologies. Reviewers should be reminded that the review process is confidential and that electronic copies must be deleted once the review process has been completed. Appropriate time to obtain peer reviews must be factored into the review process and a marking sheet, including feedback for applicants should be used in the review process.

Each anonymised application should be reviewed by two independent peer reviewers. Where there is a difference in opinion as to whether an application if fundable, a third independent reviewer should be sought. A final decision may be taken by a grants panel, though this could be undertaken by the Specialist Section NEC.

Criteria within the marking sheet for a grant could include:

- **Adherence to theme** – does the application reflect the theme and purpose of the grant?
- **Relevance** – how closely does the application reflect one or more of the RCOT top 10 research priorties? Does the application demonstrate a commitment to a Specialist Section research priority area?
- **Experience of applicant** – how clearly does the applicant show the skills necessary to undertake the planned activity? What support/supervision arrangements are in place?

- **Scientific excellence –** how rigorous is the proposed methodology?
- **Ethics** – does the applicant demonstrate compliance with ethical principles and good governance?
- **Strength of collaborating partnerships** (where relevant).
- **Potential impact –** to what extent will the project contribute to the knowledge/evidence base for occupational therapy and/or improve practice?
- **Involvement of people who access services –** is this included at appropriate stages within the project?
- **Feasibility** – is the proposed project achievable within the timeframe and resources available?
- **Value for money** – will the likely benefits of the project justify the investment of funding?

The process for giving feedback to applicants once the grant decision has been made must be decided on. If resources are limited, unsuccessful applicants may receive general rather than individual feedback.

Unsuccessful application forms should be retained until the outcome of the funding round has been made public, and for a further period thereafter (two/three months) in case decisions are challenged and then destroyed. Successful applications should be retained until the project is complete and all grant requirements fulfilled.

7. Contractual agreement

This is an important part of the process before funds can be released and sufficient time should be allowed for this process.

A letter of agreement may be sufficient for a personal grant, for example to support an individual member's masters or doctoral fees, a full contract may be required in other circumstances. The RCOT Research and Development Administrator can provide examples if required. RCOT Head of Finance can provide advice if needed.

A signed letter of agreement or contract setting out the terms and conditions of the grant must be in place prior to the release of any funding from the Specialist Section. This protects the interests of the Specialist Section and ensures that the grant recipient agrees to deliver the required outputs.

Key sections to include in the letter of agreement/contract are:

- **Parties to the contract** – the funder will always be 'RCOT Ltd' as the only legal identity, or 'RCOT Ltd on behalf of RCOT SS [name]'; the other party might be the individual grant recipient (in the case of a personal grant), or the organisation hosting the activity, for example, a Higher Education Institution or NHS Trust.
- **Research governance compliance –** including reference to the relevant legislative framework.
- **Agreed outputs and dissemination** – such as a final project report, conference abstract, journal submission.
- **Project monitoring** – where the proposed activity takes six months or more a progress reports at key milestones or progress reports are recommended to make sure timescales are being met. You may wish to nominate a member of the NEC to act as a monitoring officer or you could appoint a steering group depending on the size of the project.
- **Schedule for payment of grant instalments –** this should set out the month/year on which grant instalments will be paid and specify any related conditions for example, no funding will be released until evidence of ethics approval(s) has been received if required. Typically, instalments would be paid at commencement of the project, the midway point, and following sign-off of the project. It is prudent to retain some grant money until after the project has been completed and signed off to ensure delivery of contractual outputs. This section should also

indicate how the grant will be paid for example, on receipt of invoice from the host institution or via BACS payment direct to the grant recipient.

- **Retention and storage of data** – following principles of good governance, any personal information should not be retained for any longer than is needed. All information should be securely deleted when it is no longer required.
- **Signatories** – the Royal College of Occupational Therapists signatory is the Chief Executive (CEO).

Both parties should agree the contract wording before the final, signature ready contract/letter of agreement is produced. The final contract/letter of agreement should be signed by both parties, each party should keep a copy signed by both parties. The RCOT Head of Finance will need to approve the contract wording before the contract/letter of agreement goes to the RCOT CEO for signing and will also require a letter from the Specialist Section Chair confirming that they agree with the contract terms and that the funding is available. It is advisable to involve the RCOT Head of Finance in the contracting process at an early stage. Once the contract has been signed by both parties, a copy should be sent to RCOT CEO's office and to the Head of Communities and Connections.

The contract/letter of agreement and project documents – including the original project proposal, correspondence between contracting parties, invoices and reports should be retained for six years following the end of the contract term/project completion/payment of the final grant instalment, whichever is the latest.

8. Liaison with RCOT Research & Development Manager

Please contact the RCOT Research and Development Manager at an early stage in the development of a new Specialist Section grant for advice.

The Specialist Section should also notify the Research and Development Manager of any forthcoming grants so that the R&D team are aware of research-related funding for members and can help with promotion of the grant to members via the RCOT R&D Bulletin and Funding Calendar on our website. Information should be provided about the promotional details including advertising, grant/award amount(s) criteria, closing dates.

Once the call has closed, please notify the R&D Manager about the response (number of applications) and outcome for example, who has been successful and nature of funded project/research for monitoring purposes.

Appendix 1

Grant administrative process

1. Preparation:

a. Determine funding available, scope of grant, required outputs.
b. Agree timeline.
c. Inform RCOT R&D Manager about the grant opportunity.
d. Prepare grant documents [examples from RCOT R&D Administrator]
    i. Call for proposals
    ii. Application form
e. Draft advert for publication in newsletter/*OTnews*/website/social media.
f. Advertise grant/make application documents available.
g. Agree decision-making process/who will be involved/how will decision making be executed and confirm any necessary meeting dates.

h. Devise marking sheet for peer reviewers.
i. Identify potential peer reviewers.
j. Following the application deadline: Screen applications to ensure any stated application criteria have been met –for example are they a member of the Specialist Section.
k. Agree appropriate peer reviewers and seek their agreement to undertake a review. Remember that you will need to check for potential conflict of interest before allocating reviews.
l. Anonymise and send applications to peer reviewers with deadline for response [allow three weeks]. Remind re confidentiality of process and need to delete electronic copies and dispose of any hard copies of applications as confidential waste.
m. Collate applications and associated peer reviews and send to the grant panel/NEC for final decision.
n. Inform applicants of the outcome including feedback (if agreed).
o. Publicise the outcome.

2. Contracting and monitoring:

a. Agree timelines and deliverables for release of funds
b. Draft contract/letter of agreement [examples from RCOT R&D Administrator] – liaise with RCOT Head of Finance re contract wording if required
c. Provide copy of draft contract/letter of agreement to grant recipient/host organisation [for example HEI/Trust] for comment.
d. Once contract wording agreed, arrange for two copies of the final contract to be signed by both parties and for each party to retain a signed copy.
e. Create project file for key documents – including application form, signed contract, invoices, progress reports etc.
f. Obtain BACS details from grant holder for payment of funds.
g. Monitor projects in progress – review key milestones against progress reports.
h. Process invoice payments – check to ensure any conditions for deliverables and payment have been met.
i. Publicise project outputs.