FONDATION Maladies Rares

CALL FOR PROPOSALS 2026

- TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH -

Preclinical Research in rare diseases: translational steps in large animals

Submission deadline for applications: **January 14th, 2027, 2:00 pm (CET)**

CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

Translational research bridges basic science and clinical applications to benefit patients. Within this continuum, preclinical research uses physiologically relevant models to assess the potential of promising therapeutic approaches before testing in humans.
While cells and small animal models underpin basic research, progression towards clinical application may require studies in larger animals. Despite advances such as organoids, in vitro systems cannot yet fully reproduce whole-organism physiology. Large animal models therefore remain necessary for some projects to assess therapeutic feasibility, efficacy or safety, particularly when human-like size or anatomy matters. They may also provide more informative biodistribution and toxicity data than rodents.

In this context, the Foundation for Rare Diseases is launching this call to support preclinical studies in large animals that bridge the gap towards clinical development. By enabling new disease models and therapeutic proof-of-concept testing, the call aims to bring promising approaches closer to patients with rare diseases.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This call supports scientific projects that **bridge the gap between in vivo proof of concept, usually established in rodents, and the development of clinical applications for patients**, with the ultimate aim of improving human well-being. Projects should generate essential evidence to guide further clinical development, through the creation of a specific disease model or the assessment of a therapeutic approach's relevance, feasibility, efficacy or safety for use in humans.

Key requirements:

- Projects must be supported by **validated preliminary data**.
- At this early stage towards clinical application, the **specific need for a large animal model and its relevance to human disease must be justified**. Studies in large animals must not replace research in small animal models, particularly rodents.

The project should address one or more of the following objectives:

- Improve understanding of the disease, develop a new disease model or identify a marker predictive of disease severity or progression.
- Define new clinical, biological or imaging biomarkers.

- Demonstrate the feasibility, efficacy or safety of administering a therapeutic product in a relevant large animal model.
- Conduct pilot toxicology and biodistribution studies necessary for further development of the proposed therapy.
- Contribute to technological optimisation.
- Develop new technical know-how required for the project.

Pilot toxicology and biodistribution studies are within scope; however, more extensive studies that may be required for an application to the National Agency for Medicines (ANSM, www.ansm.sante.fr) are outside the scope of this call. These may involve additional animals and experiments, including detailed biodistribution, toxicology or dose–response studies.

The application should clearly describe the **experimental protocol**, including the justification of the number of animals, technical protocols, duration of procedures, follow-up arrangements, endpoints and samples to be analysed (clinical, biochemical, histological and biological). The experimental design and conditions must be appropriate, with **achievable milestones that are clearly defined and scheduled**.
A **detailed schedule and budget (requested and additional ones) covering the entire procedure** should also be provided.

SPECIFIC CONDITIONS OF EXPERIMENTATION

Eligible animal models: this call primarily covers minipigs, pigs, sheep, dogs and non-human primates. Other animal models may also be eligible; applicants are invited to contact FFRD at aap-bio@fondation-maladiesrares.com to confirm their eligibility.

Research facilities and collaboration: experiments involving large animals must be conducted in suitable research facilities in accordance with European regulatory requirements (Directive 2010/63 and Delegated Directive 2024/1262). The experimental work must be carried out by a dedicated technological platform based in France, in close collaboration with the applicant's research team.

Platform selection: the platform should be selected according to the following criteria:
- Suitability for the project, to ensure optimal implementation by the platform.
- Expertise in the specific animal models to be used.
- Availability of the specific techniques and equipment required for the project.
- Capacity to complete the work within the proposed timeline.
- Previous publications issued from similar investigations performed by the platform.

ELIGIBILITY

Projects

Projects should address a rare disease or group of rare diseases, as defined by European criteria: a disease affecting no more than five in 10,000 people.

Rare infectious diseases, rare cancers and rare adverse drug events resulting from treatments for common diseases are outside the scope of this call. However, rare diseases associated with a predisposition to cancer, diseases involving inborn errors of immunity, and diseases involving a genetic predisposition to rare infectious disease are eligible.

Projects are expected to meet all requirements and address all aspects set out in the "Programme Description" and "Specific conditions of experimentation" sections.

Principal Investigator

The study's principal investigator must submit the project.
To be eligible, the principal investigator must be affiliated to a French research team listed in the National Directory of Research Structures (RNSR).
Early-career researchers are encouraged to apply as principal investigators. Those in non-permanent positions should be able to demonstrate, upon request, that their salary is covered for the full project duration.
Only one application per HCERES-accredited team is permitted.

FUNDING

This call provides up to100 000 € per project for a maximum duration of 24 months.

Funding is restricted to platform costs, including purchase, housing, running costs and technician costs for experiments. Costs incurred by the applicant's laboratory are not covered. FFRD funding excludes overhead costs.

The proposed budget must be realistic and fully justified. Applicants are responsible for managing the funds awarded.
Each research team may submit only one project under this call, as a maximum of one project per team will be funded.

Projects selected for funding should be submitted to the Ministry of Higher Education and Research for ethical approval. Funds will only be released once ethical approval has been obtained.

SUBMISSION AND SCHEDULE

Proposals must be submitted exclusively through the FFRD Synto online platform, which provides the application form and details of the required documents.

Please note that:

- *Before submitting a proposal, applicants and their directors must create and complete their profiles on Synto. Guidance is available in the tutorials under the platform's "Documentation" section.*
- *Technical support is available from the launch of the call until 24 hours before the submission deadline. Applicants must identify any issues in good time, as no deadline extensions will be granted after the call closes.*

- *All subsequent communications will be emailed through the FFRD Synto platform. Applicants should ensure they receive emails from "FFRD by Synto" promptly and check their Synto account regularly to track their application's progress.*

Provisional schedule:

Launch of the call	November 2026
Submission deadline for pre-proposals	January 14, 2027, 2:00 pm (CET)
Notification of results for pre-proposals	March 2027
Submission deadline for full proposals	April 8, 2027, 5:00 pm (CET)
Notification of final results	July 2027

Applicants previously funded by FFRD must have submitted all requested interim and final financeial and scientific reports to be eligible to apply for further funding.

EVALUATION

FFRD will check that submitted projects meet the administrative and budgetary eligibility requirements and are within the scope of this call. Projects that do not meet these requirements may be declared ineligible.

A dedicated Scientific Committee, comprising members of the FFRD Scientific Advisory Board and experts in the field, will select pre-proposals based on the following criteria:

- Scientific quality and ambition,
- Project organisation and implementation.

Full proposals will undergo peer review by at least two national or international academic experts in the field. The dedicated Scientific Committee will then select proposals based on the following criteria:

- Relevance and significance of the project,
- Project quality and scientific soundness,
- Feasibility of the project,
- Innovation,
- Quality of the applicant and quality of the laboratory.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING

Successful applicants must have a managing institution able to enter into a research agreement with FFRD; otherwise, funding will be forfeited. The agreement sets out the project's scientific and financial monitoring requirements and should be signed within six months of the funding decision. Implementation remains subject to approval by the relevant ethical bodies, where applicable.
Successful applicants must submit monitoring reports using the templates provided by FFRD and report on project progress whenever requested.

FAIR policy / IRDiRC policies and guidelines

By submitting a proposal, applicants commit to following the FAIR guiding principles for scientific data management and stewardship.
The objectives of the call are in line with the objectives of the International Rare Diseases Research Consortium (IRDiRC). Applicants are expected to follow IRDiRC policies and guidelines.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Applicants must clearly disclose any use of artificial intelligence to write all or part of their proposal.

COMMUNICATION

Applicants must consent to public disclosure of funded projects' titles and non-confidential abstracts, along with the names and affiliations of the principal investigator, including publication on the FFRD website.

ACKNOLEDGEMENT POLICY

Applicants must acknowledge FFRD funding in all project-related communications (posters, oral presentations, scientific publications, etc.) using "Foundation For Rare Diseases" or "Fondation Maladies Rares" and/or the FFRD logo, available upon request. Publication references must be emailed to aap-bio@fondation-maladiesrares.com.

CONTACT

Please contact aap-bio@fondation-maladiesrares.com with any questions relating to this call.