

WE & ME  
Foundation

WE&ME  
EMERGING LEADER  
AWARD

CALL SPECIFICATIONS



[weandmecfs.org](http://weandmecfs.org)

# CALL FACTS

## About the Award

The WE&ME Emerging Leader Award recognises outstanding early-career researchers who combine scientific excellence with meaningful engagement in Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) and related post-acute infectious disease research. It provides financial support, visibility, and lasting integration into the internationally growing ME/CFS research and stakeholder community.

The WE&ME Emerging Leader Award jury includes leading ME/CFS researchers alongside patient representatives. This joint selection model ensures that awardees are recognised not only for scientific rigor but also for their genuine commitment to patient-centred research and community engagement. This award is jointly developed and supported by Science4ME.

## Who can be nominated?

- Researchers at an early stage of their career are eligible, including those who completed their PhD within the past 8 years and current PhD students (Career breaks like parental leave, illness, care duties are taken into account).
- Researchers who are currently actively working in ME/CFS or related post-acute infectious disease research fields.
- The call is open to researchers from all countries.

## Who nominates?

Every nominee must be recommended by a senior researcher (faculty-level or equivalent), patients, patient representatives or charities. Joint nominations are eligible. Submissions without a nominator will not be accepted.

## Award Amount

- Two awards per year with EUR 5,000 each
- The award funds may be used to cover costs related to conference travel, research stays, and the presentation of work at international conferences.

## Process

- Application submitted via email [funding@weandmecfs.org](mailto:funding@weandmecfs.org)
- Jury evaluation and recommendation to the WE&ME Board of Directors
- Funding decision by the WE&ME Board of Directors

## Timeline

- Nomination window open from: 15th June 2026
- Application deadline: 15th October 2026
- Announcement of award: December 2026

## Disclaimer

This call is jointly developed by the WE&ME Foundation and Science for ME, and is managed by the Vienna Science and Technology Funds GmbH. The call is funded entirely by the WE&ME Foundation.

# PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

ME/CFS and related post-acute infectious diseases remain severely underfunded and underrepresented in biomedical research. Early-career researchers who commit to this field often face greater uncertainties and less support than their peers. Many are drawn to ME/CFS research through personal experience with the disease, navigating a difficult trade-off between career security and research conviction.

The WE&ME Emerging Leader Award recognises this commitment. It signals to the scientific community that dedication to this field is valued and sustained. Through these activities, we aim to transform what might otherwise be a high-risk career choice into a high-gain endeavour, supporting researchers whose work advances our understanding of ME/CFS.

Beyond financial support, we aim to:

- Provide visibility and career recognition to exceptional early-career researchers.
- Create lasting connections between awardees, and the broader ME/CFS community.
- Amplify the voices of researchers who bridge science and patient communities.



# ELIGIBILITY

## Career stage

Nominees must be either PhD candidates or have completed their PhD within 8 years of the nomination deadline. Career breaks for parental leave, care duties, or prolonged illness are taken into account in eligibility assessment. Applicants should document any such periods in their submission.

## Research focus

Nominees must be actively working in ME/CFS or related post-acute infectious disease research. We value researchers who take innovative approaches to address the complex challenges of these diseases. Applicants with deep domain expertise in a particular field are equally welcome.

## Nomination

Every nominee must be recommended by either (a) a senior researcher at faculty level or equivalent, or (b) a patient, patient representative, or patient organisation/charity. Joint nominations are eligible. Each nominator may put forward a maximum of two candidates. Submissions without a nominator will not be accepted.

# APPLICATION PROCESS

Applications are submitted via [funding@weandmecfs.org](mailto:funding@weandmecfs.org) and consist of a single document of no more than 2 pages, structured in two parts (template will be provided).

## Candidate section (approx. 1.5 pages)

- Short bio: current position, year of PhD completion, host institution, and a one-sentence description of your current research focus. Links to research portfolio are highly encouraged.
- Your engagement with ME/CFS or post-acute infectious diseases: when and how did you start working in this area, and what sustains your commitment?
- Most significant scientific contribution to date (e.g., publication, method, dataset, tool, or finding) and why you consider it significant. How does your work connect with or benefit the patient community? Please provide concrete examples rather than general statements.
- Use of the award funds: Please indicate which conference(s) or research visit(s) you would attend and what you would present. A rough estimate is sufficient. The activities should take place within the next 12-24 months.
- What is the research question in this field that you most want to see answered in the next five years? What role do you see yourself playing in answering it?

## Nominator section (approx. 0.5 pages)

- Short bio of the nominator (2 sentences max)
- Why this candidate, why now? What sets them apart from peers at the same career stage?
- What specific opportunities would the award unlock for this candidate?

Note: When two nominators are involved, ensure both nominators are represented adequately.

# EVALUATION CRITERIA

Applications are assessed by an independent jury against the following criteria:

- **Research quality and significance:** Demonstrated scientific contribution (publication, method, dataset, tool) from the candidate with measurable (or anticipated) impact in ME/CFS or post-acute infectious disease research.
- **Sustained commitment to the field:** Clear evidence of deliberate engagement by the candidate with ME/CFS research and articulation of why this commitment matters to the researcher.
- **Patient-centered research:** Concrete examples of how the candidate's research connects with or benefits patient communities.
- **Career development potential:** Clarity on how the award would catalyse the next phase of the candidate's career.
- **Distinctiveness:** Distinction of the candidate relative to their career stage and cohort (e.g., evidence of exceptional promise or trajectory) as described by nominators.

# SELECTION AND DECISION PROCESS

An independent jury appointed by the WE&ME Foundation evaluates all applications. The jury provides a recommendation to the WE&ME Executive Board, which takes the formal funding decision. There is no rebuttal stage. The jury recommendation and the funding decision by the WE&ME Executive Board are final.

# FUNDING CONTRACT

- The contract will be WE&ME Foundation and respective affiliation of the awardee
- In case of a positive funding decision, WE&ME Foundation will draw up the funding contract

# AWARD BENEFITS

In addition to the financial award, recipients benefit from:

- Integration into the network of WE&ME-funded projects and the ME/CFS community
- A platform to present their work to an international scientific and patient audience
- A lasting connection to the WE&ME Foundation and its awardee community

# COMMUNICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- Awardees must acknowledge the WE&ME Foundation in all publications, presentations and public communications relating to the project.
- Funded awardees agree to contribute, where reasonable, to WE&ME Foundation communications activities, for example by providing lay summaries, interviews, or images.
- The WE&ME Foundation may publicise funded awardees via its own channels.

# FINANCING AND PARTNERS

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