

Development Fund Overview Guidance 2025-6

Overview:

This fund aims to provide short-term, pump-priming funds to support innovative, high-risk, proof-of-concept cancer research. Often the projects we support are at too early of a stage to be competitive for project/programme grant applications but have the potential to be with additional preliminary data. Priority is given to projects with a clear translational trajectory, to early career researchers, for new collaborations between investigators, and those that map onto both [CRUK Oxford Centre's](#) & [Oxford Cancer's](#) Strategic Framework.

Applications to the [Development Fund](#) are reviewed by the multidisciplinary [Research Committee](#) with support from previous awardees. Projects will also be reviewed by members of our [Patient and Public Involvement group](#) (see below section under PPI for further information).

The Development Fund is considered one of the key successes of the Centre and we look to continue its evolution with the implementation of more targeted award schemes aimed at complementing CRUK's new funding streams.

Development Fund Award Types:

For the Development Fund, both Small (requests not exceeding £7,500) and Main (requests not exceeding £15,000) awards are available. Each are for a period of 12 months starting on 1st April 2026, and run until 31st March 2027. Please keep this in mind as you prepare your application, and any impact this may have on costings / timeline of your project.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion:

We are committed to supporting and promoting equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in everything that we do, recognising that only by harnessing the diversity of our researchers and patients can we improve our communities lived experience of cancer.

We support researchers across both Oxford University and the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, we are committed to building on their organisational strategies to strengthen EDI activities and ensure that best practice is embedded across the city's cancer research ecosystem in both process and as a core value, as outlined in our EDI strategy.

Eligibility:

The applicant must:

- Be a member of the Oxford Cancer membership (sign up [here](#)).
- Be an employee of the University of Oxford holding an academic post or the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.
- Be a senior post-doctoral researcher or independent principle investigator with a contract extending beyond the end date of the award.
- Have reported on any previously awarded development fund applications (Outcomes Report).
- Be named as a lead applicant on only one project submitted during any given round of the Development Fund. There are no limitations on the number of projects that applicants can be collaborators on.
- If a postdoc and their supervisor (or two postdocs within the same group) both submit separate projects during the same round of the Development Fund, only one award will be made to that group. The project funded is at the discretion of the Research Committee.

- Awards will normally be made only for the directly incurred costs of research: funds may be provided for equipment, consumables and other items required for the project.
- Funds to support the costs of posts, either for formal employment or work experience, will only be met in exceptional circumstances, please contact the Centre team (cancer@medsci.ox.ac.uk) as soon as possible before applying for funds to support salaries or clearly state within your application highlighting the reason why funding is not available for the post from other sources and the value the post will have on the success of the project. Any applications for equipment must demonstrate an intent to share the equipment (or demonstrate a use) beyond its application to the applied-for project.

Funding Priorities:

- 1) **Pump-Priming High Quality Cancer Research.** Funds are provided for innovative, high quality projects and proof-of-concept work, which are currently at too early a stage to put to an external sponsor. The aim is to bring the project to a stage at which a strong application for external funds can be made. Applications should clearly articulate their plan for downstream funding.
- 2) **Relevance to Cancer and Centre Strategy.** Projects with translational potential with strategic importance to Oxford's cancer objectives will be prioritized. All applications whether they are based around fundamental science or clinical research must have a clear line of sight to cancer research with an emphasis on improving patient care.
- 3) **Early Stage Career Researcher.** Training of tomorrow's cancer researchers is a key objective of the Centre. Applicants from early stage career researchers are particularly welcomed. For very early-stage researchers, it is recommended that the application is made in collaboration with your PI or mentor. Early Career Researchers are defined as having at least 3 years of research experience (excluding PhD/DPhil studies) and be within 7 years of completion of a DPhil, PhD or MD.
- 4) **Collaborative Oxford Science.** The Centre recognizes the value of research that transcends traditional thematic and disciplinary boundaries. Collaborations between Oxford researchers from different departments and sciences which utilise more than one discipline are encouraged.
- 5) **Patient, Public Involvement (PPI).** Patient and public involvement (PPI) is crucial in all stages of cancer research. It can improve the quality and relevance of your work, helping you better understand and articulate the benefits your research can have for cancer patients. Furthermore, PPI is becoming an increasingly important aspect of the research proposal review processes by external funding bodies.

Scientific Review Process and Assessment Criteria:

At least three scientific reviewers are asked to score the application 1-5 as per the below rubric and comment on its strengths and weaknesses. These scores and comments are considered for all applications by the committee at a meeting before a decision is made on whether to fund each project. We advise all applicants to familiarise themselves with both the categories and the scoring criteria.

Score 1-2

- No/poor scientific justification or objectives defined
- No/poor alignment to funding partners or Centre strategic framework
- Inappropriate amount of funding requested, and unrealistic timelines proposed
- No/unrealistic plans for downstream funding
- No attempt to explain its relevance to patients / no consideration of PPI

Score 3

- Satisfactory justification with indistinct objectives
- Partial overlap to funding partners or Centre strategic framework
- Partial/vague justification for funds and timelines proposed
- Partial or vague attempt to explain its relevance to patients / some consideration of PPI

Score 4-5

- Novel idea, supported by literature or preliminary/clinical observations with specific clear objectives
- Strong alignment to funding partners or Centre strategic framework
- Clear and accurate justification for funding requested and appropriate timelines proposed
- Clear articulation of targeted downstream funding
- Excellent explanation of relevance to patients / considered discussion of PPI
- Strong Oxford-based collaborations

Patient and Public Involvement:

PPI Review:

At Oxford Cancer, we want to ensure that people with experience of cancer are at the heart of our work. We want to promote and model best practices in involving patients in cancer research.

Members of our PPI panel will review your application. **The success of your application will be contingent on the approval by the PPI group as well as the scientific review.** It is therefore in your interests to communicate clearly why your work matters to people with cancer.

Involving PPI contributors in this process will:

- ensure that our research responds to the needs and concerns of people with cancer
- encourage researchers to think about PPI
- ensure that researchers develop skills in communicating to a lay audience
- better prepare applicants when applying for external funding.

Thinking about PPI

The application form includes a section for you to describe how patients and / or the public might be involved to support you with your project. You might want to think about PPI in your research more widely, over and above this particular project. PPI might include, for example:

- any work that you have done to include PPI so far
- an advisory committee to hear about your research, ask questions, challenge you and clarify your thoughts
- getting patient feedback on their interpretation of the results and implications for future studies
- advice on practical implications for patients, such as tissue donation, consent or practicalities of participation
- mentoring lab-based scientists to provide a real-world perspective on their work
- sharing and promoting your work with other patient groups
- helping with patient-facing materials and lay explanations of your work.

Please get in touch with us on oxfordcancerppi@medsci.ox.ac.uk if you would like any further guidance on this in support of your application. Please also make use of the attached tips for writing a good lay summary. Further guidance can also be found on [NIHR](https://www.nihr.ac.uk) & [CRUK](https://www.cruk.ac.uk) websites.

PPI and successful applications

If your application is successful, we will:

- expect that at a suitable point of your project, you present your work to the PPI contributors that approved your application
- advise you on how best to involve patients in your work
- support you with your PPI strategy and facilitate as necessary.

Lay Summary

You **will need to include a lay summary** to describe your project, explain why your research question is important and outline how you anticipate this will impact patient care in the future. Your lay summary should be **up to 300 words**.

Please provide a lay summary of the research proposal that

- (i) describes your project
- (ii) explains why your research question is important
- (iii) outlines how you anticipate this will impact patient care in the future.

If you do not include a lay summary in your submission, your application will not be considered and will be sent back. You will be asked to resubmit to the development fund in the next call for projects.

The lay summary will be read by members of the [Oxford Cancer PPI group](#) and will be the main basis for their assessment of your application. It should:

- Ensure it has a lay title.
- Clearly articulate the clinical context and future patient/population impact of your work: why does your work matter, and why should patients be interested in it?
- Be aimed at an audience that does not have prior medical or scientific knowledge.
- Be written in plain English, avoid the use of jargon and explain any technical terms or acronyms that have been included. Consider using short sentences (15-20 words) and headings to break up the text.
- Make clear the type of cancer you are targeting.
- Provide a clear rationale for why this research is necessary, why it should be funded, and the rationale of its design.