International fellowships ME/CFS

This document is a translation of the Dutch version of this document. The following is to be considered an extra service for non-Dutch speaking applicants. In case of any differences or other inconsistencies between the Dutch text and the English translation, the Dutch grant call is legally binding and prevails.

Date: 17 December 2026
Deadline: **2 March 2027, 14.00 CET**
Place: The Hague

PLEASE NOTE!
- This grant call only includes a detailed grant application phase; there is no separate project idea phase.
- The number of characters you can use in the application form is limited. Spaces also count as characters. Please take this into account when writing your grant application.

Contents

1. Summary 1
2. Aim of the grant call 2
3. Conditions and requirements 2
3.1. Conditions 2
3.1.1. Who can apply? 2
3.1.2. State aid 4
3.1.3. Collaboration with third parties 4
3.1.4. What can be applied for? 5
3.1.5. Practical requirements 6
3.2. Requirements 7
4. Assessment and prioritisation 8
4.1. Assessment procedure 8
4.2. Relevance criteria 9
4.3. Quality criteria 10
4.4. Prioritisation 11
5. Submitting your application 11
5.1 Submission through Mijn ZonMw 12
5.2 Tips 12
5.3 Statement of agreement for submission of detailed grant application 12
5.4 Content-related questions 12
5.5 Technical questions 12
5.6 Information consortia 12
5.7 Contact information patient organisations ME/CFS 13
5.8 Downloads and links 13
6. Annexes 14
Annex 1 - Overview conditions and documentation 15
Annex 2 - Guidance on the applicant profile (‘profiel aanvrager’) 16

1. Summary

Who can apply

The international fellowships ME/CFS is a personal grant intended for researchers and medical specialists who are within the first five years of completing their PhD or medical specialisation. The international fellowships ME/CFS provide an opportunity to conduct research at a foreign research organisation with expertise in ME/CFS, to further develop biomedical and/or clinical knowledge on ME/CFS in the Netherlands.

What for

The aim of this grant call is to generate new biomedical and/or clinical knowledge on ME/CFS by providing researchers and medical specialists with the opportunity to conduct research and gain experience at a foreign research organisation with expertise in ME/CFS. The research can focus on the cause, diagnosis, and/or treatment of ME/CFS and can be (pre-)clinical, and fundamental research. It is important that the knowledge and insights gained are sustainably embedded within the existing ME/CFS knowledge infrastructure and/or clinical practice in the Netherlands. In this way, the fellowships bridge knowledge and expertise on ME/CFS and the Dutch research field and/or practice.

What to request

The maximum amount that can be requested is €375,000 per project, for a project duration of at least 12 months and no more than 24 months. The total budget available for this funding round is €1,125,000. The funding provided by ZonMw is primarily intended to cover the applicant's salary. In addition, the grant can be used to fund research expenses, communication and implementation activities, travel costs, and Open Access publication costs. Further information on eligible costs can be found in section 3.1.4 of this grant call.

When

Opening detailed grant application	17 December 2026
Information meeting	19 January 2027
Deadline submission of detailed grant application	2 March 2027, 14:00 CET
Reviewers' comments received	16 April 2027
Deadline for submitting a response to reviewers' comments	7 May 2027
Interview	End of June 2027 (online)[1]
Decision	August 2027
Latest start date	6 months after awarding the grant

[1] An interview forms part of the assessment procedure for the detailed grant application. Applicants will receive an invitation in due course. The scheduling of the meeting of the ME/CFS programme committee, during which these interviews will take place, depends on the availability of the committee members. Audio of the interview will be recorded. The recording will be deleted once the assessment procedure has been completed.

2. Aim of the grant call

Research programme ME/CFS

The international fellowships ME/CFS is a part of the research programme ME/CFS. Patients are at the base of the programme through the citizen initiative 'Erken ME'. This initiative led to a Health Council of the Netherlands advisory report and the development of a biomedical research agenda for ME/CFS. The research programme ME/CFS was launched at the end of 2021 and its mission is to improve the health, quality of life, and societal participation of ME/CFS.

The research programme promotes international alignment and collaboration (see Section 4.1 of the programme description for further information). This is important for the exchange of knowledge and expertise on ME/CFS and for connecting with international developments in (pre-)clinical, and fundamental ME/CFS research. To foster such international collaboration, the programme includes, within the programme line "Biomedical research" funding line, the international fellowships ME/CFS grant call.

Grant call

The aim of this grant call is to generate new biomedical and clinical knowledge on ME/CFS by providing researchers and medical specialists with the opportunity to conduct ME/CFS research and gain experience at a foreign research organisation with expertise in the field of ME/CFS. Under this call, funding can be requested for (pre-)clinical and fundamental research into the cause, diagnosis, and/or treatment of ME/CFS.

By engaging with international ME/CFS research, researchers and medical specialists can acquire knowledge and expertise on relevant (pre-)clinical, and/or biomedical developments in the field of ME/CFS, while further developing their professional and scientific skills. This contributes to building expertise within the Dutch ME/CFS community, strengthens international collaboration, and accelerates the generation of new knowledge on the cause, diagnosis, and/or treatment of ME/CFS.

By fostering connections between the international fellowships ME/CFS and ongoing Dutch ME/CFS research, facilitate exchange of knowledge, data (in accordance with the FAIR principles), methods, and research findings that strengthen one another. It is important that the knowledge, insights, and expertise gained add value to the Dutch ME/CFS field and are sustainably embedded within the existing knowledge infrastructure and/or practice in the Netherlands. In this way, the international fellowships ME/CFS bridge international knowledge and expertise on ME/CFS and the Dutch research field and/or practice.

3. Conditions and obligations

You must take account of certain rights, conditions and obligations when applying for a ZonMw grant. The rights, conditions and obligations of a grant applicant are based upon the Dutch General Administrative Law Act (Algemene wet bestuursrecht, Awb). Article 4.2 of the Awb contains specific provisions applying to ZonMw grants. General Terms and Conditions Governing Grants of ZonMw also apply.

3.1. Conditions

The detailed grant application must conform to the following conditions to be taken into consideration. A concise overview of these conditions is provided in Annex 1.

3.1.1. Who can apply?

An application for an international fellowship ME/CFS can be submitted by applicants who completed their PhD programme or medical specialist training (medical specialisation) no more than five years prior to the application. Applicants who are still undertaking a PhD programme or medical specialisation training can also apply. In such cases, a written statement from the supervisor must be submitted, stating that the applicant is expected to have successfully completed their PhD programme or medical specialisation by the project start date.

The fellowship is a personal grant. Therefore, only individual researchers or medical specialists can apply. Research groups or joint applicants are not eligible to apply. The applicant's motivation and suitability will be assessed based on the Applicant Profile and must be presented in accordance with

the principles of DORA (Declaration on Research Assessment) (see Section 3.1.5, Practical conditions, for the required template).

Extension of the eligibility window
Applicants can apply up to five years after completing their PhD programme or medical specialisation. This period is referred to as the eligibility window. Under certain circumstances, an extension of the eligibility window can be granted. The eligibility window can be extended by a maximum of five years. Applicants are eligible for an extension under the following circumstances:

- Biological mothers can receive an extension of 18 months per child. This applies to each child born after the completion date of the PhD programme or medical specialisation. The extension compensates for the time associated with pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare, and includes any period of parental leave taken and/or reduction in contracted working hours.
- All other parents can receive an extension of 12 months per child for each child born after the completion date of the PhD programme or medical specialisation. This extension compensates for the time associated with childcare and includes any period of parental leave taken and/or reduction in contracted working hours.
- An extension can also be granted in the case of other exceptional personal circumstances (for example, documented caregiving leave or long-term illness). Such cases must be discussed and agreed upon with ZonMw.

Prior approval from ZonMw is required for all extensions. Applicants should contact mecvs@zonmw.nl to request an extension. Approval must be obtained before submission of the detailed grant application and must be requested no later than two weeks before the submission deadline of the detailed grant application, which is 2 March 2027.

Employment and secondment during the project period
Research funded through the international fellowships ME/CFS is primarily conducted at a foreign research organisation (hereafter referred to as the foreign host institute). A Dutch research organisation, such as a university medical centre (hereafter referred to as the Dutch host institute), acts as the employer responsible for seconding the fellow and administering the grant. In addition, the final phase of the research may be carried out at the Dutch host institute. This concerns the final months of the project, for a maximum period of six months. This arrangement is intended to facilitate the embedding of the knowledge and expertise developed during the fellowship within the Dutch ME/CFS field.

Foreign host institute
The foreign host institute where the research will be conducted should preferably have demonstrated expertise in research on the cause, diagnosis, and/or treatment of ME/CFS. In this call, the foreign host institute will be assessed under the relevance criterion ‘Quality of the foreign host institute and project team’. Examples of potentially suitable research organisations include:

- Charité Fatigue Center – Universitätsmedizin Berlin (Germany)
- Institute of Pathophysiology and Allergy Research – Medical University of Vienna (Austria)
- Røysumtunet - University of Oslo (Norway)
- Bateman Horne Center (United States)
- Institute for Neuro-Immune Medicine - Nova Southeastern University (United States)
- Stanford ME/CFS Clinic (United States)
- Brigham and Women's Hospital - Harvard Medical School (United States)

These examples are not exhaustive; other host institutes abroad may also be eligible.

The foreign host institute must indicate its willingness to host the applicant if the grant is awarded using the form of acceptance (see the template provided in section 3.1.5. Practical conditions). Submission of this form does not constitute a guarantee of final acceptance, as it is only applicable if the application is funded and the applicant has obtained all required documentation (such as a visa and work permit). The applicant is responsible for obtaining all necessary documentation in a timely manner. Applicants are therefore strongly advised to identify at an early stage which documents are required and what procedures must be followed to obtain permission to reside and work in the host country.

Dutch host institute
Throughout the entire duration of the project, the applicant must hold an employment contract with the Dutch host institute. The Dutch host institute acts as the grant administrator and is responsible for managing the grant in accordance with ZonMw's General Terms and Conditions Governing Grants and the conditions governing the international fellowships ME/CFS. In addition, the final phase of the

research may be carried out at the Dutch host institute for a maximum period of six months. Given these responsibilities and tasks, the Dutch host institute must provide an adequate research infrastructure and demonstrate relevant expertise and experience. Therefore, only a Dutch research organisation canact as the Dutch host institute.

For the detailed grant application, an Embedding statement ('Inbeddingsverklaring' in Dutch) from the Dutch host institute is required (see Section 3.1.5, Practical conditions, for the template). The statement must be signed by the individual with administrative responsibility on behalf of the Dutch host institute. If the applicant intends to carry out the final phase of the research at the Dutch host institute, the arrangements regarding this appointment must also be included in the Embedding Statement. In addition, applicants are encouraged to discuss any further commitments and/or guarantees that may contribute to the sustainable embedding of the knowledge and expertise acquired during the fellowship and to include these in the Embedding statement.

3.1.2. Avoiding state aid

No grants will be awarded by ZonMw if this would or could constitute unlawful state aid.[2].

A personal grant is awarded directly to a natural person for the purpose of carrying out research activities. Such a grant falls outside the scope of EU State aid rules, as the grant recipient is not considered an undertaking within the meaning of Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). This is conditional upon the grant recipient not carrying out the funded activities as part of an economic activity and not commercially exploiting, or otherwise using for economic gain, the research results generated through the grant.

Further information on State aid can be found on the ZonMw webpage State Aid exemption regulations.

3.1.3. Third-party collaboration and contributions

ZonMw encourages collaboration and participation among relevant parties. However, no grant will be awarded if such arrangements result, or could result, in the provision of unlawful State Aid, or if they prevent compliance with the ZonMw General Grant Provisions or the conditions set out in this grant call. It is therefore important to establish clear agreements with every party that actively contributes to the project and to document these agreements appropriately. Below, the different forms of collaboration are described, together with the types of contributions and the way these should be documented.

Collaborations and contributions of parties

Mandatory collaboration on communication and implementation

To strengthen the implementation and dissemination of knowledge, this call requires collaboration on implementation and communication activities with at least one of the two existing ME/CFS consortia funded through the research programme ME/CFS: the Netherlands ME/CFS Cohort and Biobank (NMCB) and the MECFS Lines Consortium. Further information about these consortia is provided in Section 5.6, Information on the Consortia. The detailed grant application must describe how this collaboration will be carried out. (see Section 4.2, Relevance Criteria: Collaboration and Sustainability). In addition, the collaboration must be reflected in the budget (see Section 3.1.4, Budget) and formalised through a Letter of Commitment (see below).

Additional collaboration(s) in the research project

In addition to the collaboration with and appointment at a foreign host institute (see Section 3.1.1, Employment and Secondment During the Project Period), applicants may also collaborate with other (foreign) research and/or clinical groups. Given the relatively limited duration of the fellowship, however, the formal appointment can be held with only one foreign host institute. Any collaboration with additional parties must be clearly described in the detailed grant application (see Section 4.2, Relevance Criterion: Collaboration) and formalised through a Letter of Commitment (see below). Parties that actively contribute to the project at their own expense and risk are also considered collaboration partners and must therefore be described and documented accordingly.

Contributions from collaboration partners through co-funding

If collaboration partners, including the Dutch host institute and the foreign host institute, contribute to the project through co-funding (either in kind or in cash), these contributions must be described in the

[2] Article 107 VWEU.

detailed grant application. Co-funding contributions (both in kind and in cash) must be included in the budget (see Section 3.1.4, Budget) and formalised through a Letter of Commitment (see below).

Contracting third parties
Where third parties are contracted to carry out specific activities (for example, measurements or analyses), the detailed grant application and budget must clearly specify which activities will be performed by third parties and the related costs that will be incurred (including VAT). Such arrangements must be based on market-conforming terms and conditions. For more information and the conditions of hire/terms of contract, see the ZonMw webpage Grants and collaboration: Third-party contributions.

Formalisation of collaborations
Letters of Commitment
Because ZonMw requires assurance that a project party or sponsor will be legally bound to provide the agreed amounts, each project party or sponsor must provide a Letter of Commitment, which is to be submitted together with the detailed grant application. Please use the template letter which you can find on the ZonMw webpage Grants and collaboration: Third-party contributions.

Collaboration and sponsorship agreement
Following the award of the grant, the collaboration must be formally documented in a Collaboration Agreement or Sponsorship Agreement, as appropriate. Further information on the various forms of collaboration and contributions (sponsoring/assignment) can be found on the ZonMw webpage Grants and collaboration: Third-party contributions. This webpage also provides sample agreements as an aid to drafting the relevant agreement; the accompanying explanation contains the conditions the agreement must meet. The conditions specified on this web page and in the explanation form an integral part of this call for grant applications. Where ZonMw requests draft collaboration and/or sponsorship agreements, it awards the grant on the condition that the agreements are found to be acceptable.

3.1.4. What is the amount of the grant I can apply for?
Within this funding call, a maximum of €375,000 can be requested per project. Project duration must be at least 12 months and no more than 24 months. The total budget available for this funding round is €1,125,000.

Budget
For the detailed grant application, it is mandatory to include a detailed budget in *Mijn ZonMw*. The submitted budget will be reviewed and assessed by ZonMw. All budget items must be proportionate to the proposed research and must be justified in the detailed grant application. In addition, the budget must be prepared in collaboration with a financial controller from the applicant institution (the Dutch host institute). The budget should also include any contributions from collaborating parties through co-funding and/or the procurement of external services or expertise.

Eligible costs
Eligible costs include salary costs, research costs, communication and implementation costs, travel expenses, and, where applicable, Open Access publication costs. Costs related to accommodation, computers, and other overhead expenses are not eligible for reimbursement. The grant provides a contribution towards the costs of the research but may not fully cover all expenses. Therefore, additional co-funding from the host institutions is encouraged.

Salary
The funding provided by ZonMw is primarily intended to cover the applicant's salary, enabling applicants to dedicate time to conducting the research themselves. Salary costs depend on the type of appointment. See Table 1 for the latest salary scales by institution. Applicants are advised to discuss salary arrangements with the Dutch research organisation that will employ them at an early stage and, where necessary, make additional agreements regarding co-funding from the host institutions to cover salary costs.

Table 1: Salary scales by institution

Universities	For Dutch universities, salary costs will be funded in accordance with the UNL salary scales applicable at the time the grant is awarded.

University Medical Centres	For Dutch university medical centres, salary costs will be funded in accordance with the NFU salary scales applicable at the time the grant is awarded.

Research costs
Research costs are the material costs that are directly attributable to the research. As the ZonMw contribution is primarily intended to enable the applicant to dedicate time to carrying out the research, research costs may not exceed 25% of the total requested budget. This means that, for an application requesting the maximum amount of €375,000, research costs may amount to no more than €93,750. Additional co-funding from the host institutions to supplement research costs is encouraged.

Communication and implementation costs
To ensure that newly developed knowledge and expertise are embedded within the Dutch research landscape, at least 5% of the total grant amount must be allocated to communication and implementation activities. The budget for communication and implementation costs may be used, in whole or in part, for activities that are organised or carried out at the consortium level. Consequently, the ME/CFS consortium with which the applicant collaborates may be entitled to receive a part of the grant funding for such activities.

Travel expenses
For stays of 12 months, the travel allowance may be claimed once. For stays of more than 12 months, the allowance may be claimed twice. Travel costs are calculated based on the straight-line distance between Amsterdam (the Netherlands) and the foreign host institute.

Table 2: Travel expenses

Distance (km)	Fixed allowance per 12 months (EUR)
< 500	250
500 – 1,000	500
1,000 – 1,500	750
1,500 – 2,500	1,000
2,500 – 5,000	1,500
5,000 – 10,000	2,000
> 10,000	2,500

Costs for Open Access Publication
If you publish according to the full golden Open Access route, you may include the cost of Open Access publications in the project budget. The maximum amount of this allowance is €5,000. Please include 'Open Access' as a separate line in your budget. For more information about Open Access, see Section 3 and the ZonMw web page Open Access.

3.1.5. Practical conditions

General conditions

- The detailed grant application must be composed in English.
- One optional annex (with a maximum of 2 pages) with figures and tables. This annex is part of the assessment.

Applicant conditions
(See section 3.1.1, Who is eligible to apply for funding?; see Appendix 2 for further information on the applicant profile.)

- Obligatory annex: Applicant profile. This consists of a personal profile and an evidence-based Curriculum Vitae (CV).
  Mandatory format/pdf/English
- Obligatory annex (if applicable)**:** A statement from the supervisor confirming that the PhD programme or medical specialisation is expected to be successfully completed before the start of the project, if the applicant is still undertaking a PhD programme or medical specialisation at the time of application.

Conditions employment, secondment and collaboration
(See section 3.1.1. Who is eligible to apply for funding?; Section 3.1.3, Collaboration and contributions from third parties; and Appendix 1 for an overview of the conditions.)

- Obligatory annex: Embedding statement from the intended Dutch host institute. *Mandatory template/pdf/Dutch*
- Obligatory annex: Form of acceptance from the intended foreign host institute. *Mandatory template/pdf/English*
- Obligatory annex: A Letter of Commitment must be provided for each collaborating partner and/or sponsor. In all cases, this is at least one of the two Dutch ME/CFS consortia for collaboration on communication and implementation activities.

Budget conditions
(See section 3.1.4. What can be applied for?)
- It is mandatory to include a detailed budget with the detailed grant application.
- The application must allocate at least 5% of the project budget to communication and implementation activities.
- Research costs may account for no more than 25% of the total budget requested.

3.2. Obligations

Obligations apply when the funding is granted. For the obligations, ZonMw uses the General Terms and Conditions Governing Grants of ZonMw. In addition, the following conditions also apply:

– **Open Access**
All publications resulting from scientific research fully or partially funded by ZonMw must be made available in Open Access, in accordance with the ZonMw Open Access policy. ZonMw accepts various Open Access routes. In addition to articles, ZonMw encourages researchers to make their results available in other formats via Open Access, such as monographs, books, conference proceedings and grey literature, but also research data and knowledge products for practice-oriented research, such as models, protocols, prototypes, digital tools and demonstrations.
For more information about the ZonMw Open Access policy, conditions and opportunities, please visit our website.

– **Conditions for valorisation**
As ZonMw is committed to making the projects it funds widely accessible, the ten principles of Socially Responsible Licensing (SRL) should be applied to the licensing of results. Please describe, where applicable, how intellectual property rights will be arranged with partners and any third parties. Also indicate how these parties will comply with the ten principles.

4. Assessment and prioritisation

4.1. Assessment procedure

The general procedure for the assessment of grant applications can be found in the infographic 'applying for funding in 10 steps' and the Applicant Procedure Brochure. The international fellowships ME/CFS grant call only includes a detailed grant application phase; there is no separate project idea phase. The assessment procedure for the international fellowships ME/CFS grant call is explained in more detail below.

Assessment of grant application

The detailed grant application is a comprehensive and detailed description of the research project and the applicant's profile. A detailed budget must also be submitted with the detailed grant application. ZonMw will first assess whether the application meets the specified conditions (see Chapter 3 'Conditions and obligations'). If necessary, the applicant will be given one opportunity to make administrative corrections. Once the application has been accepted by ZonMw, it will undergo a written assessment by both scientific reviewers and experts by experience reviewers. The scientific reviewers will assess the scientific quality of the application. The experts by experience reviewers will primarily assess the added value of the research for patients and whether the contribution of experts by experience is adequately embedded within the project. The reviewer assessments will be followed by a written rebuttal phase, whereby the applicant must respond to the anonymised reviewer reports. Following the written rebuttal, an interview will take place. During the interview, the applicant will be invited to give a brief presentation, after which the programme committee will ask questions about the application, the reviewer assessments, and the rebuttal. The audio of the interview will be recorded, which will be destroyed after the assessment procedure has been completed. After the interviews, the programme committee will conduct the final assessment. The prioritisation of applications regarding quality and relevance will be carried out by the programme committee based on the detailed grant application, the reviewer assessments, the rebuttal, and the interview with the applicant.

Independent assessment

The Code of Conduct on Conflicts of Interests applies to all individuals involved in the assessment and/or decision-making process. In addition, ZonMw strives to foster an inclusive culture in which conscious or unconscious barriers related to cultural, ethnic or religious background, gender, sexual orientation, health, or age are not tolerated. For more information, please visit the ZonMw Diversity webpage.

DORA

ZonMw is a signatory of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). DORA is a global initiative that aims to improve the way research and applicants are assessed. It provides recommendations for research funders, research organisations, scientific journals, and other stakeholders. DORA seeks to reduce the uncritical use of bibliometric indicators and to mitigate unconscious bias in the assessment of applications and researchers. The overarching philosophy of DORA is that research should be assessed on its own quality and merits rather than based on surrogate indicators, such as the journal in which the research is published. When assessing the scientific track record of applicants, ZonMw adopts a broad definition of scientific output. The programme committee is requested to apply the principles of 'recognition and rewards' as promoted by ZonMw when assessing the applicant's profile.

Table 3: Timeline assessment procedure international fellowships ME/CFS

Opening detailed grant application	17 December 2026
Information meeting	19 January 2027
Deadline submission of detailed grant application	2 March 2027, 14:00 CET
Reviewers' comments received	16 April 2027
Deadline for submitting a response to reviewers' comments	7 May 2027
Interview	End of June 2027 (online)
Decision	August 2027
Latest start date	6 months after awarding the grant

4.2. Relevance criteria

Aim grant call
The detailed grant application describes how the proposed project aligns with the aim of the grant call. The aim of this grant call is to generate new biomedical and/or clinical knowledge on ME/CFS by providing researchers and medical specialists with the opportunity to conduct research and gain experience at a foreign research organisation with biomedical and/or clinical expertise in the field of ME/CFS. Under this call, funding may be requested for (pre-)clinical and fundamental research into the cause, diagnosis, and/or treatment of ME/CFS.

Contribution to programme objectives
The detailed grant application and the subject of the application must be aligned with the objectives and scope of the research programme ME/CFS (see the programme text). Research that is focused on chronic fatigue as a consequence of diseases or disorders other than ME/CFS are outside the scope of this grant call. Symptoms, impairments, and underlying mechanisms that are associated with ME/CFS but may also occur in related conditions (i.e. post-COVID) may only be investigated in relation to ME/CFS, for example by including a control group consisting of individuals with a related condition (i.e. post-COVID). The detailed grant application must clearly describe and substantiate how the project aligns with the objectives and scope of the research programme ME/CFS.

Added value
The detailed grant application must demonstrate the added value of the project in relation to existing knowledge and/or current practice, both within the Netherlands and internationally. The application must also describe how the project relates to completed and ongoing studies in the same field, and what this project will contribute to the Dutch ME/CFS research field. For (pre-)clinical research, the application must describe the underlying mechanism of action, as well as the pre-clinical, fundamental, and/or other scientific evidence that supports the rationale for the proposed research. Research that builds on previous or ongoing projects, as well as replication studies, is permitted, provided that the necessity and added value of such research are convincingly substantiated.

Added value for patients
The detailed grant application must clearly describe the expected benefits of the project for people with ME/CFS. Consideration should be given to the currently limited available knowledge on the diagnosis and treatment of ME/CFS in the Netherlands. If the project involves patient inclusion, it should be assessed whether the anticipated benefits of the project sufficiently outweigh the potential burden and risks associated with participation in the study.

Participation of patients/experts by experience
The detailed grant application must describe how stakeholders, the target group and/or end users with lived experience are or will be involved in the project. The involvement of experts by experience can be highly valuable and is therefore encouraged. This is possible in various forms. Experts by experience can, for example, contribute to the development of the detailed grant application, be consulted (online) during the project, and support the dissemination and embedding of the results. The application should clearly explain which form of participation is appropriate for the project. Applicants may make use of available external tools to support the design of participation, such as a participation matrix or a kickstarter for researchers.

Collaboration
During the research project, the applicant must enter an employment contract with a Dutch host institute and be seconded from this organisation to the foreign host institute. In addition, for the implementation and communication activities a collaboration with at least one of the two existing ME/CFS consortia funded through the research programme ME/CFS is mandatory (see Section 5.6 for further information on the consortia). The detailed grant application must describe in detail which parties will be involved in the collaboration and how the collaboration will be carried out. For example, consideration should be given on how ownership, governance and future accessibility of data and research results will be arranged. Furthermore, the application must clearly demonstrate how the collaboration will contribute to the further development of the existing ME/CFS knowledge infrastructure in the Netherlands. Collaborations with multiple research and/or clinical groups, both

within and beyond the foreign host institute, are permitted and should be described convincingly in the detailed grant application.

Embedding
It is important that new knowledge and expertise are utilised in practice, policy, education and/or further research. The Implementation support webpage explains what impact is, how efforts can be made to achieve and demonstrate it, and what is expected of project leaders. In this grant call, impact is assessed under the relevance criterion 'safeguarding'.

The detailed grant application must address the communication and implementation of research findings to maximise the project's impact. The application should present a clear vision and ambition for embedding the results and insights generated by the project within the existing ME/CFS knowledge infrastructure and/or practice in the Netherlands. Therefore, applicants are required to collaborate on communication and implementation activities with at least one of the two existing consortia funded through the research programme ME/CFS (see Section 5.6 'Information consortia').

The detailed grant application must clearly demonstrate how the knowledge and expertise developed through the project will be implemented and embedded within the Dutch ME/CFS research field and/or practice, and which activities will be undertaken to achieve this. This means that the application should clearly describe:

- How the expected results can be applied within the Dutch ME/CFS research field and/or practice, and how they relate to the (results of the) existing ME/CFS knowledge infrastructure and/or current practice in the Netherlands;
- How the insights generated by the research will be disseminated, implemented and embedded within at least one of the two ME/CFS consortia involved in the collaboration. This should include a description of how the collaboration is organised and should consider both facilitating and hindering factors;
- How the budget allocated to communication and implementation activities (minimum of 5% of the requested budget) will be used, how these activities align with at least one of the two ME/CFS consortia, and how the planned activities are proportionate and realistic in relation to the available budget.

Animal models
ZonMw encourages applicants to develop and/or apply alternatives to animal experimentation. If a project includes animal experiments, the necessity of using animals must be justified. This justification should include the relevance of the selected animal model, the methodological and statistical design of the study, and consideration of available alternatives, such as computational models.

4.3. Quality criteria

Objective and research question or task(s)
The objective and research question should be described clearly resulting in a concrete and verifiable question that can be objectively assessed.

Approach
The approach of the research proposal must be appropriate to the research question and/or objectives. In the detailed grant application, the selected methods and analyses should be described in detail, including their theoretical and/or empirical justification. This includes the hypothesis driving the research proposal, the study design, the data to be used, the analytical methods, and the expected outcomes. The inclusion criteria must also be justified and be in line with relevant literature to the specific research question and with consideration of relevant subgroups. The detailed grant application should clearly define the study population. In the assessment of the study population, the alignment of the study population with the research question will be considered, as well as how it relates to the advantages and disadvantages of the different criteria commonly used to define ME/CFS (as described in Section 2.2.2 of the programme text of the research programme ME/CFS).

Feasibility
In the detailed grant application, it must be made apparent that the applicant will be able to answer or realise the intended question or remit with the available expertise, people and facilities in the planned time. The applicant should also describe factors that may facilitate or hinder the successful execution

of the project. In addition, the budget must be realistic and adequately justified. Attention should also be paid to the feasibility of participant recruitment and inclusion. If a visa, permit, or ethical approval, such as from a METC, is required for the execution of the proposed project, the applicant must ensure that it is obtained in a timely manner from the relevant institution or ethics committee.

Quality of the foreign host institute and research group
The application must clearly describe how the foreign host institute, including the relevant department and research group, provides a stimulating research environment for both the applicant and the proposed research project. The quality and expertise of the foreign host institute and research group should also be described, particularly in relation to the ME/CFS research field and/or practice.

Applicant profile ('profiel aanvrager')
Given the personal nature of the international fellowships ME/CFS, the applicant's profile must be clearly described and substantiated (see annex 2 - Guidance on the applicant profile). The applicant's profile will be assessed in accordance with the principles of 'recognition and rewards'. To assess the quality of the applicant's profile:

- In the 'personal profile', the applicant's scientific work experience and, where relevant, societal engagement and clinical experience should be clearly demonstrated.
- In the 'academic profile', it should be clearly substantiated and justified why the applicant is well suited to carry out the proposed research. The applicant's activities, achievements, and development should be supported by a clear rationale and motivation.
- In the 'key outputs', the applicant's role and contribution to each key output should be clearly described. In addition, the applicant should explain why these key outputs are considered important and describe their impact and relevance to the field and to the proposed research project.

4.4. Prioritisation

The relative weighting of relevance and quality takes place according to the following prioritisation matrix:

Relevance → / Quality ↓	Very relevant	Relevant	Not relevant
Excellence	1	2	X
Good	3	4	X
Satisfactory	5	6	X
Moderate	X	X	X
Insufficient	X	X	X

To be eligible for funding, the detailed grant application should be assessed as very relevant or relevant. The quality of the proposal should be assessed as very good or good to be eligible for funding. A grant application that is assessed as satisfactory for quality and (very) relevant for relevance (scores 5 or 6 in the table) can only be considered for funding if there is sufficient remaining budget and the quality of the application can be substantially improved. An X in the prioritisation matrix indicates that the application is not eligible for funding.

If after applying the prioritisation matrix the number of eligible applications exceeds the available budget, the programme committee will deploy the following additional grounds of evaluation:

- **Children and severely ill patients:** The research programme aims to promote research involving children, adolescents, and severely ill patients with ME/CFS. If applicable, the detailed grant application should clearly describe how attention is given to children and adolescents with ME/CFS and/or to severely ill patients.
- **ME/CFS and female-specific aspects:** ME/CFS is known to be more prevalent in females than in males. Where applicable, the detailed grant application should clearly describe how it addresses female-specific aspects of ME/CFS.

5. Submitting your application

5.1 Submission through Mijn ZonMw

Detailed grant applications can only be submitted by the main application in ZonMw's online submission system (Mijn ZonMw). The closing date for submitting a detailed grant application is **2nd of March 2027, 14.00 CET**.

The complete timeframe for this grant call can be found here.

5.2 Tips

- ZonMw now uses a different online application system. If you have not worked with My ZonMw before, you must first register as a 'New user'.
- The submitter is automatically the 'Main applicant' as a user of the ZonMw account, and therefore the manager of the application in Mijn ZonMw. The submitter will also receive all messages sent by ZonMw from the system.
- We advise you to print out a Word version of your application (via My ZonMw) and carefully review it for errors before you submit it digitally. This is especially important if you have created your application in Word and then copied it to My ZonMw, as some characters (such as quotes) may not be converted correctly. You can correct this yourself in My ZonMw.
- For further information, see the My ZonMw manual.

Attention! Ensure that the documents you upload are not protected/encrypted. Budgets or other files that are signed (for example, with ValidSign) often automatically have a protection or are encrypted. Make sure to remove this before uploading the file, otherwise the system will not be able to process the file properly. You can check if your PDF has protection or an encryption by opening it in Adobe Acrobat, right-clicking, going to document properties, and then going to the security settings. There you can see if and how your file is encrypted. You can also open the PDF in a browser; if your file is protected/encrypted, this will be indicated in a banner at the top.

5.3 Statement of agreement for submission of detailed grant application

The 'Statement of agreement to your detailed grant application' must be signed by the individual with administrative responsibility (of the Dutch host institute) and the main applicant. The signed declaration can be added to the application in My ZonMw or sent to ZonMw by email at mecvs@zonmw.nl. The declaration must have been received no later than one week after submission of the application.

5.4 Substansive questions

For questions regarding the content of the application, please contact Marjet Opdam (+31 70 515 0366) or contact us via e-mail: mecvs@zonmw.nl.

5.5 Technical questions

If you have any technical questions about using ZonMw's online application system, please contact the Service Desk from Monday to Friday between 8.00 and 17.00 (+31 070 349 51 78, servicedesk@zonmw.nl). Please include your telephone number in your email so that we can call you back if necessary.

5.6 Information consortia

Within the research programme ME/CFS, two consortia are currently funded: the Netherlands ME/CFS Cohort and Biobank consortium (NMCB) and the MECFS Lines Consortium. Under this grant call, applicants are required to collaborate with at least one of these two consortia in on implementation and communication to ensure that the knowledge, expertise, results, and insights generated through the proposed research are embedded within the existing Dutch ME/CFS knowledge infrastructure.

NMCB consortium

Consortium

The Netherlands ME/CFS Cohort and Biobank consortium (NMCB) is a broad national collaboration involving academic medical centers, knowledge institutes (including universities, RIVM, KNAW), and patient organisations. The consortium also collaborates closely within several international partnerships. The consortium focuses on biomedical research into ME/CFS as well as Post-Acute

Infectious Syndromes (PAIS, including post-COVID, Lyme, Q fever). The NMCB Consortium develops and manages a patient cohort and biobank containing a large collection of biological samples, medical data, questionnaire data, and physical and cognitive test results. The biomaterials and data are internationally harmonised while allowing individual studies to add to this. The cohort also serves as a patient registry for supplementary research, including clinical intervention studies.

Communication and implementation
To achieve the strategic objectives of NMCB it is essential to communicate effectively about ME/CFS and its impact on society and to disseminate scientific findings to relevant target groups, including patients, healthcare professionals, researchers, and policymakers. The consortium undertakes a wide range of activities for this, including conferences, summer schools, training programmes, online communication channels, and newsletters. Furthermore, the NMCB also aims to strengthen the connection between research, clinical practice, and society to ensure that newly generated knowledge is better aligned with the needs of end users. These end users include researchers, policymakers and healthcare professionals working with patients with ME/CFS and PAIS. A key component of the consortium's communication and impact strategy is patient involvement, ensuring that NMCB findings are accessible, understandable, and useful to those who may benefit from or contribute to the research.

MECFS Lines
Consortium
The MECFS Lines consortium brings together national (including universities, TNO), international research partners and the patient organisation MECVS Nederland to conduct biomedical research into ME/CFS. Using data generated within the consortium, researchers seek to identify novel mechanisms underlying the development of ME/CFS, to improve diagnosis and treatment. The consortium uses data and biomaterials collected since 2006 through the Lifelines population cohort, which includes more than 167,000 participants. These biomaterials enable the study of genetics, the microbiome, antibody repertoires, proteomics, and metabolomics in individuals with ME/CFS and matched controls. The consortium has a strong focus on a multi-omics and longitudinal approach, including the use of biomaterials collected before the onset of ME/CFS.

Communication and implementation
To maximise the societal, clinical, and policy impact of the research conducted within MECFS Lines, the consortium invests in engagement, communication, and collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including patients, healthcare professionals, researchers, and policymakers. To facilitate this, a stakeholder board composed of patients, healthcare professionals, and policymakers meets regularly to discuss consortium developments and research findings and to initiate impact cycle activities aimed at translating results into clinical practice. The consortium employs a range of dissemination and engagement activities, including consortium meetings, summer schools, masterclasses, webinars, educational initiatives, and online communication channels. MECFS Lines seeks to strengthen the impact of its research by ensuring that new knowledge is shared, understood, and applied in policy, practice, and society. This is done in close collaboration with experts by experience to ensure that research findings are not only published but also translated into accessible information, disseminated to relevant audiences, and implemented in practice.

Contact information
Further information about the consortia can be found on the ZonMw project web pages (NMCB and MECFS Lines) and on the consortia's own websites (NCMB and MECFS Lines). Applicants can also contact the consortium leaders using the contact details provided below:

- NMCB consortium, consortium leader Jos Bosch, nmcb@amsterdamumc.nl
- MECFS Lines consortium, consortium leaderJudith Rosmalen, mecfslines@umcg.nl

5.7 Contact information patient organisations ME/CFS

The following patient organisations can be contacted to involve experts by experience within the detailed grant application and project:

- MECVS Nederland, info@mecvs.nl
- ME/cvs Vereniging, contact@me-cvsvereniging.nl

5.8 Downloads and links

On the ZonMw website more information can be found regarding:

- General Terms and Conditions Governing Grants of ZonMw
- Applying for funding in 10 steps
- Applicant Procedure Brochure (only available in Dutch)
- What must I submit?
- Conditions and obligations
- Assessment
- Grants and Collaborations/contribution from third parties
- State aid exemption
- Open Access
- Diversity
- Participation matrix
- Kickstarter for researchers
- Implementation and impact
- Mijn ZonMw manuals
- Statement of approval for submission of a detailed grant application
- Programme page of the research programme ME/CFS
- Programme text research programme ME/CFS

6. Annexes

Annex 1 - Overview conditions and documentation
Annex 2 - Guidance on the applicant profile (‘profiel aanvrager’)

Annex 1 - Overview conditions and documentation

Overview of minimum conditions and documentation

Conditions	Documentation in detailed grant application
The individual applicant obtained their PhD degree or completed their medical specialisation no more than five years ago. In certain cases, an extension (up to a maximum of five years) may be granted.	• Applicant profile ('profiel aanvrager') (see section 3.1.5 Practical conditions). • If applicable, a written statement from the supervisor if the applicant has not yet completed their PhD or medical specialisation. • If applicable, prior approval of an extension by ZonMw: requests must be submitted by email no later than two weeks before the detailed grant application submission deadline.
The applicant must hold, or obtain, an employment contract with a Dutch research organisation (the Dutch host institute), which will act as the grant administrator.	• Embedding statement ('inbeddingsverklaring' in Dutch) (see section 3.1.5 Practical conditions).
The applicant will be seconded from the Dutch host institute to a foreign research organisation 'the foreign host institute'.	• Form of acceptance (see section 3.1.5, Practical conditions).
The applicant must establish a collaboration with at least one of the two existing Dutch ME/CFS consortia on implementation and communication activities.	• The collaboration must be described in the detailed grant application (see section 4.2 Relevance Criteria: Collaboration and embedding). • Letter of Commitment (see section 3.1.5 Practical conditions).

Overview additional conditions and documentation

Conditions	Documentation in detailed grant application
When the applicant intends to spend the final six months of the research project at the Dutch host institute.	• The arrangements regarding this appointment must also be documented in the Embedding statement (see section 3.1.5 Practical conditions)
Additional collaborations and/or co-financing arrangements.	• The collaboration arrangements must be described in the detailed grant application (see section 4.2 Relevance criteria: Collaboration). • Letter of Commitment (see section 3.1.5 Practical conditions). • In cases of co-financing, the collaboration must also be included in the Budget (see section 3.1.4 What can be applied for?).

Annex 2 - Guidance on the applicant profile ('profiel aanvrager')

Introduction
The applicant's profile will be assessed in accordance with the ZonMw principles of 'recognition and rewards'. The applicant profile consists of 2 components: the personal profile and the evidence-based CV. Further guidance on these components is provided below.

1. Personal profile
The personal profile contains the applicant's personal details, background, and professional experience.

2. Evidence-based CV

- *2a: Academic profile*
  In the academic profile, applicants describe and substantiate their profile, as well as their relevant qualities, skills, and activities.

  Applicants should provide a narrative highlighting the achievements that are most relevant to the field and to the proposed research project. The applicant's motivation and suitability to conduct the proposed research should be clearly demonstrated.

  References to publications, grants, conferences, and other outputs should only be used to support the narrative regarding:
  - The significance of the research conducted;
  - The contribution of the proposed research to the field;
  - The applicant's qualities and development.

  When references are regarding specific outputs, only the key outputs included in section 2b may be cited. The academic profile should not consist of a list of presentations, nor should it refer to publication metrics, bibliometric indicators, or anticipated future outputs. Applicants may provide context regarding circumstances that may have limited their opportunities to develop or demonstrate their capabilities.

- *2b: Key outputs*
  Applicants can include a maximum of five key outputs that best demonstrate their qualifications and are relevant to the detailed grant application, the proposed research project, and/or the field.

  For each output item, applicants must provide a complete reference, an URL (preferably a DOI) and at least one quality indicator. In the motivation textbox, applicants should explain why the output item is relevant, what the selected quality indicator(s) signifies, and what their own contribution was to the output.