

# Research grant award process

CCLG is a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC). CCLG's process of awarding new research grants is based on guidance from the AMRC. This provides CCLG with a consistent process for all competitive research applications.

At the heart of this process is a rigorous system for peer review, ensuring that all new research funded by CCLG has been subject to independent scrutiny by those with expertise (peers) in paediatric oncology. It is the advice of independent experts about the scientific quality of research that informs decisions about which proposals are funded. The aim of this process is to draw from leading insight from across the paediatric oncology to help guide the most effective use of CCLG's resources to help maximise the impact of funding.

This helps to enact CCLG's research strategy to facilitate much needed change in the management of children with cancer, by developing better, kinder treatments.

## Process for awarding new research grants

CCLG's process for awarding new research grants is based on the steps recommended by the AMRC meaning that independent external peer review is steering the process.

- Step 1: Grant round defined & advertised
- Step 2: Internal Triage
- Step 3: Written Peer review
- Step 4: Research Advisory Group
- Step 5: Charity Trustees
- Step 6: Project Monitoring
- Step 7: Engagement & Dissemination

## Principles guiding CCLG's process of awarding research grants

The process used by CCLG to award research grants is based on the five principles of peer review as set out by the AMRC. These principles are embedded within the six stages of the process used to select new research grants.

- **Accountability** - Charities are open and transparent about their peer review procedures and publish details, including the names of the members of scientific advisory board committees or other decision making bodies.
- **Balance** - Scientific advisory committees reflect a fair balance of experience and scientific disciplines.
- **Independent decision making** - The scientific advisory committee is independent of the charity's administrative staff and trustees.
- **Rotation** - Scientific advisory committee members have a fixed term of office and do not have tenure.
- **Impartiality** - Scientific advisory committees include a significant number of non-beneficiaries. There is a conflict of interest policy and potential beneficiaries are not present when decisions are made.

## Step 1: Grant round defined & advertised

The types of research funded by CCLG are described in the CCLG research strategy, which can be downloaded from the website. This outlines CCLG's approach to supporting paediatric cancer research. It sets out the aims for its research programme and describes the priority areas that new funding schemes are designed to fulfil. The research strategy is reviewed regularly to reflect progress within the wider paediatric oncology field and the changing challenges that need to be prioritised.

- The funding for the new grant schemes that CCLG manages comes from different sources: Sources directly from within CCLG
- CCLG's Special Named Funds
- The Charities Research Network, or
- Awards managed by CCLG on behalf of other charities.

The origins of the funding are clearly stated in advert details provided for each new grant scheme. The process for awarding new research grants is essentially the same regardless of funding source. Minor amendments, such as variation in which Trustees provide final approval, may be made to the process.

Funding for new project grant schemes are advertised to the research community. This will include news items posted on CCLG's website, social media posts, and contact with previous and current grant holders. Further details about each scheme may be found within the New Funding Section within CCLG's research area within its website.

The remit, theme and priority areas for each new grant is specified, together with the source of the funding. Details of the amount of funding that can be applied for and maximum duration of the project are listed. All new grant applications will be submitted through the CCLG Flexigrant portal, and a deadline for submission is provided.

CCLG's process for funding new grant schemes, together with access to funding round submission criteria with guidance documents and further details about CCLG's peer review process and RAG may also be found within the research section of the CCLG website. This includes access to relevant policies and documents which can be downloaded.

Details about the RAG members and information about the peer review process can be found within the research area of CCLG's website. Research calls which are currently open, and research which we have funded, are detailed within the research section of the website. Information about CCLG's wider research portfolio, including previously funded research, is also available online.

Potential applicants may liaise with internal staff members from CCLG for guidance in areas such as project remit, collaborations, and funding eligibility. Advice regarding scientific quality cannot be provided by internal CCLG staff.

CCLG supports the AMRC position statement on the use of animals in research. In line with AMRC guidance, all applicants are asked to provide details about how they have considered the replacement, refinement and reductions of animals in their research proposals. Reviewers will be asked to comment on these responses, and the details will be reflected upon by the RAG. As part of the CCLG grant terms and conditions, all new grants funded through CCLG should refer to the *ARRIVE guidelines* and *Responsibility in the use of animals in biosciences research: expectations of the major research council and charitable funding bodies* for reporting research using animals. Resources to support researchers with this aspect may be found within the research section on CCLG's website. As part of the review process, peer reviewers and RAG will examine how the 3Rs have been accounted for in grant applications. Further details about CCLG's position and sources for further information may be found on the CCLG website.

## Step 2: Internal Triage

Internal CCLG staff check applications meet the funding round submission criteria. Triage is only based on eligibility, strategic fit and completeness of applications. This ensures that only applications that are within the scope of the grant round progress to the next stage. No decisions are made at this stage with regards to research quality.

Any applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria will be returned to the lead applicant with an explanation of why the applications was ineligible.

### **Step 3: Written Peer review**

CCLG aims to draw from the expertise of academic researchers and clinicians with insight into different types of paediatric cancers and from across the field from basic research, through to clinical research and practice. Experts are not limited to academic researchers and clinicians, but may include others who bring a different type of insight and perspective, such as patients their families and carers, healthcare professionals, industry representatives and regulators. Together these experts support CCLG with advice in areas such as the feasibility, quality, importance and cost-effectiveness of research.

All research applications are assessed by external reviewers who will provide a written appraisal and scoring based on a matrix. CCLG is a host of various Special Interest Groups for different specialisms within the paediatric oncology field. This provides one source from which external peer review may be sought. External peer reviewers are also sourced from experts from the UK paediatric oncology field, and internationally from experts from around the world. Reviews are subject to a conflict of interest policy and adhere to a grant review code of conduct, which are available on our website and provided to all reviewers.

Areas for assessment for review of a proposals' scientific quality include: Quality & impact; relevance; leadership & strength of research team; justification of resources; Public engagement, involvement with families & broader impact.

Any research applications with a financial value of over £25,000 per annum will be assessed by at least two external reviewers. Research applications with a financial value of £25,000 will be assessed by a minimum of one external reviewer. If further expertise is required, a further external reviewer may be sought.

For larger grants (e.g. to include all applications with a financial value over £250,000), applicants will be given the opportunity to view the written peer reviews (both external, internal and PPI) that have been provided for their application before the RAG meeting. They may provide a written response to be examined by RAG members at the review meeting.

Grant round applications may also be reviewed by members of CCLG's families involvement group, comprised of representatives from parents, family members, current and former patients who have had experience of childhood cancer. The reviews provided by this group provide a different angle about priorities and areas which are important from the perspective of those with experience of paediatric cancer services. In addition to demonstrating scientific quality and its potential clinical-academic impact, applicants are required to discuss how their project will have a wider impact. Applicants should consider how they might involve families with experience of childhood cancer in the development and progress of their research and should set-out their plans for engagement with the wider public.

### **Step 4: Research Advisory Group**

CCLG's research review committee, the Research Advisory Group (RAG), is formed of external members who provide independent advice and recommendations about which new grant proposals should be funded. The list of current CCLG RAG members may be found on the website.

Members of the RAG are and are not employed in the day-to-day administration of the charity's work. The RAG is independent of CCLG's trustees. Representatives of the RAG may also be CCLG Executive members. The CCLG Treasurer is also a members of the Board of Trustees (but may not also be a RAG members), thus providing a communications link between these groups and the RAG, whilst maintaining independence. The

recommendations of the RAG will be presented to the CCLG Executive and Board of Trustees for grants funded through CCLG sources. For schemes where CCLG are managing the process in partnership with other charities, the RAG will provide recommendations to the funding charity's Board of Trustees.

The RAG will at any one time have no fewer than 8 members. CCLG's aim is to have a larger number of advisory members to (a) provide greater breadth of expertise to draw on (b) support the development of experience from comparatively less-experienced members of the research community (c) to support the maintaining of experience of CCLG's processes as members naturally reach the end of the appointed fix-term.

The quorum for the RAG is a minimum of four members, and for each meeting it is aimed that at least half of the RAG members are present. RAG members are appointed for a fixed term of office. This is currently three years, with a second term if three years. Members may not re-join for three years after retiring from the RAG.

All reviewers and members of the RAG agree to a grant review code of conduct and adhere to a conflicts of interest policy. This ensures that research proposals are assessed objectively and impartially. All application material is treated confidentially and is not to be shared outside of the review process. All reviewers and RAG members must declare any vested interest. Where there are potential conflict of interests, relevant members must not be part of the consideration of the relevant application. Further details about the code of conduct and policies may be found on the CCLG website and is downloadable in the form of a document.

Meetings of the RAG are organised for each grant round. Collated scoring and comments from all review sources are provided to a full meeting of RAG members. Each application is assigned to a lead RAG member. This member provides an 'internal' written peer review and leads on presenting the scores and comments from the external reviews to the RAG. Following discussion of all review information, the RAG makes assessments about whether projects are judged as 'fundable' and confirms final ranking of projects. The recommendations of the RAG are forwarded to the relevant charity trustees.

## **Step 5: Charity Trustees**

The recommendations of which projects should be funded are provide to the Charity Trustees. For projects funded from CCLG sources, including Special Named Funds, CCLG's board of trustees will confirm them

For Grant Schemes funded through external sources, such as through CCLG's Charities Research Network, final approval is made by the Board of Trustees of the charity funding the research.

## **Step 6: Project Monitoring**

All new grants funded through CCLG will sign to agree to follow CCLG's project 'terms & conditions'. All grants will provide an annual progress reports, and will produce a final report at the end of the project.

CCLG is built around a community of families who have experience of childhood cancer. New grant holders are encouraged to engage with representatives. This may include lab visits, working with representatives as 'lay ambassadors', or dissemination events designed to be inclusive to a lay audience.

Depending on the funding source, grant holders may be encouraged to develop contact with families from the Special Named Funds, with external charities through CCLG's Charity Research Network, or with members of CCLG's families involvement group.

## **Step 7: Engagement & Dissemination**

Throughout the project, grant holders will be encouraged to engage with patients and their families, together with the wider public. This will help to highlight the purpose of the project. Information about new grants will be shared on CCLG's website and social media. Grant holders will be encouraged to participate in events hosted by CCLG and through their own sources.

After the finish date of the project, grant holders will be requested to remain in regular contact with CCLG with regards to any publications, dissemination and new grants that are related to the funded grant.

