8.3: Grant types

The type of support needed for an intervention trial depends on the personal and institutional circumstances of the applicants. For example, an applicant in a tenured position in an academic institution may not require salary support but just need direct and indirect research project costs for equipment, staff, materials, and administrative costs. If the principal applicant is not in a salaried position, salary support will be needed, in which case, for some funding agencies, a fellowship may be an appropriate avenue of support.

3.1 Project and programme grants

In the parlance of many funding agencies, a project grant is for a specific piece of work to answer just one or two specific questions, usually for a period of about 3 years. It may be, for example, a clinical trial to test the safety of a drug in its early development phase. A programme grant is for a larger, more complex set of studies to answer several related questions and is often for 5–7 years. A clinical trial may sometimes form part of an application for programme grant support. Some agencies may not support project or programme grants but only fellowships, or vice versa, so it is important to check this early.

Once a grant has been awarded, in most cases, funds are released on a yearly basis, taking into account technical progress and financial implementation. Estimating the cost of a project can be a very complicated exercise, especially with respect to indirect costs associated with the study. These aspects are discussed in Chapter 18.

3.2 Personal fellowships

Personal fellowships are for researchers who do not have a salaried, tenured, or substantive 'permanent' position. Fellowship applicants request for their personal salary, in addition to partial or complete research costs. Many agencies
have programmes to support scientists throughout their career, from the Masters/PhD stage through one or more intermediate phases where they establish their independence, and finally to senior levels.

3.3 Special initiatives

Investigators should be on the lookout for special initiatives such as calls for support to conduct a trial on a particular topic. When there is a special initiative, research proposals are competing within a smaller specified area of science, and applicants are likely to be reviewed by people who work in roughly the same subject area.

It is not unusual that large clinical trials are conducted as a collaborative effort. For example, vaccine trials might have to be conducted in multiple sites and countries where there are significant differences in population structure, host genetic factors, public health systems, environment, and prevalence of co-infections. In this case, it may be important to collaborate and coordinate approaches to more than one funding agency.