

The background of the entire page is a microscopic image of cells, likely muscle or connective tissue, showing various cellular structures and fibers in shades of blue and purple. The cells are out of focus, creating a bokeh effect.

Innovative Therapies

Manual 2026-2027

Prinses Beatrix
Spierfonds

The Prinses Beatrix Spierfonds funds, guides, and promotes scientific research into neuromuscular disorders. Because we know that scientific research is the only key to making all neuromuscular disorders treatable in the future. By collaborating with leading researchers and maximising the potential of our research, we achieve success. Furthermore, we stay alert to the opportunities that modern technologies and innovations provide.

Programme Drug Development

Scientific research is key to winning the fight against neuromuscular diseases. The aim of the Drug Development Programme is to accelerate the development of medicines for neuromuscular diseases in the Netherlands. Through various funding opportunities, the Spierfonds promotes innovative approaches, multidisciplinary collaboration, and the application of new technologies.

The 'Innovative Therapies' grant round

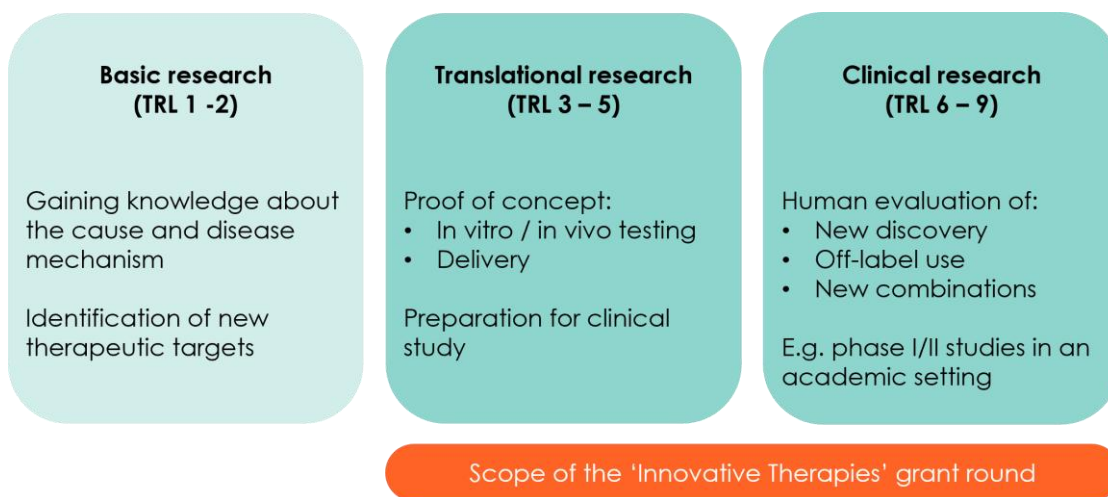
The annual 'Innovative Therapies' grant round is part of the Drug Development Programme. The goal of this initiative is to advance promising research from preclinical studies more efficiently toward clinical application. We seek projects that contribute to the development of innovative therapies for neuromuscular disorders, targeting either the underlying cause or disease mechanisms.

Principles:

- **Academic research with a strong focus on application**
To accelerate the translation of promising research results into real-world application, this grant round encourages a goal-oriented approach. Our aim is to enable researchers to take significant steps toward developing innovative therapies. Therefore, we support translational and clinical projects (starting at approximately [Technology Readiness Level 3](#), see [Figure 1](#)) that not only expand scientific knowledge but also take concrete steps towards the next phase of development.
- **Equal opportunities for all neuromuscular disorders**
The Spierfonds is committed to supporting research into all neuromuscular disorders, not just the most well-known or common conditions. This means that no neuromuscular disorder is excluded in advance from this grant round. If the research concerns an ultra-rare condition (1-40 patients in the Netherlands), the research results must have broader applicability for the Spierfonds' target audience.
- **Collaboration between scientists, expertise centres, and relevant parties**
Research conducted in isolation often delays the transition from laboratory findings to patient treatments. Therefore, we encourage multidisciplinary collaboration and knowledge sharing, both within and beyond academia. Project proposals are evaluated, among other factors, on the quality and complementarity of the research team. Experience in drug development is not a prerequisite, and junior researchers are welcome to apply, provided that the project group as a whole possesses the necessary expertise to successfully conduct the research and advance its results towards application.
- **Appropriate duration and realistic project planning**
A well-thought-out project design increases the likelihood of success. We encourage researchers to choose a project duration that aligns with their intended goals and to carefully consider the required expertise and staffing. In some cases, such as sequential projects (where a second phase depends on the results of the first) or high-risk, high-gain studies, a shorter duration may help to evaluate interim outcomes and reduce the risk of

unachieved objectives. This could enhance the chances of obtaining funding. In the application form, we ask researchers to justify their choices, ensuring that the proposed duration and staffing are realistic and appropriate.

Figure 1: Phases of scientific research into drug development.



What research is eligible?

Projects applying for funding in this grant round must meet the following criteria:

- **Relevance:** The research project contributes to the development of an innovative therapy for neuromuscular disorders (including drug repurposing) that targets the underlying cause and/or disease mechanism.
- **Timeliness:** The project addresses a bottleneck or crucial step in drug development and provides clear added value within the international research field.
- **Feasibility:** The project includes realistic and well-substantiated steps towards the next development phase, with a concrete end goal.
- **Project group:** The project group has the right expertise and composition to successfully execute the project.
- **Patient participation:** Patients (or their representatives) are actively involved in the design and execution of the project.
- **Impact:** The research project makes a tangible contribution to drug development and bringing promising therapies closer to patients.

Assessment

Assessment of preliminary applications

To minimise the burden on applicants, this grant round includes a preliminary selection phase. Project proposals that meet the conditions outlined in [Appendix I](#) of this guide are assessed in writing against the funding criteria mentioned above by representatives from the User Committee and the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB). Based on this assessment, it is determined which preliminary applications may be developed into full proposals.

Assessment of full applications

Full applications are assessed by international reviewers. Based on this evaluation, selected applicants are invited for an interview with the evaluation committee, which includes members of the SAB and patient representatives. During the interview, applicants have the opportunity to present their proposal, respond to feedback, and address any additional questions from the committee. Following the interviews, the committee issues a funding recommendation to the Supervisory Board and the Management Board of the Spierfonds.

For the full evaluation procedure, see [Appendix II](#) of this manual.

Deadline and budget

We invite all researchers to submit a preliminary application. The deadline for submission is Thursday, **1 October 2026, at 14:00**. Applicants can request funding between €100,000 and €350,000 for projects lasting a minimum of 1 year and a maximum of 4 years. We aim for a funding success rate of at least 40% of full applications. Depending on the grant amount requested, the Spierfonds expects to be able to fund two to three projects.



Extra research thanks to Spieren voor Spieren

Spieren voor Spieren is committed to children with a neuromuscular disease and their families. Based on the promise made during 3FM Serious Request to make more research possible into new treatments, Spieren voor Spieren is making an additional €350,000 available for this grant round. This enables the Spierfonds to make one or two extra research projects possible that otherwise would not have been possible.

For these extra projects, two additional criteria apply:

- The project relates to a neuromuscular disease that (also) occurs in children.
- The project does not make use of animal testing.

Researchers do not need to submit a separate application. All pre-applications are shared with Spieren voor Spieren. During the assessment, it is automatically checked whether a submitted project meets the above criteria. The awarding and guidance of all funded projects take place via the Spierfonds, in consultation with, or with the approval of, Spieren voor Spieren.

Timeline

The timeline is as follows:

Deadline pre-proposal	1 October 2026, 14:00
Invitation for full application	Early November 2026
Deadline full application	Late January 2027
Interview	Late April/early May 2027
Besluit	May 2027

Contact

Do you have questions about this grant round? For example, whether your research idea fits within the call? We are happy to assist. Please contact Marije Geilenkirchen via onderzoek@spierfonds.nl.

Appendix 1: Conditions

Grant applications submitted for the 'Innovative Therapies' grant round of the Prinses Beatrix Spierfonds must meet the following requirements to be considered for evaluation. In case of doubt, the Spierfonds reserves the right not to process a grant application. The decision will be made based on advice from the chair of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB). The applicant will be notified within six weeks after the submission deadline.

The applicant

- The applicant must have a PhD and hold (or will hold) a position at the institution where the project will mainly be conducted, i.e., a Dutch university, university medical centre, university of applied sciences, or KNAW institute.
- A researcher may submit only one application as lead applicant in this grant round.
- The applicant is the official point of contact for the Spierfonds during the evaluation procedure.
- One member of the project group must be employed at a [recognized expert centre for neuromuscular diseases](#) accredited by the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport (VWS).

Objective

- The project must relate to one or more of the neuromuscular disorders listed in [Appendix III](#).
- If the research concerns an exceedingly rare condition (1-40 patients in the Netherlands), the application must demonstrate that the research results are broadly applicable to the Spierfonds' target audience.
- For projects eligible for the extra funding from Spieren voor Spieren, the following applies: the project relates to a neuromuscular disease that (also) occurs in children.

The project

- A research project that has already started before the assessment by the Scientific Advisory Board has taken place is not eligible for funding.
- Most of the research project must be conducted in the Netherlands. If part of the research project takes place abroad, the Spierfonds must receive a clear proposal for this in advance.
- The Spierfonds acknowledges the necessity of using laboratory animals for scientific research. As a socially responsible organization, the Spierfonds encourages alternatives to or reduction of animal testing, following the [guidelines of the Samenwerkende Gezondheidsfondsen](#). The following conditions apply to research with animals:
 - Only research involving invertebrates and small rodents is eligible for funding. Research based on the use of large mammal species is not subsidized by the Spierfonds.
 - The development and characterization of animal models is not funded by the Spierfonds, as these may deviate too far from the diseases covered by the objectives.
 - For projects eligible for the extra funding from Spieren voor Spieren, the following applies: the project does not make use of animal testing.

The project proposal

- The (pre)application must be written in clear and understandable English. A full application must also include an accessible Dutch public summary.
- If multiple project proposals are submitted from the same department in the same grant round on the same subject, a cover letter must be submitted explaining why multiple applications have been chosen and how they relate to each other.
- If a project proposal is submitted from a department where the Spierfonds is already funding research in the same subject area, the new proposal must clearly explain how it relates to the ongoing research.
- If funding has been requested elsewhere for the research outlined in the project proposal, this must be reported to the Spierfonds, along with the outcome.

Regulations

- When drawing up the required budget, the researcher must adhere to the 'Regeling Subsidieverlening' of the Spierfonds.
- When a research proposal is granted, the 'Algemene Subsidievoorwaarden' of the Spierfonds apply.

Appendix II: Evaluation procedure 'Innovative Therapies' grant round

Evaluation of preliminary proposals

Research proposals that meet the conditions outlined in [Appendix I](#) are assessed in writing against the funding criteria (see page 3) by representatives from the User Committee and the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) of the Spierfonds. Based on this assessment, the Spierfonds determines which pre-applications may be developed further. They will receive instructions from the Spierfonds on submitting a full application.

Evaluation of full proposals

Full grant applications are evaluated substantively by at least three external experts (reviewers) on the following criteria:

- Scientific quality and feasibility
- Timeliness
- Impact
- Quality of the project team

Reviewers provide their motivated judgments in the designated evaluation form, anonymously.

Conditions for reviewers

Reviewers are non-interested parties to a grant application. The reviewer and the applicant may not have co-authored publications in the last three years. Reviewers are selected internationally, through suggestions from the applicants and online databases. A list of external reviewers from previous years who have provided well-reasoned assessments is also used.

Interviews

Based on the reviewers' assessments, a selection of applicants is invited for an interview. For this purpose, an evaluation committee is formed, consisting of members of the SAB and patient representatives. Both the applicant and the committee receive the evaluations from the reviewers in preparation for the interviews. During the interview, the applicant presents the proposed research, addresses the evaluations, and responds to additional questions from the committee. After the interviews, the evaluation committee provides a funding recommendation to the Supervisory Board and the Management Board of the Spierfonds.

Funding / rejection

The Supervisory Board and the Management Board of the Spierfonds decide on the funding and rejection of grant applications based on the funding proposal and the available budget. In case of equal suitability, the Spierfonds may resort to a lottery.

For projects eligible for the additional funding from Spieren voor Spieren, Supervisory Board and the Management Board of Spieren voor Spieren decide on whether the project will be funded.

Appendix III: Neuromuscular disorders

Motor neuron diseases

- Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)
- Polio and post-polio syndrome (PPS)
- Primary lateral sclerosis (PLS)
- Progressive spinal muscle atrophy (PSMA)
- Spinal-bulbar muscular atrophy (SBMA)
- Spinal muscular atrophy (SMA)

Peripheral nerve diseases

- Charcot Marie Tooth (CMT / HMSN)
- Chronic idiopathic axonal polyneuropathy (CIAP)
- Hereditary neuropathy with pressure palsies (HNPP)
- Small fiber neuropathy

Inflammatory neuropathies

- Chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (CIDP)
- Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS)
- MGUS polyneuropathy
- Multifocal motor neuropathy (MMN)
- Neuralgic amyotrophy (NA)

Neuromuscular junction diseases

- Congenital myasthenic syndromes
- Lambert-Eaton myasthenic syndrome (LEMS)
- Myasthenia gravis (MG)

Muscular dystrophies

- Becker muscular dystrophy (BMD)
- Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD)
- Emery-Dreifuss muscular dystrophy (EDMD)
- Facioscapulohumeral muscular dystrophy (FSHD)
- Limb-girdle muscular dystrophies (LGMD)
- Oculopharyngeal muscular dystrophy (OPMD)
- Congenital muscular dystrophies (merosin-deficient, Ullrich, dystroglycanopathy, integrin-deficient, rigid spine)

Myotonic disorders

- Myotonic dystrophy (DM)
- Non-dystrophic myotonias (Thomsen, Becker, Paramyotonia Congenita)
- Periodic paralysis (PP)

Congenital myopathies

- Brody myopathy
- Central core disease
- Myotubular myopathy/centronuclear myopathy
- Nemaline myopathy
- Distal myopathies (Miyoshi, Nonaka, Welander, Markesbery, Laing)

Inflammatory myopathies

- Dermatomyositis
- Inclusion body myositis (IBM)
- Polymyositis

Metabolic myopathies

- Glycogen storage diseases
 - Lipid storage myopathies
 - Mitochondrial myopathies
-
- Of the infectious diseases, only acute anterior poliomyelitis is eligible for funding.
 - Not eligible for funding are research into diseases resulting from trauma, diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular abnormalities, cancer, drug use, or intoxications (alcohol); diseases that are manifestations of a mental illness or disorder; unexplained conditions without an organic substrate.
 - For multisystem diseases, the grant application must demonstrate that it primarily presents a neuromuscular phenotype with muscle weakness at the forefront.