Blood cancer UK

Innovative Pilot Grants 2024-2025: Guidance for Applicants

Introduction

We're here to beat blood cancer - Blood Cancer UK is the UK's largest blood cancer research charity. We're a community dedicated to beating blood cancer by funding research and supporting those affected. Since 1960, we've invested over £500 million in blood cancer research, transforming treatments and saving lives.

Survival rates for blood cancer have risen faster than those for other types of cancer as a result of breakthroughs funded by us and others. But there is more to do as 15,000 people in the UK still die of blood cancer every year and there are many more who are counted as "surviving" but still die before their time, either because of their cancer or from the effects of their treatment.

Blood Cancer UK's current strategy focuses on bringing forward the day when no one dies of blood cancer or its treatments. We are looking to maximise our research impact by increasing the amount we spend on research and by targeting that spend in the areas where it will have the most impact.

For this reason, we launched the Innovative Pilot Grant Scheme last year. This scheme aims to support researchers with novel research ideas in areas related to blood cancer to develop the pilot data needed to secure further investment from our other grant schemes, other medical research funders or industry.

Remit

- Pilot grants are awarded for up to **£30,000** for a duration of up to 12 months
- We invite applications for innovative research projects which aim to explore and develop novel areas of research with the potential to impact the understanding, prevention, diagnosis, treatment or management of blood cancer
- Applicants should clearly outline the potential impact for people affected by blood cancer
- Pilot grants are **NOT** for:
    - supplementing or making up shortfalls in funding for ongoing research or staff funded by other awards
    - bridging support between grants
    - biobank funding or other infrastructure costs
    - research involving randomised trials of clinical treatments.

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Timelines

Call opens: **Thursday 10th October 2024**
Deadline for submission: **3pm on 16th January 2025**
Applicants notified of outcomes: **March 2025**

Assessment Criteria

Every application for this funding scheme will be reviewed by the Blood Cancer UK Research Funding Committee and by people affected by blood cancer, experts through lived experience. We regard the input from people affected by blood cancer as a vital part of the review process. We strongly encourage applicants to involve patients in developing their application and, as a minimum, ask that someone affected by blood cancer is invited to review the plain English summary of their project to ensure this can be understood by a lay audience. More details can be found on our website.

Assessment criteria used to make funding decisions will include:

- **Relevance:** How relevant and timely are the research questions to people affected by blood cancer? Has the research got the potential to lead to a positive impact for patients and how significant is that impact? Why is it needed now?
- **Originality and Innovation:** Is the work novel or is it already being undertaken elsewhere? Does the project clearly address a gap in current knowledge?
- **Scientific potential:** What are the prospects for good scientific progress? Does the project seek to answer a focused research question, with robust scientific reasoning and appropriate methodology to back it up? If successful will the proposed work make an innovative research idea more competitive for larger follow-on funding?
- **Feasibility:** Do the applicants have the expertise required to achieve the aims of the project? Is the project achievable within the time and resources requested?
- **Resources requested**: Are the funds requested essential for the work and do the importance and scientific potential of the research justify the funding requested?
- **Use of animals:** Consider whether this is justified for the work planned, the suitability of the experimental design, and if the species, model and number of animals is appropriate.

The recommendations from our Research Funding Committee will be sent to our Board of Trustees, who will then make the final decision on which applications we fund. Notification of the outcome of applications will be made after consideration of the Board of Trustees. The Trustees' decision is final and non-negotiable.

Eligibility

Individuals based at UK universities, hospitals or other recognised research institutions who are able to sign up to Blood Cancer UK's Terms and Conditions are eligible to apply.

Applicants should have at minimum some postdoctoral research experience, or equivalent, and be scientists, clinicians or healthcare professionals.

Early career researchers are especially encouraged to apply, this includes both independent early career researchers with access to their own lab space, and current postdocs aiming to develop the pilot data required for further research or fellowship applications. Early career researchers and postdocs must include a letter of support for both them as an individual and for the project from the head of the lab or department in which they are working. They can also include letters of support from any other relevant mentors.

Any early career researchers currently undertaking fellowships must also clearly outline how they will deliver this pilot grant alongside their existing fellowship project.

This scheme is not open to applicants employed by a commercial organisation.

Online application system

All applications must be submitted via the Blood Cancer UK Grant Tracker grants management system. Grant Tracker is used for submission, peer review (where applicable), award and monitoring of all grant applications. Please follow the instructions on our webpage Grant application guidance to complete and submit an application. The application can be stored and edited at any time prior to submission.

The application deadline is **3:00pm on the date advertised**. No applications will be accepted after the deadline. Applicants should allow enough time for submission of their applications before the deadline to ensure all the required approvals are obtained.

For any enquiries about completing the application form or submitting your application, please contact research@bloodcancer.org.uk.

Application form

Project summary

Project Title: Give your full project title.

Synopsis: The synopsis should be a scientific abstract of the proposed research. This should include the background, hypothesis and objectives as well as brief details of the proposed methodology. Applicants should also outline the expected outcomes and the benefits to people living with blood cancer. (200 words max.)

Institution: The name of the Lead Applicant's host institution.

Proposed Start Date: Awarded grants are expected to be activated by the grant holder within three months of the start date indicated on the Grant Award Letter. Applicants should allow enough time to recruit staff members and to gain any required approvals.

Proposed Duration: The duration of the research in months. The duration should be up to a maximum of 12 months.

Is your project associated with a clinical trial? Indicate whether the application is associated with a clinical trial. If so, state the name of the trial and the EudraCT/ISRCTN numbers. If the trial is supported by Blood Cancer UK, please also add the Grant reference number.

Objectives

Up to three objectives/aims of the proposed research can be included. There is a word limit of 200 words. If your application is successful, these will be used in your final report form at the end of the project.

Project details

Project proposal: Please provide full details of the proposed project being as clear as possible. Please include the background to the work and the plan of investigation (1,500 words max.)

Please explain how the project will be achieved with the budget, and in the duration, specified. (400 words max.)

Applicants who are currently on a fellowship must outline how they are going to manage their work across both projects.

Downstream plan and potential impact of the proposal: Please outline the next steps for this project after the collection of pilot data during this award, including details of the specific funding scheme(s) you will aim to apply for and the longer-term potential downstream impact of this project for patients affected by blood cancer if successful (300 words max.)

Figures, tables and illustrations cannot be included in the text but can be submitted in the 'Project support documentation' section underneath and referenced in the text boxes.

Other funding

Currently Submitted Elsewhere: If this application is currently being submitted elsewhere, please add the organisation and date of decision.

Previously Submitted Elsewhere: If this application been submitted elsewhere in the past year, list the organisation and result of the submission.

Currently supported: If your related research is currently being supported by another funding organisation, provide details of the grant(s), including the name of the funder, name(s) of grantholder(s), title of the project, total amount awarded (and how much of this you received), your role in the project and start and end dates. If you receive additional core funding or support from your host institution, briefly describe the resources provided.

Describe how the currently active grants listed above related to this application. If you hold grants or there is active research in your laboratory related to the topic of this application, briefly explain how this application fits with the broader research programme and confirm

that this application is for a distinct research project and there is no overlap in the funding being requested.

Patentable or commercially exploitable results: If appropriate, please provide information on the Intellectual Property (IP) potential of your research, if there is any existing IP associated with your project and how this will be managed.

IP is defined as patents, copyright, trademarks, trade names, service marks, domain names, copyrights, moral rights, rights in and to databases (including rights to prevent the extraction or reutilisation of information from a database), design rights, topography rights and all rights or forms of protection of a similar nature or having equivalent or the similar effect to any of them which may subsist anywhere in the world, whether or not any of them are registered and including applications for registration of any of them.

Ethics

Note: If the message, *"An error occurred while refreshing an item on this page"*, appears when completing this section, please click the 'Save' button at the top of the page. You should then be able to continue.

Please outline how you have considered the principles of diversity and inclusion into the design of any research involving humans and animals. For animal studies please consider NC3Rs guidance on including both sexes in your experiments. For clinical studies and trials, please consider all aspects of diversity and inclusion as outlined in the NIHR INCLUDE guidance.

For projects involving the use of animals

The application must state whether or not reference is necessary to appropriate Ethical Committees for approval, and if so, when such application will be made. This must be obtained prior to the start of a successful grant and Blood Cancer UK notified of approval. The reference numbers of relevant project and personal licenses should be quoted and the final letter from the Research Ethics Committee appended to your application if already available.

All grant holders using animals must adhere to the Guidelines for the Welfare and Use of Animals in Cancer Research as set out by Workman *et al*. 2010 and implement the principles in the NC3Rs guidelines (including justification of species, details of power calculations and plans to minimise experimental bias).

Grant holders should make use of resources provided by NC3Rs including the online Experimental Design Assistant where appropriate and ensure that they plan to report *in vivo* studies in accordance with the ARRIVE guidelines as far as possible.

Research integrity: Statistical analyses – If relevant (particularly for high volume data), provide a full description of statistical analyses to be used, including number of samples in each analysis, the associated level of statistical power, and any potential limitations or biases.

Cell lines – If the proposed work includes cell lines, include details of how these will be maintained according to good practice, how any newly obtained cell lines will be authenticated and how any newly generated cell lines will be made available to others. All researchers using cell culture must incorporate a specific cell line authentication protocol into their experimental framework, following the best practice for cell culture procedures UKCCR Guidelines.

Data sharing – Blood Cancer UK expects valuable data, reagents and software arising from Blood Cancer UK-funded research to be made available to the scientific community with as few restrictions as possible so as to maximise the value of the research and for eventual patient and public benefit. Such data must be shared in a timely and responsible manner, making use of online open repositories, public databases and community-led reagent stores.

References

Please include details of any references you have included in the other sections of the application form.

Plain English section

Please note, this is the main section of the application that the 'Patient Voice Grant Advisory Network' (lay reviewers) are asked to review.

The word limit for the response to each question is 200 words unless otherwise stated.

This entire section should be in plain English using non-technical language and avoiding unexplained jargon, acronyms and/or abbreviations. This section is intended for a lay audience, and it is important that the description of the proposed research is clear and accessible. We regard the contributions made by our patient reviewers as a vital part of the review process. We strongly encourage all applicants to involve someone affected by blood cancer in the writing and review of this section. We would be happy to connect you with a member of our Patient Voice Grant Advisory Network if you need a patient to help you with your application. Please get in touch with us via research@bloodcancer.org.uk if required.

This section will be the main section reviewed by people affected by blood cancer, although we will also make the rest of the application available to them. They will provide feedback on:

- The relevance and potential impact of the research to them as someone affected by blood cancer
- The clarity of the plain English section of the application (and whether they can understand what the project aims to achieve)

- Whether patient and public involvement has been considered where relevant, and if they have any feedback or additional considerations to share about involving people affected by blood cancer throughout the course of the proposed research.

For detailed guidance on writing a clear lay summary, please see the Resources for researchers on our website.

Plain English title: Provide a full project title in non-technical language.

Plain English Summary: Provide a summary of the proposed research for a lay audience. The summary should be an abstract of the proposed research.

Background: Outline what the background is to this application. Is it a continuation of your existing or current research, or is it a new area?

Research Need: Why is this research needed?

Research Questions and Aims/Objectives: What is/are the research question(s) being addressed and why? What are the aims and objectives?

Impact and Benefits: What is the potential impact of this research to people affected by blood cancer? If successful, what is your downstream plan and what are the possible benefits in the long term? When will the benefits of your research reach patients? Does your research have the potential to have a broader impact and relevance to all or other blood cancers, in addition to the specific disease being studied?

Patient and Public Involvement (PPI): Provide a brief overview of your plans to involve or engage people affected by blood cancer in your work. Do you have any questions you would like to ask our lay reviewers? As mentioned above, further guidance and resources for Patient and Public Involvement activities are provided on our website. Please note that PPI does not refer to the recruitment of patients or members of the public as participants in the trial or study.

Main applicant

The Main Applicant or Principal Investigator (PI) of the research grant. The Main Applicant must be based at the host organisation for the grant and has overall responsibility for the delivery and reporting of the grant and ensuring that the terms and conditions of the award are met.

Individuals based at UK universities, hospitals or other recognised higher research institutions who are able to sign up to Blood Cancer UK's Terms and Conditions are eligible to apply.

Early career researchers are especially encouraged to apply, this includes both independent early career researchers with access to their own lab space, and postdocs aiming to develop the pilot data required for fellowship applications.

For new Blood Cancer UK Grant Tracker users, details on how to register are on Blood Cancer UK's website.

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Main applicant's CV

The pre-populated details are those we have stored for you. Please ensure that they are accurate. To amend them, save and close the application and visit the 'Manage My Details' section. Publications should be updated in the 'My Research Outputs' section.

Career breaks

Have you taken a break from research or had any periods of part-time work? This could include periods of parental leave or long-term sick leave, or if you had caring responsibilities. You can also include any periods of time you were not able to work because of the COVID-19 pandemic. These will be taken into consideration when reviewing your track record. Please identify the specific periods of time here, but do not include any detailed reasons or sensitive personal information.

Research Outputs

Describe **up to 5** of your most significant research outputs and how they are related to this pilot grant proposal. Examples of research outputs and contributions include, but are not limited to, authorship of peer reviewed original research articles (abstracts and literature reviews should not be included in this list), invited presentations at major conferences, authorship of pre-prints, development of datasets, software and research materials, involvement in the development of novel inventions, patents and commercial activity, development of new research partnerships, participation in regional, national or international committees/advisory bodies, receipt of research related awards, design and delivery of high impact patient and public involvement activities or contributions to real world impact on patients. For peer reviewed publications ensure that your position as author and role is clear e.g., joint first or senior co-authorship. (500 words max.)

Co-applicants, Co-investigators or Collaborators

Including details of a single main applicant may be sufficient for Pilot Grants. However, if you do wish to include additional individuals who will be involved in the project the definitions and guidance around each role is outlined below. Independent early career researchers applying as the main applicant are advised to consider including a senior colleague as a co-investigator or collaborator. Postdoctoral researchers who are leading a project can be the Main Applicant but must also include a Co-applicant with tenure based at their host organisation or have a guarantee from their Head of Department that they will be provided with space and facilities for the duration of an award.

Co-applicants

A co-applicant is an investigator who will contribute equal time and intellectual input to the project as the Main Applicant, and who will have equal status on the grant.

Add details of all co-applicants who will be involved with the project. You will be able to select individuals who already have a Grant Tracker account with us. Individuals who do

not have an account with us will be asked to register and will be sent details via an automated email. Please ensure they update their CV and their publications in the 'My Research Outputs' section of their Grant Tracker account.

Co-investigator

A co-investigator is an investigator who will provide significant intellectual input, as well as overseeing some aspects of the experimental work. Please ensure they update their CV and their publications in the 'My Research Outputs' section of their Grant Tracker account.

Collaborators

A collaborator is an investigator who may provide reagents, advice or access to research materials, but won't be directly involved in the day-to-day work. A letter of support, stating their involvement and commitment to the project, must be attached where indicated. This page will display all the collaborators added for this grant.

Please note, collaborators added on this page will be provided with details on how to access the system to view the application PDF.

Administrators

The pre-award administrator role is for someone in addition to the Head of Research Office equivalent or the Main Applicant to help with input of aspects of the application, e.g. finances or text. They will not be able to validate or submit the application (that can only be done by the Main Applicant), and their role is only relevant during the pre-submission stage. The individual to be the pre-award administrator should register with Grant Tracker.

Adding a post award administrator is mandatory. Should your application be successful this is the person that will be the point of contact at the Host Institute for the award documents and for the subsequent claims for payment.

Finance & costs

Eligible Costs

As a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities, Blood Cancer UK will only fund directly incurred costs and not the full economic costs of the research. We will not fund directly allocated costs or indirect costs.

Directly incurred costs include:

- Research staff
- Recurrent costs and costs directly attributable to the project
- Equipment specific to the needs of the research.

Staff members: Pilot grants can support full-time or part-time staff members. Full-time PhD students and clinical staff are not normally permitted to be members of staff on pilot

grants. Eligible staff include postdoctoral research assistants, research assistants and technicians. Early career researchers applying as the main applicants can include requests for their own salary support if this is not already covered from another source.

Salaries are expected to be costed by the host organisation's research office according to an applicable pay model. Add the following figures to each box in the salary section of the online form in Grant Tracker: Basic Salary, National Insurance, Superannuation, London allowance (if applicable) and Inflation.

Grant Tracker will add these costs up and insert a total figure. Please show the percentage figure used for the inflation addition and for the FTE in the relevant boxes. If your costing tool automatically adds inflation to the basic salary amount then add 0 to the inflation box, but please show the percentage figure used in your calculations in the relevant box.

Recurrent costs: Details of any costs that don't fall under staff members, equipment or animals should be included here. An itemised breakdown of consumables is not required.

Patient and Public Involvement costs can be included here**.** Provide details of any reimbursement of expenses and/or involvement payments you have, or will, offer to people involved in your research. For further guidance, refer to the NIHR INVOLVE policy on payments and expenses for members of the public

Equipment: We assume that there is a basic level of laboratory equipment available for the research. Applicants can request equipment essential to the pilot project (including computing and software). Items of equipment greater than £10,000 must include a written quote. Written confirmation is also required if an item of equipment is to be co-funded by the host organisation. The equipment must not be disposed of during the period of the grant without Blood Cancer UK's prior written approval.

Animals: Include all costs related to the use of animals including costs for purchase, maintenance and experimental procedures listed separately.

Ineligible Costs

- Costs relating to staff recruitment and relocation costs
- Apprenticeship levy
- Personal licence fees and a Home Office licence
- Funding to provide maintenance and/or insurance of equipment
- Office stationery costs unless required for the project and justified accordingly
- Indemnity insurance
- Training courses (including Home Office animal licence courses)
- Publication costs.

Directly-allocated costs – shared costs, based on estimates and do not represent actual costs on a project-by-project basis, such as:

- Investigators: the time spent by the Principal Investigator, Co-Applicants and Co-Investigators
- Estates
- Shared resources, such as administrative and clerical staff and equipment.

Indirect costs – necessary for underpinning research but cannot be allocated to individual projects, such as:

- Computing and information support,
- Central services,
- General maintenance and other infrastructure costs.

Signatories

Please add the details of the signatories required to sign-off the application. Details should be completed for the Department Head and Research Office Signatory. Once the application has been submitted, the signatories will be asked to approve the application online.

Major Disease Area Classifications

Please select one classification relevant to your application from the available list in the online application form in Grant Tracker. This will help Blood Cancer UK categorise the applications we receive.

Focus Classifications

Please select one classification relevant to your application from the available list in the online application form in Grant Tracker. This will help Blood Cancer UK categorise the applications we receive.

The list of classifications is:

- **Causes** – a project looking to identify the causes of blood cancers, for example epidemiology, impact of radiation, viral triggers etc.
- **Mechanisms** – generally a basic research project looking at the cellular and genetic mechanisms involved in blood cancer
- **Diagnosis** – a project which may speed up or improve the initial diagnosis of blood cancer, e.g. biomarker identification
- **Treatment** – clinical trials, possibly some Trials Associated Research Projects (TARPs) which look to identify new treatment options for the individual or assess molecules which could lead to new treatments.

Common Scientific Outline (CSO) Classifications

Please select up to four classifications relevant to your application from the list available in the online application form in Grant Tracker. This will help Blood Cancer UK categorise the applications we receive.

For further information on the Common Scientific Outline (CSO) classification system please refer to the International Research Partnership (ICRP) website which groups cancer research grants into six broad areas of scientific interest to allow for better comparison across funders.

Attachments

Please note that only text can be added to the background and proposal section of the application form. However, files can be attached to the application.

Some file types you attach will be embedded at the end of the application file itself including JPEG, GIF, .doc. Some file types will be saved in a separate zipped file and referenced in the application form on the 'Attachments' page including .docx, .xls, .xlsx, PNG, PDF.

In all cases the embedded or attached files will be visible to the reviewers and committee members.

The following must be attached to the application if applicable:

- If appropriate, the final letter of approval from the Research Ethics Committee
- Early career researchers applying as the lead applicant must include a letter of support for both them as an individual and for the project from the head of the lab or department in which they are working. They can also include letters of support from any other relevant mentors.
- If appropriate, collaborator(s)' letters of support
- If appropriate, written cost estimates for equipment
- If appropriate, any other relevant documents.

Validation

You have now completed the application form. Please save and close if you need to work on the application later.

To submit your application, please click 'validate'. This validation step will highlight any missing information in the application form. Once any missing information has been added, and validation of the form completed, then 'save' and 'close'. If you are sure that you are happy with the application form, then click 'submit'.

Once you have submitted your application, an automated email will be sent firstly to your named research office contact. Once they have approved the application, a second email will be sent to your Head of Department. It is only upon your Head of Department's approval that the application is finally submitted to Blood Cancer UK.

By submitting the application, the host organisation confirms that they can accept the terms and conditions and that space and facilities will be provided for the duration of an award.

This approval step must be completed by the deadline. You will receive an automated email containing an acknowledgement that we have received your application

Thank you for taking the time to read this guidance document. We look forward to receiving your application.