

2021 Research Grant Call

Key date: applications received by 17:00 GMT on Friday 5 March 2021

The Borne Foundation (“Borne”) is announcing a research funding call to identify a research group or consortium of scientists and clinicians capable of delivering a comprehensive and effective feasibility study for Borne’s Uterine Mapping Project (“BUMP”).

Borne is initially offering funding of **up to £500,000** to support the feasibility study over the next 18 months before launching, in 2022, a multi-million pound grant call for BUMP that will also be competitively awarded.

Further details follow below on BUMP, the feasibility study that is the subject of this grant call, and our evaluation criteria for the award.

Borne’s Mission

Borne is a medical research charity working to prevent premature birth. Our mission is to save lives, prevent disability and create lifelong health for mothers and babies.

We aim to:

- Find answers by supporting ground-breaking scientific research.
- Translate this research into improvements in clinical practice.
- Encourage the next generation of scientists and clinicians to embrace their research interests in our area of focus.

Background to this research grant call

In early 2020, Borne consulted with a global group of preterm birth experts on the reasons why there had been very little progress in understanding and treating pre-term birth in the last 20 years and how Borne might direct its efforts to accelerate progress.

As preterm birth is a complex, multi-factorial problem, we felt it important to focus our interest on advancing our understanding of the inevitable maturation event at the end of pregnancy with a view to identifying new, effective interventions to prevent the premature initiation of labour.

The experts agreed that the answers to the questions are likely to lie at the seams between different areas of scientific focus and specialisation. They believe that the systematic study of the biological interactions across different cells and tissues in the human uterus will enable scientists to spark breakthroughs in the understanding needed to identify new targets, therapies and interventions.

In particular, the experts highlighted the value and importance of creating an open source scientific ‘map’ that advances the global community’s understanding of human parturition and facilitates the identification of novel interventions.

Borne’s Uterine Mapping Project (BUMP)

The ultimate goal of Borne is to support global cross-disciplinary collaboration by funding the creation of such a 'map' at scale and the establishment of a unique dataset – BUMP.

This will involve:

- the recruitment of a diverse cohort of pregnant women who consent to the contribution of a variety of tissues at the fetal/maternal interface.
- the processing of those profiles in accordance with protocols and techniques that enable comprehensive molecular analyses and use cutting edge techniques.
- the integrative analysis of these multi-modal datasets in readiness for analysis by the scientists that participate in BUMP.
- the validation of theories and hypotheses by collaborating scientists using this unique dataset to: 1) inform the biological interactions of the uteroplacental environment; and 2) develop new interventions to prevent preterm labour.

Given the scale of that ultimate project, Borne is taking a stepwise approach to delivering BUMP.

The BUMP feasibility study

Before Borne supports a multi-million pound effort to launch BUMP, the charity feels that it is important to be sure that tissue and cells generously donated by patients can be collected and processed reliably so that cells and tissues stored with consent for future use may be analysed at later dates.

As the first stage of realizing the vision of BUMP, Borne is offering funding of up to £500,000 over 18 months to a research group from one or several research organisations who wish to undertake an initial feasibility study for BUMP.

Key deliverables of the feasibility project will be:

- the development of robust, validated protocols detailing sample collection, processing and storage to enable later analysis
- the definition of both the analyses which will be carried out on the cells and samples and the bioinformatic analyses of the data that will follow
- a forward look at how data generated from this study would inform BUMP itself

In addition to sharing their perspectives on these key deliverables, Borne would encourage applicants to demonstrate:

- their access to maternal and fetal tissue samples
- their relevant experience in setting up and curating clinical and biobank datasets
- the clinical, scientific and bioinformatic credentials and cross-disciplinary expertise of the groups that come together to apply

The application should contain milestones, full costing and justification of costs. We would also actively encourage collaboration from individuals and teams with different skillsets relevant to the call.

The timeline

The timeline for this grant call is as follows:

- Grant call announced – 4 January 2021
- Deadline for applications – 5 March 2021 at 17:00 GMT
- Decision expected – April 2021 post peer review and a recommendation by Borne's Scientific Advisory Board to The Borne Foundation's Trustees.

The Borne Foundation is a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities and funding is awarded in open competition through a process of external, expert peer review.

BORNE'S RESEARCH AWARD CONDITIONS

1. Applicants should first satisfy themselves that their proposed research falls within the remit of the Charity.
2. The Institution shall ensure that, before a Project commences and during the full term of the Award, all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the Project are met, and all the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained, including any research involving the use of animals. The Institution shall ensure that it has in place formal written procedures for managing the process for obtaining any necessary or appropriate ethical approval for a Project and must accept full responsibility for ensuring such ethical approval is in place at all relevant times during the Project. The Institution will ensure all Award-holders and the Programme Team will keep complete and accurate records of all work carried out in connection with the Programme.
3. Costs covered by the Award application may include research worker salaries and associated research expenses such as consumables. The Institution can include the purchase of special equipment, if justified, but not standard basic equipment. The application should not include any indirect costs such as administrative or other overheads imposed by the university or other institution and should not include percentages of salaries for those already employed in permanent/long term positions such as the Awardholder.
4. Before submitting an application, the Institution shall confirm with its finance officers that the amounts specified are accurate. The Charity is not able to consider supplementary Awards other than in very exceptional circumstances. Salary scales and increments shall be stated as at the time of application and include an additional sum to cover estimates of future nationally agreed pay awards to cover cost of living increases.
5. VAT should not be included in the application. Schedule 5, Group 16 of the Value Added Tax Act 1983 zero rates the supply of medical and scientific equipment and consumables purchased with charitable funds when they are donated to designated non-profit making institutions, provided the supply is used for medical research, diagnosis or treatment.
6. Costs of travel may be included in an application provided they form a necessary and integral part of the research proposed. The application should not include an allowance for attendance at meetings and conferences. These must be the subject of separate and individual application in writing to the Charity as the need arises and funds are limited to £500 p.a. and restricted to registration and travel costs.
7. Any Award offered will be made available only after the Award Letter has been signed by both the Institution and the Awardholder.
8. The Award-holder(s) shall supply the Charity with regular reports on the progress of each Programme as required by the Charity. These progress reports shall be provided on an annual basis. An appropriate final report will be submitted within ninety (90) days of the end date of the project. The Interim Reports will be reviewed by the Charity for adequacy of research to date and, if appropriate, details of the Programme plan for the next year. Payments may be withheld if Interim Reports are not received within sixty (60) days of request by the Charity. The final payment due under the Agreement, will be withheld pending the Final Report.
9. The Charity's commitments under this Agreement will be subject to the annual review of the Scientific Advisory Board which will confirm that the Project fulfils its scientific mission with the required standards of scientific excellence. If the Board concludes that such standards have not been met, then the Charity may terminate the Programme, projects within the Programme or the Agreement.