Request for Applications: 2027 Early Career Scholar Grant

Myotonic Dystrophy Foundation
663 Thirteenth Street, Suite 100
Oakland, CA, 94612, USA

Email:	grants@myotonic.org
Phone:	+1-415-800-7777
Contracting Officer:	Tanya Stevenson, Chief Executive Officer, MDF
Location:	United States, Canada, and eligible international sites
Date Issued:	April 6, 2026
Proposals Due:	September 4, 2026
Selection Notification:	by December 18, 2026
Period of Award:	January 1, 2027 – December 31, 2028
Anticipated Award:	$95,000 per year for 2 years; $190,000 total
Number of Awards:	To be determined based on applicant mix and available funds

Synopsis

The Myotonic Dystrophy Foundation (MDF) is accepting applications for two types of Early Career Scholar awards to support the retention of early-career researchers in the DM field.

1. **Early Career Scholar – Basic/Translational Science:** This award supports projects in basic research or translational DM research. Applicants must provide a letter from their department chair or clinical chief confirming protected time from teaching.
2. **Early Career Scholar – Clinical Research:** This award, geared toward physician-scientists, supports clinical research projects in DM. Applicants must provide a letter from their department chair or clinical chief confirming protected time from clinical duties.

Both awards are contingent on available funding.

Myotonic Dystrophy FOUNDATION

Contents

Goal

MDF seeks to retain early-career researchers who are committed to DM research by funding projects in basic, translational, or clinical research and care.

Background

Early-career researchers often face funding insecurity and job instability, which can hinder the pursuit and completion of research projects.[i] This can be especially difficult with clinical research and can lead to a lack of retention in medical research fields. Physician-scientists face particular challenges due to long clinical training, limited research opportunities, educational debt, and high competition for research funding.[ii] The MDF recognizes the importance of recruiting and retaining both basic science and clinical early-career researchers who are committed to myotonic dystrophy research.

Grant Focus Areas

Myotonic dystrophy is a chronic and multi-systemic disease that affects the lives of individuals with DM and their families every day. There are two major types of myotonic dystrophy: type 1 (DM1) and type 2 (DM2). Both are inherited autosomal dominant disorders affecting multiple organ systems. In DM1, progressive muscle wasting and weakness primarily affect the lower legs, hips, hands, shoulders, neck, and face. In DM2,

progressive muscle wasting and weakness primarily affect the proximal legs, hips, shoulders, and neck.

Symptoms may include myotonia, cataracts, cardiac conduction defects, infertility, and central nervous system involvement, which can cause fatigue, excessive daytime sleepiness, and executive function difficulties. Congenital DM, a severe infantile form of DM1, can cause hypotonia, breathing and swallowing difficulties, delayed development, and intellectual disability. Research indicates that as many as 1 in 2,100 individuals in the United States are affected by myotonic dystrophy or at risk of passing the disease to the next generation.[iii]

Opportunity for DM Research

Recognizing that the symptoms and the severity of DM vary widely among affected people and often severely impact activities of daily living, mobility, and independence, the MDF is soliciting scientific proposals for two types of Early Career Scholar awards,

1. an "Early Career Scholar- Basic/Translational Science" award and
2. an "Early Career Scholar- Clinical Research" award.

Eligible research includes projects focused on improving treatment, care, and support for DM patients and their families, as well as fundamental basic science investigations. Applicants must demonstrate a clear plan for contributing to the DM field.

Duration of the Award

The grants are awarded for two years, with second-year funding dependent on the successful completion of the first year's stated objectives. Applicants may apply once per calendar year. Once receiving an award, grant recipients are not eligible to apply for three calendar years. Applicants may only apply for one type of MDF grant at a time and may only receive one grant during the duration of their award. The Small Grants Program is an exception to this rule (please see the RFA for more information).

Payment

Awards are made to the applicant's organization on behalf of the recipient. Each award provides $190,000 over two years for salary, benefits, travel, and research support. MDF awards may not be used for institutional capital costs, overhead, or indirect costs.

Second-year funding of the award is contingent upon documentation of satisfactory progress. A progress report satisfactory to the MDF is required four weeks after the end

of each award year. The Foundation can cancel the award for non-compliance with any of the eligibility rules herein, or due to non-performance.

Applications

Eligibility Requirements

Applications are limited to those submitted by individuals at academic institutions or non-profit research organizations. For-profit organizations are not eligible. Applications from non-U.S. academic institutions or non-profit organizations are permitted, as long as they are accredited academic medical centers or research institutes.

Principal Investigator Requirements. The submitting principal investigator (PI) must:

- Be employed at an appropriate educational, medical, or other non-profit research institution and be qualified to conduct and supervise a program of original research.
- Have both administrative and financial responsibility for the grant.
- Have access to organizational resources necessary to conduct the proposed research project.
- For the Early Career Scholar- Clinical Research award, the applicant will need to include a letter of commitment from their chair or clinical chief that they will have protected time from clinical service for the study.
- For the Early Career Scholar- Basic/Translational Science award, the applicant will need to include a letter of commitment from their chair or clinical chief that they will have protected time from teaching during the study.
- All successful applicants must hold a Doctor of Medicine (MD), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Doctor of Science (ScD), or equivalent terminal research degree. Eligibility is based on the completion date of the terminal degree or residency as follows:
    - The terminal degree or completion of residency must have occurred within ten years prior to the award.
    - For individuals who have completed both residency and a PhD, eligibility is based on the date residency was completed.
    - Completion of a fellowship after residency does not change eligibility, which is still based on residency completion.
    - Exceptions to the ten-year limit may be made for periods of family or medical leave only.

Myotonic Dystrophy FOUNDATION

Study Requirements. Applicants must demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to complete the proposed research project. Proposals must focus on research directly related to myotonic dystrophy and may include basic, clinical, or applied research. Eligible research areas include, but are not limited to:

- Pathogenesis of DM
- Molecular mechanisms underlying phenotype differences in DM1, DM2, and congenital DM
- Development of diagnostics or biomarkers
- Studies of disease progression or natural history
- Identification and validation of endpoints for drug development
- Standards of care and care integration, including nursing, social work, and psychology
- Epidemiology, health economics, and patient support services
- Therapeutic development, particularly early-stage projects that could leverage additional funding

Proposals focused on DM2 research are given priority for these awards.

Submission Process and Requirements

Proposals must be submitted in 12-point font. Proposals must be submitted via the Proposal Central application system **by September 4, 2026, at 5 PM Pacific Time**. The proposal must include the following sections:

Applicant

- Professional Profile
- ORCID Number
- NIH-style applicant bio sketches (not to exceed four pages each)

Applicant Institution Information

- Applicant Institution Profile
- IRS EIN or TIN Number
- Signing Official Email
- Financial Official Email

Abstract

- *Technical Abstract of Research Plan (one-half page).* The technical abstract should provide a concise scientific summary of the proposed research. It should briefly describe the central hypothesis, specific aims, overall approach, and anticipated

significance of the project. The abstract should be written for reviewers with scientific expertise and clearly demonstrate the rigor and feasibility of the proposed work. The technical abstract will remain part of the application and is used exclusively for the evaluation of scientific merit. Applicants should ensure that it is precise, well-organized, and fully integrated with the research plan.

- *Lay Summary (one-half page).* The lay summary should describe the purpose and potential impact of the proposed research in clear, nontechnical language appropriate for a general audience. Applicants should explain why the research is important and how it may benefit people living with myotonic dystrophy. If the project is funded, the lay summary may be published and shared publicly by the MDF in newsletters, on the website, annual reports, and other communications. Applicants should ensure that the summary is clear, accurate, and appropriate for a general audience while avoiding the disclosure of confidential or proprietary information.

Budget

- *Detailed Budget.* Applicants must submit a detailed budget outlining all proposed expenses for the grant. Authorized expenses include salary and fringe benefits for the applicant or research personnel, equipment and supplies directly related to the project, and travel expenses, which are limited to a maximum of $2,500 per year. Expenses not covered by the grant include institutional overhead or indirect costs, educational fees, payments to members of governing bodies, illegal or inappropriate expenditures, and any costs not directly related to the research project.
- *Budget Description and Justification (one paragraph).* Applicants should explain the rationale for each proposed expense and describe how any uncovered salary, fringe benefits, or research costs will be addressed. Applicants should clearly indicate any funding gaps and how these will be covered, whether through other grants, departmental support, or personal resources.
- *Other Sources of Funding (one paragraph).* Applicants must describe other sources of funding that support the project or the applicant's research program. This should include current and pending awards, institutional support, or collaborations that contribute to the feasibility and success of the proposed research.

Publications

Applicants should provide a list of their current publications relevant to project and the DM field.

Myotonic Dystrophy FOUNDATION

Attachments

- *Applicant Statement (two pages).* Include the applicant's name, contact information, a listing of current funding, a description of other pending applications for research funding during the funding period, and a description of how previous experience and research interests will align with this project to address important questions related to myotonic dystrophy. Applicants must clearly explain how their prior experience and research interests position them to contribute to research on DM. The statement should describe how the proposed project fits within the applicant's broader research program and how it addresses important questions related to DM. Applicants should also describe their long-term commitment to DM, their intended trajectory in the DM field, and how this award will support their development as a independent researcher working on DM. The statement should demonstrate a clear plan for sustained engagement and funding in DM research.
- *Description of Environment (two paragraphs).* Provide a brief description of the research environment in which the project will be conducted. This should include available facilities and equipment, institutional resources that will support the project, and any leveraged or complementary funding that will contribute to the work.
- *Research Plan (total should not exceed six pages).* This must include the following information:
    1. Background and Hypothesis (one page): Describe the scientific background relevant to the proposed project. This section should summarize the current state of knowledge, highlight key gaps in understanding related to myotonic dystrophy, and explain the rationale for the proposed work. Clearly state the central hypothesis that will be tested and explain how the hypothesis is supported by existing literature or prior findings.
    2. Specific Aims of the Project (one page): Clearly state the primary objectives of the project. Each aim should describe a defined research question or objective that can be realistically completed within the proposed funding period. Applicants should briefly describe the approach that will be used to achieve each aim and explain how the aims collectively address the central hypothesis. Applicants should also very briefly describe alternative strategies.
    3. Translational Significance (one-half page): Explain the potential relevance of the proposed work to myotonic dystrophy. Applicants should describe how the findings may contribute to improved understanding of disease mechanisms, development of therapeutic strategies, identification of

biomarkers, or other outcomes that may advance research or clinical care for individuals with DM.

4. Preliminary Data (one page): Provide any preliminary data that support the feasibility of the proposed work or the validity of the central hypothesis. Preliminary data may include pilot data generated by the applicant or relevant findings from the literature. If preliminary data are limited, applicants should describe other evidence that supports the feasibility of the proposed research.
5. Methods and Data Analysis Plan (two pages): Describe the study design and methods that will be used to accomplish the proposed aims. This section should include details regarding experimental approaches, data collection procedures, and analytical methods. Applicants should describe how data will be analyzed and interpreted, including the statistical methods that will be used when applicable. Expected results and their significance should be discussed. When relevant, applicants should include estimates of statistical power and justification for sample sizes. This section should also address potential challenges that may arise during the project and describe alternative strategies that could be used if initial approaches are not successful.
6. Anticipated Collaborative Agreements, if applicable (one-half page): If the project involves collaboration with other investigators, institutions, or organizations, describe the nature of these collaborations and how they will contribute to the success of the project. Include a brief description of the roles and responsibilities of collaborators and any relevant agreements or arrangements that support the work.

References

Provide references cited in the research plan.

Letter of Reference

Include one letter of recommendation from an individual familiar with the applicant's work and career development. The letter should address the applicant's qualifications, the proposed project, a mentoring plan and support for the applicant, and the applicant's potential to develop a sustained research program related to myotonic dystrophy.

Letter of Support

Include one letter of support from the applicant's chair or clinical chief confirming protected time from teaching and/or clinical duties.

Myotonic Dystrophy FOUNDATION

Review and Selection

All applications must be received by **5:00 PM Pacific Time on Friday, September 4, 2026**. The MDF Scientific Advisory Committee will score and prioritize candidates based on the following criteria:

- **Impact on People Living with DM (approximately 25% of total score).** Reviewers will assess the potential of the proposed research to improve the quality of life for individuals with myotonic dystrophy. This includes considering how the project addresses urgent research gaps, clinical needs, or care delivery challenges. Applicants should clearly articulate the real-world relevance of their work in the "Lay Summary" and "Technical Summary" sections, including how the research might directly or indirectly improve patient outcomes, inform clinical practice, or advance understanding of disease mechanisms. Proposals that make a strong, well-supported case for meaningful impact will score higher in this category.
- **Commitment and Career Trajectory of the Early-Career Researcher (approximately 50% of total score).** Reviewers will evaluate the applicant's dedication to a career in DM research, including previous research experience, publications, presentations, and prior projects related to DM or related fields. They will also consider evidence of engagement in the DM field, such as participation in collaborations, networks, or professional development activities. Critically, applicants must present a clear, actionable plan for continuing independent research in DM beyond the scope of this award. This plan should describe how the project will support the applicant's development as an independent investigator and how it fits into a long-term trajectory to contribute meaningfully to DM research. Include how the project might be foundational toward independent and sustainable funding by elaborating on follow-up funding mechanisms possible through this award. Letters of support will also be considered for insight into the applicant's potential, mentorship, and ability to advance the field. A strong application will clearly demonstrate both the applicant's past accomplishments and a well-thought-out plan for future engagement, making it evident that the researcher will continue to contribute meaningfully to DM research beyond the scope of this award.
- **Feasibility and Scientific Quality (approximately 25% of total score).** Reviewers will assess the scientific rigor, clarity, and feasibility of the proposed research. This includes evaluation of the study design, methods, analytical approach, expected outcomes, and the applicant's ability to complete the project within the proposed timeframe. Applicants may suggest external experts in their field for

consideration in the review process. These suggestions may inform the selection of reviewers but will not guarantee assignment. Proposals deemed infeasible or of low overall scientific quality will receive a low-priority funding score regardless of the proposal's scores on the other dimensions.

Applicants are welcome to consult with the MDF Chief Scientific Officer, Dr. Andy Rohrwasser at Andy.Rohrwasser@myotonic.org for refinement of their proposals before submission. Technical issues should be directed to the MDF Director of Evaluation and Research Programs, Dr. Nadine Ann Skinner at nadine.skinner@myotonic.org.

After initial screening by MDF staff members, the Scientific Advisory Committee and selected experts will review applications and recommend final candidates to the MDF Board of Directors. The MDF Board of Directors will consider the Scientific Advisory Committee recommendations and select final grant awards. Awards are made at the sole discretion of the MDF Board of Directors and are contingent upon the availability of funds. Availability of funds does not signify a commitment to award any grants. If no applicant is deemed of sufficient scientific merit, expertise, and/or skill, the MDF may choose not to award a grant during this funding cycle.

Reporting and Publications

Progress Reports

All grant recipients are required to submit narrative progress reports to the MDF on a regular schedule throughout the two-year grant period. Narrative reports must include updates on research progress, accomplishments, and any challenges encountered.

Recipients must submit a mid-year narrative progress report six months after the start of the grant. At the end of the first year, a year-one narrative progress report must be submitted along with the year-one expense report. A second mid-year progress report is due six months into the second year. Upon completion of the project at the end of the second year, a final narrative report must be submitted no later than one month after the conclusion of the grant. The final report must include an abstract written in lay language for general audiences.

Expense Reports

Each grant recipient must submit expense reports to the MDF during the course of the two-year grant:

- An interim expense report (including the original proposed budget and final expenses on the grant) submitted to the MDF no later than one month after completion of research at the end of the first year.
- A final expense report (including the original proposed budget and final expenses on the grant) submitted to the MDF no later than one month after completion of research at the end of the second year and should be submitted along with a check for any unexpended funds on the grant.

The grant recipient may reallocate up to 10% of the total grant award budget between line items without prior approval.

A request for a "no-cost extension", if required, must be submitted in writing at least two weeks before the end of the grant year for which the extension is requested and may be granted for no more than six months.

Publications and Conferences

Early Career Scholar award recipients are encouraged to submit at least one scientific manuscript for peer-reviewed publication within six months of the conclusion of the research, reporting the research findings. All publications, exhibits, and press releases directly resulting from MDF funding shall carry a credit line to the MDF.

Grant recipients must notify MDF if a press release is being prepared or if they are contacted by a journalist regarding the project. Recipients should encourage university press offices or outside journalists to contact MDF to coordinate publicity. Press releases related to MDF-funded research should be emailed to grants@myotonic.org.

MDF encourages an open-access policy that enables the unrestricted access and reuse of all peer-reviewed published research funded, in whole or in part, by the MDF. MDF shall pay reasonable fees required by a publisher or repository to effect immediate, open access to the accepted article. This includes article processing charges and other publisher fees. While not needed to fulfill the open-access policy requirements, grantees are encouraged to deposit funded research consisting of their submitted manuscript, and its subsequent versions, on a preprint server.

Early Career Scholar recipients must attend virtually or in-person at all MDF International Conferences and are eligible for additional travel support from MDF. Early Career Scholar recipients are encouraged to attend and present at the biennial IDMC conference.

Myotonic Dystrophy FOUNDATION

The title of each study funded by MDF, together with the lay language abstract of the research, the names of the grant recipient, and the institution, will be published on the MDF website, in MDF newsletters, in annual reports and wherever else MDF deems appropriate. The grant recipient will always be clearly acknowledged. The lay summary description should not contain information the grant recipient does not wish to disclose to the general public.

Timeline

Date Issued:	April 6, 2026
Proposals Due:	September 4, 2026
Selection Notification:	by December 18, 2026
Period of Award:	January 1, 2027 – December 31, 2028

---

[i] Janus Laust Thomsen, Dorthe Jarbøl, Jens Søndergaard. Excessive workload, uncertain career opportunities and lack of funding are important barriers to recruiting and retaining primary care medical researchers: a qualitative interview study. *Family Practice*. 2006;23(5):545-549. doi:10.1093/fampra/cml034

[ii] Hall AK, Mills SL, Lund PK. Clinician–Investigator Training and the Need to Pilot New Approaches to Recruiting and Retaining This Workforce: *Academic Medicine*. 2017;92(10):1382-1389. doi:10.1097/ACM.0000000000001859

[iii] Johnson NE, Butterfield RJ, Mayne K, et al. Population Based Prevalence of Myotonic Dystrophy Type 1 Using Genetic Analysis of State-wide Blood Screening Program. *Neurology*. Published online January 20, 2021:10.1212/WNL.0000000000011425. doi:10.1212/WNL.0000000000011425