

OCION Funding Scheme Guidance

Mission & Overview

The mission of the Oxford Cancer Immuno-Oncology Network (OCION) Funding Scheme is to provide short-term awards that **pump-prime innovative, high-risk and proof-of-concept Oxford-based immuno-oncology 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. If you are unsure whether your proposal would be in scope, please contact cancer@medsci.ox.ac.uk for an informal discussion. Priority will be given to projects that nurture new collaborations and are multi-disciplinary. Moreover, to be successful applications should:

- 1) demonstrate genuine integration of immunology and cancer research;
- 2) demonstrate clear line of sight to translation;
- 3) be informed by patient and public involvement;
- 4) increase Oxford's immuno-oncology capacity;
- 5) be used to leverage follow-on external funding.

Fund details

Awards of **up to £20,000 each** are available for a maximum of 12 months starting on 1st December 2025.

Permitted expenses include running costs, consumables and equipment <£5,000. Staff costs (direct costs only) may only be included **only** where the supported staff member is already in post, to avoid delaying project timelines with recruitment. In your application, please state 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.

Eligibility

The lead applicant must:

- be a member of the Oxford Cancer Immuno-Oncology Network (sign up by emailing cancer@medsci.ox.ac.uk);
- be an employee of the University of Oxford, holding an academic post, or of the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust;
- be a postdoc, clinical trainee or independent principal investigator with a contract extending beyond the Award end date;
- be named as lead applicant on only one project submitted during any given round of the OCION Funding Scheme. There are no limitations on the number of projects on which applicants can be listed as collaborators;
- have at least bronze LEAF accreditation, or have submitted an application.

PPI Review

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. We have instigated patient and public reviews as part of our drive to better prepare applicants for applying for external funding after the end of the OCION award.

Submissions to the OCION Funding Scheme are reviewed by members of the [Oxford Cancer PPI group](#). You will need to include a lay summary to describe your project including a lay title, explain why your research question is important and outline how you anticipate this will impact patient care in the future. Funding will be contingent on the approval by the PPI group and the scientific review committee. If your application is successful, you will be allocated two PPI group representatives to work with you during the project and as part of the group that you report to at the end of the award.

Application process

Please complete the application form and submit with a 1-page CV and 3-page research proposal (inclusive of figures and references) to cancer@medsci.ox.ac.uk by **midday on Friday 12th September 2025**. Late submissions and those lacking any of the below sections will **not** be considered.

The 3-page research proposal should include:

1. **Title**
2. **Lay summary** (up to 300 words). Please provide a lay title and summary of the research proposal that covers:
 - (i) *Background* (“why and who”): explain why your research question is important;
 - (ii) *Aims* (“what”): state what question(s) your research will address
 - (iii) *Method* (“how”): describe what you will do;
 - (iv) *Impact/benefit* (“so what”): outline how you anticipate this will impact patient care in the future;

This will be reviewed and scored by a member of the [Oxford Cancer PPI group](#) and so should be written for members of the public rather than researchers. Please refer to Oxford Cancer’s lay summary guide for more information and/or further guidance on the on [NIHR](#) & [CRUK](#) websites. In brief your lay summary should:

- Be written in plain English, avoiding the use of jargon and explaining any technical terms or acronyms that have been included. Consider using short sentences (15-20 words) and subheadings. Use an active (rather than passive) voice. Use simple punctuation and words e.g. “helping” instead of “facilitating”, “suggest” instead of “hypothesise”. Consider converting percentages into proportions e.g. “3 out of 4” instead of “75%”.
- 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?
- Make clear the type of cancer you are targeting and how many people are affected.
- Provide a clear rationale for why this research is being conducted and its design.

Plus, the following in terms that will be comprehensible to a generalist audience of academics (rather than subject specialists):

3. **Scientific abstract** (up to 250 words)
4. **Research objectives and proposed outcomes**, with reference to
 - (i) the academic and/or clinical value of the research;
 - (ii) the collaborations involved and how these will be facilitated by the award;
 - (iii) how the award will increase Oxford's IO capacity.
5. **Translational potential of the project**. Describe the expected impact of the project on the future detection and treatment of cancer in the clinic and the plan for obtaining future funding after completion of the project.
6. **Justification for support**, which should address
 - (i) why you think OCION funds are appropriate for this project,
 - (ii) a clear articulation of how the requested funds will be used within the given timeframe.
7. **Plans for future funding for this research topic (likely funders, award schemes, timescales)** (up to 100 words).
 - (i) If an early career researcher, how this project will help you to establish your independent research niche, and how the activity differs from your current role or your current Group's research. Plans for your career development over the next 5 years, and how the award would help achieve these aims.

Project proposals will be reviewed by the selection committee and it is expected that successful projects will be announced in November 2025.

Selection criteria and scoring

Applications will be reviewed by 3-4 members of the [selection committee](#), including a member of the [Oxford Cancer PPI group](#), who will score each project from 1-5 and provide their comments. These scores and comments will be considered and a final funding decision will be made by the OCION Steering Committee chaired by Professor Tim Elliott. Priority will be given to projects that meet the following criteria:

- *High quality, innovative cancer research with a clear scientific rationale.*
- *Significant expected impact of the project, technology, method or infrastructure, including but not limited to enhanced eligibility for larger external funding schemes and the potential longer term scientific and/or clinical impacts (beyond the award).*
- *Alignment with the OCION Funding Scheme mission (as defined above).*
- *Collaborative Oxford research between more than one research group and/or infrastructure that will benefit researchers from multiple disciplines/cancer types.*
- *Appropriate funding requested and a realistic timeline for completing the proposed work.*
- *Worthwhile and important from a patient/public perspective.*
- *Clearly written lay summary.*

Proposals will be scored using the following rubric:

Criteria	Score 4-5	Score 3	Score 1-2
Quality	Novel idea, supported by literature or preliminary/clinical observations with specific, clear objectives	Satisfactory scientific justification with indistinct objectives	No/poor scientific justification with uncertain objectives
Impact	Clear articulation of targeted downstream funding with a high longer-term potential for scientific/clinical impact	Vague plans for downstream funding with limited potential for scientific/clinical impact	No/unrealistic plans for downstream funding with poor potential scientific/clinical impact
Alignment to remit	Strong alignment with the fund mission statement	Partial overlap with fund mission	No/poor alignment with fund mission
Collaboration	Strong element of Oxford-based collaborative working. For BRC-relevant projects, clear inter-theme synergy	Oxford-based collaboration between >1 research group	Proposal only supports a single research group
Justification	Clear and accurate justification for funding requested and appropriate timelines proposed	Partial/vague justification for funds and timelines proposed	Inappropriate amount of funding requested and unrealistic timelines proposed
PPI: <i>(1) context; (2) impact and relevance of proposed work; (3) presentation and content</i>	Very well written lay summary that is clear and easily understandable. Very worthwhile and important from a patient/ public perspective.	Satisfactory lay summary that can be understood with a little effort. Somewhat worthwhile and important from a patient/public perspective but with numerous minor weaknesses/at least one moderate weakness.	Poorly written lay summary that is difficult to understand. Not worthwhile nor important from a patient/ public perspective with numerous major weaknesses.