



## OVERVIEW

The **National Cardiovascular Research Network (NCRN)** is an interdisciplinary community connecting academics, clinicians, health professionals, industry, and charities to accelerate high-quality cardiovascular research. Our mission is to strengthen cardiovascular research across Wales by building partnerships and driving vital research to advance prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of heart and circulatory conditions. At the heart of the NCRN is inclusive engagement, embedding lived experiences into innovative research, and knowledge-sharing initiatives.

The **Secure Data Access Catalytic Fund (SDACF)** is a small grant funding scheme that enables researchers to access to secure, linked cardiovascular datasets for feasibility work and pilot analyses. The scheme is designed to help researchers overcome initial data-access barriers and accelerate the generation of preliminary findings that can strengthen future applications for larger funding awards, such as project, programme or fellowship grants. Projects must align with one or more of NCRN's [strategic themes](#):

Tackling Arrhythmias and Myocardial Disease

Vascular Ageing and Clinical Outcome

Cardiovascular Data and Advanced Analytics

The SDACF supports short-term, preliminary studies that require secure data access. This can include population and cohort derived data that may be accessed via Trusted Research Environments like SAIL, UK Biobank, Health Data Research UK, BHF Data Science Centre or equivalent, such as:

- Imaging data
- Biomarker data
- Genetic data
- Healthcare records
- Questionnaire data
- Physical measurements
- Demographic and lifestyle data
- Environmental data

The SDACF may support the addition of supplementary data or variables to enhance existing datasets.

This fund is designed solely to facilitate secure data access for priming novel and important research ideas, or for **enhancing or broadening existing data access specifically to generate feasibility evidence for larger funding applications**. It is not intended to supplement ongoing project work without a clear pathway toward a future grant application. Please note that when NCRN analyst support is required, it is expected to be minimal and MUST be discussed with the NCRN team prior to submitting an application.

## ELIGIBILITY

- Applications are welcomed from researchers employed at Higher Education Institutions (HEI) or research active staff within NHS or Social Care organisations in Wales.
- Open to research-active applicants at any career stage, with early-career researchers strongly encouraged.

- Applicants are encouraged to collaborate with at least one NHS, academic, or public partner, unless strong justification for not doing so is provided.
- Applicants must be a member of the NCRN – follow [this link](#) to register.
- While matched funding is not essential, applicants may draw upon additional institutional resources where available (e.g. through internal institutional funding schemes or other complementary opportunities).

### Expectations

Successful applicants are expected to spend all funds within the award duration and submit a competitive application to a major funding organisation within 12 months of completing the preliminary activities. This plan should be clearly detailed in the application.

For queries about eligibility or suitability, please contact [admin@NCRN.uk](mailto:admin@NCRN.uk)

## WHAT WILL THIS FUND PAY FOR?

Eligible Costs	This fund <u>cannot</u> be used to pay for
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Data access fees and associated costs for accessing Trusted Research Environments (TREs) or biobanks (e.g., SAIL Databank, UK Biobank)</li> <li>✓ Staff time for activities enabling preliminary analyses or feasibility work using secure data</li> <li>✓ NCRN analyst support time (if required, must be discussed with the NCRN team prior to submission).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Investigator Staff salaries</li> <li>✗ Travel &amp; Subsistence</li> <li>✗ Consumables &amp; materials</li> <li>✗ Equipment</li> <li>✗ Consultancy costs</li> <li>✗ Patient and public engagement costs</li> <li>✗ Overheads, estate and indirect costs (FEC)</li> <li>✗ Tuition fees or training costs</li> <li>✗ Publication costs</li> </ul>

Please note that if your preliminary study requires support for activities beyond data access, we advise you to consider applying to other funding schemes alongside your SDACF application.

**Award Amount:** A total of £15,000 is available for this call, and we anticipate supporting 2-3 projects. All application costs should be fully justified to ensure the best value for money.

**Project Duration:** Up to 12 months

## ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Applications will be reviewed by the NCRN's Grants Funding Panel, which includes members of the NCRN Leadership Team, Universities, and NHS partners, and people with lived experience, including patients and members of the public. Applications will be assessed against the criteria below:

- ✓ **Relevance & Fit**
  - Does the project clearly support the aims of the NCRN and the SDACF initiative?
  - Is the proposed research novel & important?
  - Does the proposal clearly articulate research for patient and public benefit?
- ✓ **Feasibility**
  - Is the plan realistic within the timeframe and budget?

- Has the applicant demonstrated that TRE access is already underway or provided evidence that expected turnaround times are achievable within the project duration?
- Where TRE approval is not yet in place (e.g., SAIL), has the applicant carried out appropriate scoping, outlined a realistic plan, and confirmed feasibility with the relevant TRE?
- ✓ **Potential for Impact**
  - Will the activity significantly strengthen a future funding application in cardiovascular research?
  - Are the outputs clearly defined?
  - Are the plans for securing future funding realistic and well thought-out?
- ✓ **Collaborative Potential**
  - Has the applicant engaged with the NCRN to discuss the application?
  - Applications that involve **cross-sector partnerships** (e.g., universities, NHS, charities, industry) are strongly encouraged.
- ✓ **Value for money**
  - Are the costs fully justified and clearly linked to the activities and outcomes described?

## HOW CAN I APPLY?

Please submit your signed application to the NCRN Operations team via email: [admin@ncrn.uk](mailto:admin@ncrn.uk)

Late applications or those exceeding the stated word counts will not be considered.

For application support, contact: [admin@ncrn.uk](mailto:admin@ncrn.uk)