HIC-Vac Pump Priming Round 7: Application Guidance

Call for new proposals for the period July/October 2024 – September 2025

Deadline: Midday, 26th April 2024 by e-mail to aino-maija.maskuniitty08@ic.ac.uk.

Summary

The HIC-Vac Network aims to support, develop and advocate the use of human infection challenge (HIC) to improve understanding about infections and the diseases they cause, leading to better vaccines and treatments with high global impact. The Network enables open sharing of knowledge and expertise, using network resources to increase HIC use in the UK and in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC), disseminating best practice, enhancing training and fostering new collaborative studies relevant to high-impact pathogens.

HIC-Vac has received new funding for pump priming awards to be spent by the end of September 2025. **We are inviting proposals for initiatives that are ready to start by 1st October 2024 at the latest, that can incur expenditure between by Sept 25, and that are aligned with the HIC-Vac objectives.**

Scope and criteria

Grants are available for projects of £50,000 – £100,000 (at Full Economic Costing, FEC), via competitive application to the Network Management Board (NMB). Smaller and larger grant applications will be considered, although applications for close to the maximum amount (£100,000) will require exceptional justification of costs requested. Projects should run until no later than **30 Sept 2025** and should lead to relevant and useful data for this field, ideally capitalising on existing data or samples that will support a larger grant application.

Activities supported: all projects must be within the scope of the HIC-Vac Network and its strategic objectives to support studies that will underpin new grant applications including:

1) Methodology development.
2) Deeper analysis of existing samples.
3) Ethical framework development & public involvement and engagement.
4) Attenuated challenge.
5) Regulatory development.
6) Challenge agent manufacture.
7) Effect of co-infection on challenge.
8) Comparison of natural infection with challenge.

Eligible costs include directly incurred research salaries, consumables, sample shipment, and public involvement payments. Travel costs are allowed to facilitate laboratory visits/exchanges; travel costs must be reasonable and via economy class only. VAT is allowable. Costs must be presented in Great British Pounds (GBP). Total costs (at 100% FEC) must not exceed a maximum of £100,000 for the project.

Activities not supported: PI time, research outside the HIC-Vac strategic objectives and remit, projects from non-members, PhD projects, animal costs, equipment purchase (over £10,000), industry salaries.

All UK-based costs will be covered at 80% FEC; overseas high-income country costs will be covered at 100%, excluding indirect costs; and LMIC-based costs will be covered at 100% FEC, including indirect costs. No project extensions beyond Sept 2025 will be permitted.

Applications will be assessed on the following criteria:

1) Scientific merit (10 points)
2) Applicant's track record (5 points)
3) Potential societal/health impact for LMIC (5 points)
4) Ability to complete within the timeframe (5 points)

Additionally, the Network Director and Deputy Director may each award up to a further 5 discretionary points per funding round for overall strategic importance.

HIC-Vac awards must follow UKRI and MRC terms and conditions https://www.ukri.org/manage-your-award/meeting-ukri-terms-and-conditions-for-funding/.

Eligibility

Awards are open to all HIC-Vac Network members, but the lead applicant must either be a HIC-Vac Investigator or a HIC-Vac Associate supervised by a HIC-Vac Investigator, as demonstrated by a Letter of Support to be included with the application. Network membership is free, and you can apply here: https://www.hic-vac.org/members/become-a-member.

We will prioritise applications that include lead applicants who are Early Career Researchers. Members based at academic institutions, governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and industry are all eligible to apply.

Each application must include at least two institutions, at least one of the partners preferably being an LMIC institution.

This funding is from UKRI (UK Research and Innovation) through the International Science Partnerships Fund (ISPF) and is part of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment. ODA funded activity focuses on outcomes that promote the long-term sustainable growth of countries on the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list. All pump priming awards must be relevant to ODA, and applicants must either:

- be based in a high-income country and have demonstrable potential to benefit LMIC, OR
- be based in a LMIC institution.

Any applicants from India or China, and applicants with partners from India or China, should contact Dr Maija Maskuniitty at aino-maija.maskuniitty08@ic.ac.uk for more information before applying.

Reporting

All awardees will be required to submit narrative and financial reports at 6 months upon project completion. Awarded projects, with non-confidential abstracts, will be included in HIC-Vac Network outcomes and publicity. All awardees must agree to present their work at a HIC-Vac meeting. All successful applicants must also commit to the MRC data sharing policy: https://www.ukri.org/about-us/mrc/our-policies-and-standards/research/data-management-and-sharing/.

Application process

Key dates

21st February 2024	Call launch
26th April 2024 (midday)	Deadline for submission of proposals
17th May 2024	Notification of successful proposals
17th July – 1st October 2024	Project start date
30th September 2025	Latest project end date and final date to incur expenditure

The application form should be completed in full. It is important that key milestones and deliverables are specified in the description of the proposed project because upon completion of the project you must report progress against these items. A brief CV and publication list are required for all investigators along with a letter of support from the Head of Department of the Lead Institution.

Please submit your application as a single PDF – you can use https://www.pdfmerge.com/ or similar to merge all your attachments into one document.

The application form and associated documents must be submitted by email by 12pm BST on 26th April 2024 (the closing date) to Dr Maija Maskuniitty at aino-maija.maskuniitty08@ic.ac.uk. You will receive acknowledgement of your application within five (5) working days. Please contact Maija if you have any questions.

Review

All submitted applications that have passed a formal eligibility check are presented to at least 2 evaluators from the HIC-Vac Network Management Board and potential external reviewers for competitive assessment. HIC-Vac evaluators review and score applications using a standard template.

Evaluators will not review an application where they have a conflict of interest (see below for details on conflicts of interest). Applicants are encouraged to identify any persons on the HIC-Vac NMB with whom there is a conflict of interest.

Following review of all applications, a ranked list will be used to select applications for funding.

Notification of Review Results

Successful projects will be sent award letters confirming the funds available by 17th May 2024. The date of NMB review and decision will be posted on the HIC-Vac website. Projects should start by 1st October 2024 at the latest, so it is advised that any contractual issues between partners are discussed prior to grant submission and resolved promptly upon award. Unsuccessful lead applicants will be informed promptly, and specific feedback can be provided if available.

Post-award Administration

Imperial College London will issue a simple sub-agreement to the Lead Applicant's institution. Projects may not start until this contract has been fully executed. Projects should start by 1st October 2024 at the latest, and the actual start date must be confirmed to Dr Maija Maskuniitty. It is the responsibility of the Lead Applicant to further subcontract with any co-applicant institutions to deliver the project to time, quality and budget. It is expected that ethical approvals, if required, will be in place before the award is made.

Funds must be spent as detailed on the application. Awardees are required to submit narrative and financial reports at 6 months upon completion of the project. Payment is made in arrears to the awardee's institution. If you are an LMIC institution and have problems with payments in arrears, please contact Dr Maija Maskuniitty at aino-maija.maskuniitty08@ic.ac.uk. Payment will be for actual expenditure up to the value agreed in the original award letter.

HIC-Vac does not require receipts to be submitted but these **must** be kept by the host institution as they may be required for possible future audits. The grantee's host institution must follow their standard procedures for financial accounts.

Any underspend on grants will be retained by HIC-Vac.

Awardees are encouraged to submit their project's results for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, or as a case study. A non-confidential brief summary of the project's outcomes, taken from the final report, will be published on the HIC-Vac website and in other publicity materials.

All work arising from this grant must acknowledge the funding source as follows:
"This work was supported by HIC-Vac, a network funded by UKRI/MRC through the International Science Partnerships Fund (ISPF)."

Publicity and Data Protection

Successful pump priming projects will be listed on the HIC-Vac website and in other publicity material, with a non-confidential abstract outlining the work proposed. Copies of applications will be made available to the HIC-Vac Network Management Board who will use information provided for reviewing the proposal and post-award administration. HIC-Vac may choose to publish details of awards, awardees, and information about successful projects.

All funding comes from UKRI, so to meet the Research Councils' obligations for public accountability and the dissemination of information, non-confidential details of awards may also be made available on the Research Councils' websites and other publicly available databases, and in reports, documents and mailing lists. UKRI may use this information for research related activities, including but not limited to, statistical analysis in relation to the

evaluation of UKRI funding, study of trends and policy and strategy studies. Recipients of pump priming awards may be required to attend and contribute to UKRI events within relevant areas at the request of UKRI.

Use of Human Samples or Data

HIC-Vac expects all research to be undertaken in accordance with UKRI policies and guidance available from https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-standards-and-data/good-research-resource-hub/.

Independent Research Ethics Committee approval is required for research that involves human participants (whether patients or healthy volunteers) or records. Such approval is also required for certain studies of human tissues.

In the case of social science research, HIC-Vac recommends that award holders follow the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (https://www.ukri.org/councils/esrc/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics-guidance/) which highlights the responsibility of the research organisation for ensuring that the research is subject to appropriate ethics review.

Research involving human participants in resource-poor societies presents specific ethical challenges and the UKRI principles of equitable partnerships should be followed https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-standards-and-data/good-research-resource-hub/equitable-partnerships/.

Award holders whose research involves the removal, use or storage of human tissue as specified in the relevant legislation must:

- comply with the appropriate legislation, i.e. the Human Tissue Act 2004 and/or the Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006;
- follow the relevant standards and Codes of Practice issued by the Human Tissue Authority (https://www.hta.gov.uk/guidance-professionals/codes-practice-standards-and-legislation);
- follow the MRC guidance detailed in Human Tissue and Biological Samples for Use in medical Research (2019) https://www.ukri.org/publications/human-tissue-and-biological-samples-for-use-in-research/.

For research taking place outside the UK, local national guidelines and international best practice must be followed. All legal requirements for the import/export of biological materials must be adhered to.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)

National regulations and international best practice must be followed. Researchers who carry out genetic modification should be familiar with the legislative requirements and with the Scientific Advisory Committee on Genetic Modification (Contained Use) guidance.

Dangerous Pathogens

Research organisations accommodating projects involving the use of dangerous pathogens must comply with the safeguards recommended by the UK Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens in their guidance 'Infection at work: controlling the risk', 'Biological Agents: the

principles, design and operation of containment in a level 4 facility' and 'Biological agents: Managing the risks in laboratories and healthcare premises', as well as local national regulations.

Conflict of Interest

Examples of a conflict of interest include:

- Working closely with the applicant(s), for example as a co-author or PhD Supervisor, or has worked closely in the last 4 years
- Personal/family relationship with the applicant(s)