FAILSAFE Applicant Guidance

A principal aim of the FAILSAFE Network is to accelerate research and innovation to combat fungal antimicrobial resistance (fungal AMR), with direct relevance to low and middle-income countries (LMICs).

To achieve this aim, we have funding available to support grants for pump-priming projects. These will typically be for seed-corn projects (up to £75k), mid-range projects (£75,000k- £350,000) that support innovative R&D mitigating the consequences of fungal AMR with tangible products and solutions. The final decision on the number of smaller/larger projects to be supported will be made on the quality of the proposals received, the funding available and how closely they are aligned with themes of the programme.

FAILSAFE reserves the right to take a portfolio approach to projects, to ensure as many themes as possible are addressed. All projects will need to consider access and affordability in LMIC settings, how their research will be developed and employed at point of care.

Typically, projects will be expected to last up to 12 months in duration. Funding awarded will be as follows:

- **Seedcorn projects – up to £75,000.** UK academic institutions funded at 100% Direct Costs only, other institutions at 100% fEC
- **Mid to large projects – from £75,000 to £250,000.** UK academic institutions funded at 80% fEC, other institutions at 100% fEC

The purpose of these project funds is to promote new collaborations, **in particular involving and/or for the benefit of LMIC countries**, resulting in the preliminary data necessary to attract further, more substantial, funding leading to long-lasting and beneficial partnerships that address the problem of antifungal resistance. **Applications from early career researchers and co-funded projects (with co-funding from another source) are particularly encouraged.**

Membership of the FAILSAFE Network is a prerequisite when applying for these funds. The lead applicant is required to be a member of the network, and it is strongly encouraged that all co-applicants are also members (for FREE membership apply **here**). Applications will be scored according to their scientific merit (60%, including quality of the project and research people & environment), facilitation of cross-network collaborations (20%, especially involving LMIC partners) and strategic impact for the Network (20%, including research impact and routes to further funding).

Please note that all projects in the second round must start by no later than 01/09/2025, with funds available from 11/08/2025.

Applications should be made using the relevant application form available on the website (or Expression of Interest form for mid-range and larger projects in the first instance) and, in addition to the points raised above, projects will be prioritised against the following criteria (equally weighted):

- Projects that advance the ability to tackle the global challenge of fungal antimicrobial resistance (fungal AMR).
- The generation of novel partnerships between UK and LMIC partners (applications where the lead applicant is LMIC based are strongly encouraged in this round of funding).
- The generation of novel partnerships between research and industry partners worldwide
- The generation of novel LMIC-LMIC and LMIC-HIC partnerships.
- Projects that involve partnerships between diverse network members, particularly those that include partners from LMICs and industry.
- Projects that demonstrate a clear plan as to how the partnership will grow and be competitive for further funding – EXCEPTIONALLY, well-defined short-term projects will be considered.
- Projects that demonstrate that research governance is already in place (e.g. collaboration agreements / intellectual property (IP) considerations).
- Projects that target exploratory, pre-clinical and clinical transitional bottlenecks.
- Projects that develop tangible products and solutions with the aim of developing new preventative and therapeutic approaches.

All awardees will be required to submit narrative and financial reports at the project mid and end points (e.g. 6 and 12 months for a 12-month project). For projects over £75,000, additional reporting will be required in line with milestone targets and proposed aligned payments. FAILSAFE will publish non-confidential information relating to successful projects on our website – please refer to our Privacy Policy.

All successful awards will be subject to the acceptance of our non-negotiable Terms and Conditions – we would encourage all applicants to discuss these with the relevant departments in their institution and with any co-applicants at an early stage to avoid delays in award acceptance and initiation of the projects.

Please refer to our Frequently Asked Questions for further information.

Any queries regarding the application process should be sent to FAILSAFE@exeter.ac.uk.

Details

1. Funding eligibility

1.1. Applicants: Lead applicants must be members of the FAILSAFE Network (for FREE membership apply **here**), with co-applicants strongly encouraged to apply. Applications that are LMIC led and/or involve LMIC co-applicants, industry led and/or involve industry co-applicants, Early Career Researchers (ECR) led and/or involve ECR co-applicants are particularly encouraged.

1.2. Value of grant: Project awards will be within one of these two categories:

- Seedcorn funding -up to £75k
- Mid to large funding - £75,000k - £250,000

Funding will typically cover a maximum 12-month period for the duration of projects, however, exceptionally, we will consider funding larger projects for a longer period (this level of funding will require a strong case within the 'Resource Justification' section of the application form).

Projects should be costed on a full economic cost (fEC) basis. **Please note**, for academic institutions based in the UK FAILSAFE will award funding at 100% direct costs only for seedcorn projects (up to £75 k). Mid to large projects will be funded at 80% FEC for academic institutions based in the UK (with the remaining 20% contribution to FEC to be covered by their institution) For all other institutions, including applicants based in industry and LMIC countries all projects will be funded at 100% fEC (the list of LMIC countries is subject to change by the OECD).

1.3. LMIC funding: Research must be LMIC-relevant. A list of LMIC countries can be found here; all listed countries are eligible but please note that the list of LMIC countries is subject to change by the OECD.

1.4. Scope/activities supported: All projects must be within the scope of the FAILSAFE Network and its remit (further information on this can be found on our website). Eligible costs include direct salaries (costed on a fEC basis, as described above), consumables, animal purchase & housing, sample shipment. Some travel costs for visits between collaborators are allowed if justifiable; costs stated must be reasonable and via economy class only. VAT is allowable when applicable. Costs must be in Great British Pounds (GBP). Total project funding requested must not exceed the maximum value allowed (see **section 1.2**). Total duration of the project must not exceed 12 months (exceptions apply), and all projects must start no later than 01/09/2025, with funds available from 11/08/2025.

1.5. Activities not supported: Research outside the FAILSAFE objectives and remit; research that will not deliver outputs/outcomes that are primarily of benefit to LMICs; research that does not target antifungal resistance; projects from non-members of FAILSAFE; PhD studentships; large equipment purchase (**over £5,000 per item**); projects without collaboration between two or more institutions;

2. Application process

All successful awards will be subject to the acceptance of our **non-negotiable** **Terms and Conditions** - we would encourage all applicants to discuss these with the relevant departments in their institution and their co-applicants at an early stage to avoid delays in award acceptance and initiation of the project. Furthermore, collaboration agreements must be formalised prior to the commencement of the project, contingent upon the award being granted. Preparatory measures for these agreements should be established in advance.

This will be FAILSAFE's second round of project funding. The current application timeline can be found on our web page here. **There are two routes required for applications:**

1) For seedcorn funding (up to £75,000) please complete the application form as directed. Seedcorn projects do not need to fill in the Expression of Interest form.

2) For mid to large projects (£75,000 - £250,000) **please complete an Expression of Interest (EoI)** form first by 14/03/2025 and await a response from FAILSAFE prior to full application. This will enable FAILSAFE to check eligibility against criteria, request relevant further information, and gauge if the proposed funding is appropriate before the application stage progresses.

Please adhere to the **word limits** where stated. Ensure you complete **all sections** and make clear the **importance and impact of your project** to tackling antifungal resistance, how the research will deliver **outputs/outcomes** that will primarily be of **benefit to LMICs**, how the project aligns to **addressing the global fungal AMR challenge** and your **future plans** to secure follow-on funding to take your research forward. Make sure you submit all the required supporting documents (listed on the application form). The requirement to complete the **Due Diligence Questionnaire is mandatory** and should be **completed in English**.

The application form and supporting documents must be submitted via the online submission process on our website by the closing date. You will receive acknowledgement of your application within seven working days. Please review your application thoroughly before submission to confirm that it meets all specified requirements outlined above. Additionally, ensure that your budget is accurate and complete.

Proposals should align with at least one of the following themes:

- ***Microbial Pathogenesis:*** This theme focusses on host-pathogen interactions as drivers of pathogen and immune adaptation, including co-infection and the impact of therapeutic or prophylactic interventions; and analyses of immunological basis of host protection or susceptibility in humans and animals. This includes work on understanding and overcoming pathogen antimicrobial resistance mechanisms. The focus of the work performed under this theme should be on product and solution development, with the aim of developing new preventative (e.g. vaccines) and therapeutic approaches (including combination therapies, immunotherapies) to combat antifungal drug resistance. This research must target pre-clinical and clinical transitional bottlenecks that will meaningfully assist in the development of such approaches.

- ***Biomarkers and Diagnostics:*** This theme focuses on identifying new biomarkers for fungal infections, including new diagnostic tools that will improve diagnosis and/or the targeted management of fungal infections, as well as identifying biomarkers to monitor the host response to therapy (prognostic biomarkers).

- ***Innovative platforms:*** There is a paucity of data and evidence on fungal infections and fungal AMR. This theme involves the creation of innovative new platforms and systems, including AI,

that enable the integration of both clinical data (including antifungal use) and laboratory data (including antifungal susceptibility) from different medical centres throughout LMICs. It is envisaged that such system innovations would help optimize diagnostic tools to identify the causative fungus, as well as its susceptibility pattern, and help create connectivity between, regional, national and international databases.

- ***One Health:*** This theme is aimed at developing products or solutions to improve health against fungal infections in LIMCs through the creation of interdisciplinary R&D networks. This includes work that focuses on the interconnections among animal health, environmental and climatic changes as factors contributing to human infection. This also includes the development of products or solutions that enable monitoring or prevention of zoonotic transmission of fungi to human hosts and of understanding environmental conditions that may impact antifungal drug resistance. The impact of climate change of fungal pathogenicity and human health is of particular interest in this theme. Other tangible outputs from this theme could include the development of new policy as well as publications that document new theories of change (position pieces) and best practice etc.

3. Application Review

The current application timeline can be found on our website.

All applications received will go to the FAILSAFE Peer Review Panel (PRP) for competitive assessment. PRP members will review and score applications using a standard template. Applications will be scored according to their scientific merit (60%, including quality of the project and research people & environment), facilitation of cross- network collaborations (20%, especially with LMIC partners - applications where the applicant is LMIC based, industry based and/or an early career researcher or are co-funded from another source are strongly encouraged) and strategic impact for the Network (20%, including research impact and routes to further funding). A list of PRP members is available here. PRP members do not input into discussions about an application where they have a conflict of interest (see below for details on conflicts of interest). PRP members may co-opt external members if required.

Following a review of all applications, a ranked list will be used to select applications for funding. Quorum for the review meeting is the PRP Chair and Co-chair plus 5; the PRP Chair will accept written reviews from members who cannot attend the meeting.

All information submitted is held in strictest confidence and will be retained in accordance with our Privacy Policy; all PRP members have signed a confidentiality agreement as a requirement of their committee participation.

4. Conflict of Interest

Examples of a conflict of interest include PRP members that are:

- Employed by the same institution as the applicant(s).
- Actively involved in research collaborations with the applicants(s).

- Working closely with the applicant(s), for example as a co-author or PhD Supervisor, or has worked closely in the last 4 years.
- Holding a current position on the governing body of or an honorary position within the institution(s) of the applicant(s)
- In receipt of personal remuneration in excess of £5,000 per annum from the applicant's organisation.
- Personal/family relationship with the applicant(s).

5. Notification of Review Results

Successful projects will be sent award letters confirming the funds available within 3 weeks of the PRP decision. Funding in this round will be available from **11/08/2025** and all projects must start within 1 month of the proposed start date provided on the application form but no later than **01/09/2025**. To comply with the strict timelines, it is advised that any contractual requirements/issues between collaborators and co-applicants are discussed prior to grant submission.

Notifications of award for this round will be made no later than **30/06/2025**.

All successful awards will be subject to the acceptance of our non-negotiable Terms and Conditions. Unsuccessful applicants will be informed as soon as possible, and the FAILSAFE Admin Team may pass on specific feedback if available although this is not compulsory.

6. Post-award Administration

The University of Exeter will issue an award letter contract with the non-negotiable Terms and Conditions of Award for the awardee; projects may not start until this contract has been fully executed and applicants are given a maximum of 1 month to return the signed documentation. The actual project start date must be confirmed to the FAILSAFE Admin Team at FAILSAFE@exeter.ac.uk.

Before a project can start, as well as ensuring the Terms and Conditions of Award have been brought to the attention of the relevant department within your institution, applicants must consider whether a collaboration agreement is required for the project. If required, collaboration agreements must be in place before the project starts. As stated in the criteria listed in the summary section above, projects which already have these in place will be looked at favourably during the review process.

Funds must be spent as detailed in the application. Awardees are required to submit a short narrative and financial reports at the project mid and end points (e.g. 6 and 12 months for a 12-month project) – a reporting template will be supplied. These mandatory reports must be submitted to the FAILSAFE Admin Team as per the dates specified in the contract agreement.

Payment will be made as follows:

- Seedcorn projects: 50% at project initiation (once the actual project start date has been confirmed to us), 30% on approval of the midpoint interim project report, 20% on approval of the end of project report (all reports are mandatory).
- Mid to large projects: A starting amount will be decided based on individual applications. Subsequent payments will be made upon the achievement of stated milestones, as well as approval of the mandatory reports.

- Payment will be for **actual expenditure** up to the value agreed in the original award letter. Funding will be awarded at 80% fEC for academic institutions based in the UK (with the remaining 20% of their project costs match funded by their institution) and at 100% fEC for all other institutions, including applicants based in industry and LMIC countries.

FAILSAFE does not require receipts to be submitted but these **must** be kept by the host institution as they may be required for future audits. The awardee's host institution must follow their standard procedures for financial accounts. Any underspend on grants must be returned to FAILSAFE.

Awardees are required to submit their project's results for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, or as a case-study, adhering to open access requirements as set out in the Terms and Conditions of Award.

A non-confidential lay summary of the project's outcomes, taken from the final report, will be published on the FAILSAFE website and in other publicity in accordance with our Privacy Policy.

7. Publicising Outputs and Data Protection

Successful projects will be listed on the FAILSAFE website and in other promotional literature, with a non-confidential abstract outlining the work proposed, as well as updates with regard to information provided within the interim and final reports. All information will be used in accordance with our Privacy Policy, which also includes details of our document retention policy.

Any publications, outputs or downstream funding must acknowledge the funds awarded by the UK Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) as part of the Global AMR Innovation Fund (GAMRIF), through the MRC CMM FAILSAFE project at the University of Exeter, in accordance with the Terms and Conditions of Award.

Copies of applications will be made available to the FAILSAFE PRP who will use information provided for reviewing the proposal and post-award administration. PRP members may co-opt external members if required. FAILSAFE may choose to publish further non-confidential details of awards, awardees, and information about successful projects, in accordance with our Privacy Policy.

FAILSAFE's core funding comes from the DHSC, so to meet the DHSC's obligations for public accountability and the dissemination of information, non-confidential details of awards may also be made available on the DHSC and other publicly available databases, and in reports, documents and mailing lists.

8. Use of Human Samples or Data

FAILSAFE expects all research involving human participants to be undertaken in accordance with UKRI policies and guidance available from https://www.ukri.org/publications/mrc-guidance-for-applicants/ethics-and-approvals/#section-using-human-samples-. These include:

- Good Research Practice (2012)

- Medical research involving adults who cannot consent (2007)
- Medical Research Involving Children (2004)
- Human Tissue and Biological Samples for Use in Research (2014)
- Personal Information in Medical Research (2000).

Independent Research Ethics Committee approval is required for research that involves human participants (whether patients or healthy volunteers) or records. Such approval is also required for certain studies of human tissues.

In the case of social science research, FAILSAFE recommends that award holders follow the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (revised 2015) which highlights the responsibility of the research organisation for ensuring that the research is subject to appropriate ethics review.

Research involving human participants in developing societies presents specific ethical challenges and the MRC guidelines Research Involving Human Participants in Developing Societies must be followed.

Award holders whose research involves the removal, use or storage of human tissue as specified in the relevant legislation must:

- Comply with the appropriate legislation, i.e. the Human Tissue Act 2004 and/or the Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006
- Follow the relevant standards and Codes of Practice issued by the Human Tissue Authority (HTA) (the MRC Regulatory Support Centre has summarised these).
- Follow the MRC guidance detailed in Human Tissue and Biological Samples for Use in medical Research (2014).

For research taking place outside the UK, in addition to UK guidelines, local national guidelines and international best practice must be followed. All legal requirements for the import/export of biological materials must be adhered to. The lead applicant is responsible for ensuring that co-applicants and collaborators adhere to all relevant ethics requirements.

9. Use of Animals

FAILSAFE supports the principles of the 3Rs (Replacement, Reduction and Refinement). Award holders are expected to abide by the core principles set out in the cross-funder guidance 'Responsibility in the use of animals in bioscience research: Expectations of the major research councils and charitable funding bodies' and GC2 of the RCUK Terms and Conditions. If the research involves the use of animals (rodents, rabbits, sheep, goats, pigs, cattle xenopus) overseas, rather than in the UK, you should also complete the appropriate additional questions on the use of [species] overseas' forms, and submit it with your application. **If your application includes animals not listed here, please complete the form for pigs and tailor to your specific circumstances.**

The standards and principles of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 must be observed. All FAILSAFE awards are made on the absolute condition that no work that is controlled by the Act will begin until the necessary licences have been obtained from the Home Office (or equivalent body if work is outside the UK). When animals are purchased from commercial suppliers, in-country suppliers should be used wherever possible, to minimise the risk of suffering during transport. All research

involving non-human primates must comply with the NC3Rs Guidelines: Primate accommodation, care and use. The lead applicant is responsible for ensuring that co-applicants adhere to all relevant ethics requirements.

10. Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)

National regulations and international best practice must be followed. Researchers who carry out genetic modification should be familiar with the legislative requirements and with the Scientific Advisory Committee on Genetic Modification (Contained Use) guidance.

11. Dangerous Pathogens

Research organisations accommodating projects involving the use of dangerous pathogens must comply with appropriate local and national regulations and safeguarding.

12. Useful Resources

- FAILSAFE FAQs
- FAILSAFE Terms and Conditions
- List of LMIC countries (all countries listed count as LMIC) ** This list is subject to update by the OECD
- NIHR and UK Government information on Official Development Assistance (ODA) Guidance
- FAILSAFE Privacy Policy
- FAILSAFE Network Membership
- FAILSAFE Governance