

HIC-VAC Pump-Priming Grant Application Guidance

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. Our network will enable open sharing of knowledge and expertise, using network resources to increase HIC use in the UK and in Lower and Middle Income Countries (LMIC), disseminating best practice, enhancing training and fostering new collaborative studies relevant to high-impact pathogens.

Grants are available for pump-priming projects of up to £100,000 (at 100% FEC), via competitive application to the Network Management Board (NMB). We are aiming to award one project at £100,000, one award at £50,000, and 2 awards at £25,000. Projects should run until no later than 31/01/2022 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.

Awards are open to all HIC-Vac Network members, but projects must have at least one Investigator involved. We particularly welcome applications that include lead applicants who are Early Career Researchers and/or based in LMICs. Projects must include HIC-Vac members from at least two different institutions (not just two different departments within the same institution), one of which must be in the UK. For two institutions to be considered different they must be separate legal entities – for example, the University of Oxford is the legal entity for the OUCRU in Vietnam, so they are not considered as separate institutions for networking purposes.

All awardees will be required to submit narrative and financial reports at 6 and 12 months. Awarded projects, with non-confidential abstracts, will be included in Network outcomes and publicity. All awardees must agree to present their work at a HIC-Vac meeting. All successful applicants must commit to the MRC data sharing policy: <https://mrc.ukri.org/documents/pdf/mrc-data-sharing-policy/>.

Please submit your application form and associated documents by 4pm GMT on the closing date to the Network Manager, Emma Smith, at e.smith@imperial.ac.uk. Please see further details below about this award, and on how to apply. Do contact Emma with any further queries.

Details

Funding eligibility

Applicants: Funding is for all HIC-Vac Network members, though lead applicants must be an Investigator, or an Associate working under supervision of an Investigator. Projects must include at least one Network Investigator, and a minimum of two Network members from different institutes (one in the UK). Members based at academic institutes, governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and industry are all eligible.

Network membership is free and you can apply by emailing e.smith@imperial.ac.uk for an application form or downloading one from our website <https://www.hic-vac.org/members/become-a-member>.

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.
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 direct research salaries (at full economic costing FEC), consumables, sample shipment. Some travel costs for visits between collaborators are allowed if justifiable; costs must be reasonable and via economy class only. VAT is allowable. Costs must be in Great British Pounds (GBP). Total costs must not exceed a maximum of £100,000 for the project. At least some of the budget must be spent by a UK institution. HIC-Vac grants follow UKRI and MRC terms and conditions <https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/grant-terms-and-conditions/> though some activities and costs are not supported, as outlined below.

Activities not supported: research outside the HIC-Vac strategic objectives and remit; projects from non-members of HIC-Vac; PhD projects; animal costs; equipment purchase (over £10,000); industry salaries; projects without collaboration between two or more institutes.

Value of grant: up to £100,000 (at 100% FEC). Please note, applicants from LMIC institutions will be awarded 100% of project costs; non-LMIC applicants will be awarded 80% of costs and will be expected to have additional funding for the remaining 20% of their project costs. Industry applicants will be awarded 100% of costs.

LMIC funding: to be considered for the LMIC funding level, you must work at an institution in an LMIC country and your project funds must be sent and spent there. This list excludes institutions that receive core funding from developed countries (including MRC Unit The Gambia at LSHTM, MRC/UVRI & LSHTM Uganda Research Unit, Africa Health Research Institute (AHRI), Oxford University Clinical Research Unit (OUCRU), Mahidol Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Unit (MORU), KEMRI|Wellcome Trust Research Programme (KWTRP), Malawi-Liverpool-Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Programme (MLW)). A list of LMIC countries can be found here: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/daclist.htm>.

Activities supported	Activities not supported
Direct research salaries e.g. dedicated postdoc	Animal costs
Consumables	Investigator time
Equipment up to £10,000	Equipment £10,000 and over
Economy class travel	Industry partner salary costs
Industry partner non-salary costs	PhD projects
	Non-member projects
	Not addressing one of the HIC-Vac Strategic Priorities
	Single-institution applications

Application process

There will be at least three pump-priming grant calls within the first three years of HIC-Vac. Deadlines will be advertised on the HIC-Vac website.

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 at 6 and 12 months you must report progress against these items. A brief CV and publication lists is required for all investigators along with a letter of support from the head of department of the Lead Institute. Lead applicants who are Early Career Researchers are encouraged to apply.

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 4pm GMT on the closing date to the Network Manager, Emma Smith, at e.smith@imperial.ac.uk. You will receive acknowledgement of your application within three (3) working days.

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 including the Independent Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB), for competitive assessment. HIC-Vac evaluators review and score applications using a standard template.

Applications will be assessed on the following criteria:

- 1) scientific merit (10 points)
- 2) applicant's track record (5 points)
- 3) cross-network collaborations (5 points)
- 4) potential societal/health impact (5 points) and
- 5) a solid route to further funding (5 points)

Additional points will be awarded as follows:

- LMIC applicants/co-applicants (1 point)
- Early Career Researcher as lead applicant (1 point)
- Including an industry partner (1 point)
- Equality/diversity (1 point).

The Director and Deputy Director may each award up to a further 5 points per funding round for overall strategic importance (Section 5 of the application).

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 within 2 weeks of the NMB decision. The date of NMB review and decision will be posted on the website. Projects should start within two months of the date of the award letter, 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 the Network Manager may pass on specific feedback 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 within 2 months of the date on the award letter and the actual start date must be confirmed to the Network Manager. 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 progress at the time of application and should be complete before funding is released (note: projects should be commenced within 2 months of award).

Funds must be spent as detailed on the application. Awardees are required to submit narrative and financial reports at 6 and 12 months into the project. Payment is made in arrears to the awardee's Institute against a quarterly payment schedule, and subject to receipt of 6 and 12 month project reports. If you are an LMIC institution and have problems with payments in arrears, please contact Emma, the HIC-Vac Network Manager, at e.smith@imperial.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 material.

All work arising from this grant must acknowledge the funding source as follows:

"This work was supported by HIC-Vac, a GCRF Network in Vaccines Research and Development which was co-funded by the MRC and BBSRC and is part of the EDCTP2 programme supported by the European Union."

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 NMB and ISAB 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 the MRC, 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. The MRC will use this information for research related activities,

including but not limited to, statistical analysis in relation to the evaluation of MRC funding, study of trends and policy and strategy studies. Recipients of pump-priming awards may be required to attend and contribute to MRC events within relevant areas at the request of the MRC.

Use of Human Samples or Data

HIC-Vac expects all research involving human participants to be undertaken in accordance with MRC policies and guidance available from <https://mrc.ukri.org/research/policies-and-guidance-for-researchers/#ethics>. These include:

- Good Research Practice (2012);
- Medical research involving adults who cannot consent (2007);
- Medical Research Involving Children (2004);
- Human Tissue and Biological Samples for Use in Research (2014);
- Personal Information in Medical Research (2000).

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 (revised 2015) which highlights the responsibility of the research organisation for ensuring that the research is subject to appropriate ethics review.

Research involving human participants in developing societies presents specific ethical challenges and the MRC guidelines Research Involving Human Participants in Developing Societies must be followed.

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, ie 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 (HTA) (the MRC Regulatory Support Centre has summarised these);
- follow the MRC guidance detailed in Human Tissue and Biological Samples for Use in medical Research (2014).

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)

Useful Resources

UK Government information on ODA strategic objectives:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/official-development-assistance-oda--2>

List of LMIC countries: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/daclist.htm>

UKRI terms and conditions: <https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/grant-terms-and-conditions/>