



Request for Proposal (RFP) for Collecting and evaluating animal models in mental health science and building an online resource for researchers

1. RFP Background & Objectives

Major breakthroughs in health research have relied on the use of animal models to investigate mechanisms and develop or test new therapies. As a research funder, Wellcome supports the use of animals in research if researchers can show that it is legally, ethically and scientifically justified.

While scientists in fields such as neurodegenerative disease research have evaluated and indexed animal models in a freely and easily accessible manner, this is not the case for mental health science.^[1] The mental health field faces many challenges in finding and using models that will aid in the goals of better understanding of mental health problems and the development of new treatments for anxiety, depression, and psychosis. These challenges include the lack of biomarkers, and the imperfect fit of animal behaviours onto the complex clusters of symptoms and experiences that constitute mental health diagnoses.

A recent report commissioned by Wellcome, *Harnessing the potential of cellular, animal and computational neuroscience models for mental health*,^[2] noted that:

“there is a widespread belief in a pressing need to improve how we employ preclinical animal models if we want to advance our understanding of mental health conditions and foster improved translation from the laboratory to the clinic... while current animal models have some critical shortcomings in how they recapitulate key features of anxiety, depression and psychosis, tangible opportunities to advance translatability exist”.

Recognising these challenges and opportunities, we would like to identify a supplier who can carry out a project in two phases with the aim of producing **a reliable, free-to-use, online library of the most useful behavioural or transgenic animal models and assays in depression, anxiety, and psychosis.**

^[1] <https://www.alzforum.w/research-models>

^[2]

https://wellcome.figshare.com/articles/online_resource/Harnessing_the_potential_of_cellular_animal_and_computational_neuroscience_models_for_mental_health/24321751/1

The two phases consist of:

Collecting and evaluating information on current behavioural animal models and assays. The aim of this **first phase** is identifying and providing a concise critique of the salient features, strengths, and disadvantages of the most useful model/assay combinations. “Most useful” in this context means the combinations of model and assay that are most likely to provide useful information about a specific analogous human mental health condition or symptom. Results obtained in animal studies using these model/assay combinations have the highest



likelihood of predicting successful translation of new pharmacological and non-pharmacological therapies to human beings.

We anticipate that this list may include model/assay combinations corresponding to categories such as clinical diagnoses, specific symptoms, or genetic risk factors. However, if the supplier recommends prioritising one specific category (e.g., symptoms rather than diagnoses), or expanding the remit of the project by suggesting new categories, we are keen to hear their proposal for doing so. We envisage a list of up to 5 “most useful” model/assay combinations **in each category** that will accurately predict the success of new treatments in human beings.

This **first phase** of the work is not intended as an exhaustive process of cataloguing every behavioural model/assay combination in use, but as a judicious selection and evaluation of the most useful models.

The **second phase** of this project is dependent on the extent, quality and utility of information gathered in the first phase. It would consist of building a freely-accessible web platform to help researchers select the animal model(s) most likely to yield results that will be valid when translated to human studies; disseminating information about the platform to encourage use; and devising a sustainability plan.

This contract may apply to either new startup projects, or as an extension of pre-existing work in this area, provided our deliverable requirements are met. We also welcome alternative suggestions as to how this project could be designed and would encourage collaboration between different research groups in order to achieve our aim: **to make it easier for researchers to select behavioural or transgenic animal model/assay combinations that will accurately predict the success of new treatments in human beings.**

2. RFP Specification

This section sets out the specification for this RFP. Suppliers should use this section to fully understand Wellcome’s requirements and to inform their response.

We anticipate a timescale of 2–3 years for this project, including dissemination. We have not set a specific budget at this point and will be guided by the supplier as to what is a reasonable budget for this activity as we do not want limit ambition or innovation. We will consider value for money when evaluating proposals but would encourage suppliers to be realistic and comprehensive when costing this project, including VAT at 20%.

2.1 Project Plan

Within a one month timeframe: We will require a detailed project plan detailing work packages, detailed costing, and finalised Gantt charts. This should be presented in Word and PDF formats, and no more than 15 pages in length.



2.2 Project Outputs

Progress towards these outputs should be detailed in quarterly reports of one page per work package, detailing progress, challenges, and troubleshooting plans, as well as any significant alterations to the overall project plan. We will also require additional reports at the end of the “indexing and evaluation of current models” phase to support a collaborative dialogue with Wellcome, evaluating whether or not the balance of evidence is in favour of the decision to produce a public-facing web platform. We will also require regular MS Teams or in-person check-ins with Wellcome to monitor progress.

2.2.1 Information gathering and evaluation of current models/assays (12–18 months)

We require suppliers to gather, prioritise, and evaluate information on current animal models/assays utilised in research into anxiety, depression, and psychosis. Our proposed remit is set out in section 1 of this RFP (Background and objectives); however we are open to alternative proposals.

Suppliers should develop a clear protocol, detailing justification for inclusion criteria and evaluation methodology. We encourage suppliers to utilise innovative methods to extract and analyse these data, including the use of AI if appropriate. These data should be systematically organised and securely stored in a form that will ultimately allow easy search and retrieval in an online, user-friendly database. We envisage a list of up to 5 “most useful” model/assay combinations in each category that will accurately predict the success of new treatments in human beings.

At the conclusion of this phase, we require a summary report including a full and frank evaluation of the successes and challenges of the project up to this point, including a recommendation on whether the current state of the field is such that an online platform making the information gathered and evaluated in this project would provide substantial benefit to the field. We may at this stage invite peer review of project progress and outputs.

2.2.2 Building, testing, troubleshooting, and development of “library of models” platform (12–18 months)

These deliverables represent the beginning of the second phase of this project. We require suppliers to build a freely-accessible web platform that will allow researchers to access the information collected, indexed, and evaluated in the first phase of the project. This website should be user-friendly, built in accordance with [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#), and stably and securely hosted. We require suppliers to test and evaluate the usability and reliability of this platform prior to launch. The website must be available for Wellcome and external experts appointed by Wellcome to inspect and evaluate at least three months prior to launch.

2.2.3 Dissemination activities and sustainability plan (3–6 months prior to website launch)

We require suppliers to produce and execute a package of dissemination activities, potentially including but not necessarily limited to: webinars, social media, scientific journals



and other print and online media, and conference symposia. This should include clear communication on the methodology of the project and the evidence base of the platform.

This plan should be delivered as a document of no more than seven pages up to three months before website launch, of which two pages should summarise a strategy for future maintenance, updating, and sustainability of the web platform, including approximate costs.

2.2.4 Project evaluation document and sustainability plan

At the conclusion of the project, we will require a document of no more than 15 pages evaluating the success and challenges of both phases of the project. This should include details of the impact of dissemination activities, and initial figures regarding website usage.

2.3 Lived experience engagement

We expect the supplier to actively, meaningfully and ethically involve and collaborate with people with lived experience expertise in the design and delivery of the project, as relevant to the deliverables. Lived experience expertise has been involved in shaping this RfP, and it is essential to support the development and evaluation of future animal model research.

We understand lived experience as a unique form of knowledge, insight, and expertise, that comes from having experience of mental health challenges. When we refer to 'people with lived experience' or 'lived experience experts' we are referring to people who identify as having experienced anxiety, depression or psychosis broadly defined, either in the past or currently.

For the purposes of this project, we are open to any methods of collaboration and roles the supplier chooses for lived experience experts to be embedded in this project. For further guidance and examples on how to involve lived experience expertise in mental health science research projects, please see this link [Embedding lived experience in mental health research | Funding Guidance | Wellcome](#)

3. RFP Timetable

| # | Activity | Responsibility | Date |
|----------|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | RFP issued on Contract Opportunities webpage | Wellcome | 15 August 2024 |
| 2 | Submission of Expression of Interest and Supplier Q&A | Supplier | 09:00hrs BST 21 August 2024 |
| 3 | Return of Supplier Q&A to Suppliers | Wellcome | 29 August 2024 |
| 4 | Submission of RFP Response | Supplier | 09:00hrs BST 24 September 2024 |
| 5 | RFP Evaluation Period | Wellcome | 25 September 2024 to 04 October 2024 |



| | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| 6 | Supplier Presentations | Supplier | 11 October 2024 to 15 October 2024 |
| 7 | Notification of Contract Award | Wellcome | End October 2024 |
| 8 | Contract Negotiation | Wellcome & Supplier | November 2024 |
| 9 | Contract Start Date | Wellcome & Supplier | December 2024/ January 2025 |

4. Response Format

The following headers support the timetable by providing further detail of the key steps.

Expression of Interest and Supplier Q&A

Suppliers are asked to submit a short expression of interest by e-mail to the Wellcome contact in accordance with the RFP timetable, which should contain the following information.

- Confirming whether you are an organisation or individual
- If an organisation please provide registered name, address, and registration number.
- A non-binding cost estimate as a single figure in GBP
- Any questions you have about the exercise and activity

Prior to the submission of your full proposal to the RFP, Suppliers are provided the opportunity to submit any questions they have about the exercise and the activity. All questions will be collated, anonymised, answered and returned to all Suppliers who have submitted an expression of interest in the RFP process. Please make sure you ask all questions at this stage. Once Wellcome have responded to all questions if you have any additional questions after this deadline these will not be answered to ensure that this is a fair and equitable process.

Submitting an EOI/Q&A is not a binding commitment to submit a full proposal should your organisational priorities change, you will not then be penalised for future opportunities.

RFP Response

Suppliers submitting a full proposal should cover the following areas in their response:

| # | Question | Max (Words) |
|---|----------|-------------|
|---|----------|-------------|



| Team | | |
|-----------------|--|------|
| 1 | Provide a brief overview of your organisation, including the relevant expertise and experience that will be involved in this programme. | 150 |
| 2 | Evidence of your track record, including specific case studies where you have successfully provided similar or relevant services to those described in this RFP. | 350 |
| Approach | | |
| 3 | Describe the proposed approach to address the requirements of this RFP, including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure – how you will structure the project such that it stays focused, and delivers the required material efficiently to the highest standards. Please detail specifics of work packages, and how they will work together, including a diagram • Expertise – what expertise you will involve in the project, and where this will be sourced • Lived experience expertise in mental health – how you will involve people with lived experience across multiple project stages • Programme governance – including your plans for the declaration and management of conflicts of interest, as well as engagement with Wellcome • Context – How does your proposal take account of and extend on current work in this field? | 1000 |
| 4 | Highlight any risks or challenges you foresee in meeting the requirements of this RFP, along with any proposed mitigations. Please present this as a table. | N/A |
| 5 | Provide an overview of the stages and timeframes in which you propose to meet the | N/A |



| | | |
|----------------------|--|--------------------------|
| | RFP requirements (for example, as a Gantt chart). | |
| Costs | | |
| 7 | Please provide a proposed breakdown and justification of programme costs and resources. | 400 |
| 8 | Please also complete the attached budget template published alongside this RFP. | N/A; see budget template |
| Accessibility | | |
| 9 | All our content should be WCAG 2.2. AAA compliant. Any documents being provided to Wellcome must pass accessibility requirements. If you are unable to produce accessible documents, budget must be set aside to employ a suitable agency to do this work. | [N/A] |

Evaluation Criteria

| Assessment Criteria | Weighting |
|--|------------------|
| How well the proposal meets the RFP specification. | 45% |
| Track record and expertise of the potential Supplier. | 25% |
| Strength of the proposed plans for including people with lived experience expertise. | 20% |
| Value for money. | 5% |
| Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. | 5% |
| Total | 100% |

Contract Feedback

This section allows Suppliers to provide specific feedback to the contractual agreement which will be used should their proposal be successful. This is the suppliers' opportunity to provide negotiation points on Wellcome's terms and conditions.

Wellcome will not consider negotiations that are raised in your response to this proposal, i.e., after the contract has been awarded so as not to delay the contracting process. Please



ensure you engage with a relevant legal contact if applicable. Contract feedback is to be incorporated into your proposal as an annex and in the following format.

| Clause # | Issue | Proposed Solution/Comment |
|----------|-------|---------------------------|
| | | |

Suppliers submitting proposals as a registered company should review Wellcome's Standard terms and Conditions [document](#).

Individuals submitting proposals as a sole trader (not registered) should review this [document](#).

Individuals submitting proposals through their own personal services company please highlight this to the Wellcome contact immediately (see point 6 below).

Data Protection

Wellcome is committed to upholding data protection principles and protecting your information. The [Wellcome privacy statement](#) explains how, and on what legal basis, we collect, store, and use personal information about you. This includes any information you provide in relation to this proposal.

Under UK Data Protection law, Wellcome must keep a record of all personal information it is processing (i.e., collecting, using, and sharing). This record will be made available to the Information Commissioner's Office upon request. This is Wellcome's record of data processing activities which meets UK [GDPR article 30](#) requirements.

Suppliers will be asked to complete the [TPSRA2](#) assessment before presentation stage for Wellcome to assess how you handle data.

Supplier Presentations

Following a submission of the proposal successful proposals will invited to a virtual meeting which will last 50 minutes in total and will be a PowerPoint presentation followed by questions and answers session.

5. About Wellcome

Wellcome improves health for everyone by funding research, leading policy and advocacy campaigns, and building global partnerships. Collaborative research that involves a diverse range of people from different fields of interest is key to progress in health science – and to achieving our aim of fostering a healthier, happier, world. We're taking on the biggest health challenges facing humanity – climate and health, infectious disease, and mental health – to find urgent solutions and accelerate preventions. Find out more about Wellcome and our work at: wellcome.org.

6. Prospective Suppliers Personnel - IR35 and Off Payroll Working Rules



Before the RFP response deadline, Prospective Suppliers must make the Wellcome Contact aware if they are intending to submit a proposal where the services will be provided by any individuals who are engaged by the Prospective Supplier via an intermediary i.e.

- Where the Prospective Supplier is an individual contracting through their own personal services company; or
- The Prospective Supplier is providing individuals engaged through intermediaries, for the purposes of the IR35 off-payroll working rules.

7. Equity Diversity and Inclusion

Embracing [diversity and inclusion](#) is fundamental to delivering our mission to improve health, and we are committed to cultivating a fair and healthy environment for the people who work here and those we work with. We want to cultivate an inclusive and diverse culture, and as we learn more about barriers that disadvantage certain groups from progressing in our workplace, we will remove them.

Wellcome takes diversity and inclusion seriously, and we want to partner with suppliers who share our commitment. We may ask you questions related to D&I as part of our RFP processes.

8. Accessibility

Wellcome is committed to ensuring that our RFP exercises are accessible to everyone. If you have a disability or a chronic health condition, we can offer adjustments to the response format e.g., submitting your response in an alternate format. For support during the RFP exercise, contact the Wellcome Contact.

If, within the proposed outputs of this RFP exercise, specific adjustments are required by you or your team which incur additional cost then outline them clearly within your commercial response. Wellcome is committed to evaluating all proposals fairly and will ensure any proposed adjustment costs sit outside the commercial evaluation.

All our content should be WCAG 2.2. AAA compliant. Any documents being provided to Wellcome must pass accessibility requirements. If you are unable to produce accessible documents, budget must be set aside to employ a suitable agency to do this work.

9. Independent Proposal

By submission of a proposal, prospective Suppliers warrant that the prices in the proposal have been arrived at independently, without consultation, communication, agreement or understanding for the purpose of restricting competition, as to any matter relating to such prices, with any other potential supplier or with any competitor.

10. Funding



For the avoidance of doubt, the output of this RFP exercise will be funded as a **Contract** and not as a Grant.

11. Costs Incurred by Prospective Suppliers

It should be noted that this document relates to a Request for Proposal only and not a firm commitment from Wellcome to enter into a contractual agreement. In addition, Wellcome will not be held responsible for any costs associated with the production of a response to this Request for Proposal.

12. Environmental sustainability

Wellcome is playing its part tackling the climate crisis through its mission-driven Climate & Health strategic programme.

In addition, our [Sustainability programme](#) aims to address the environmental impacts and carbon emissions of our activities and operations.

Our suppliers have a key part to play delivering on our sustainability ambitions.

We expect all our suppliers to take active steps to:

- Address their environmental impacts, for instance as part of a certified Environmental Management System.
- Reduce the carbon emissions of their products and services, for instance by adopting Science-Based targets and plans to deliver them.
- Embed environmental considerations in the sourcing and delivery of goods and services to Wellcome, across all stages of their life cycle.

13. Wellcome Contact Details

The single point of contact within this RFP exercise for all communications is as indicated below;

Name: Rebecca Giles
Pronouns: She/ her
Role: Procurement Officer
Email: RFP@wellcome.org