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University of Oxford Medical and Life Sciences Translational Fund

Call for Proposals May 2020

Building on the success of the previous **Medical and Life Sciences Translational Fund (MLSTF)**, the University has received further funding from the Medical Research Council (MRC) and Wellcome to continue the scheme. MLSTF supports proof-of-concept projects at the earliest stages of translation. It funds researchers to accelerate the transition from discovery research to translational development projects by supporting preliminary work or feasibility studies to establish the viability of a translational approach. **This fund does not support exploratory basic science.**

MLSTF is a consolidated fund comprising devolved funding from MRC and Wellcome. In 2020, the project managed fund will be in excess of £1M (the largest to-date) to 'pump-prime' the translation of novel therapeutics, devices, diagnostics and other therapeutic interventions (including 'repurposing of existing therapies') toward clinical testing.

The University of Oxford and Novo Nordisk are pleased to announce the **Novo Nordisk Innovation Fund** which will run alongside MLSTF as a pilot funding stream in 2020. Projects addressing unmet patient need in diabetes and other cardiometabolic disease (obesity, NASH, atherosclerosis, heart failure and chronic kidney disease) as well as within the field of rare endocrine and rare non-malignant blood diseases are eligible to apply for this stream.

Remit

The Fund supports goal-oriented translational research projects with a strong scientific rationale and which meet a clear and important translational medical need. Projects should also demonstrate distinct advantages over competing translational approaches that are in development or are already available in the marketplace. Projects should aim to provide sufficient preliminary data to establish proof of concept, strategic merit in a translational context, or the viability of a translational approach (i.e. to provide confidence in the underlying concept, before seeking more substantial funding from other sources), such as MRC Developmental Pathway Funding Scheme (DPFS), or equivalent schemes from other funders, or from industry. An explicit outcome of the award of MLSTF is that projects should subsequently be strong candidates for external follow-on translational funding.

To be competitive, the project proposal should identify a critical path for generating preliminary proof-of-concept data that supports moving to the next stage of translation. The project should be milestone-based with clearly articulated and quantifiable markers, which will form the basis of a rigorous monitoring process that will take place throughout the project's lifetime. All modalities of therapy and diagnostics including engineering/medical technology and bioinformatics approaches are welcomed. The research areas under which applications have been supported in the past include infection, immunity & AMR, vaccine science, oncology, neuroscience, mental health, rare diseases and regenerative medicine. Whilst MLSTF 2020 will support projects addressing unmet clinical need across all modalities, we are actively encouraging applications in AI/Data science for health as well as innovative proposals for therapies and diagnostic tools targeting COVID-19.



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Applications demonstrating academic-industry collaboration are particularly encouraged, principles and policies of a MRC Industry Collaboration Agreement (MICA) should be followed, with heads of terms being agreed with partners prior to application submission. Please contact your local Research Services team who will be able to assist with this. Where the partner is an existing or prospective spinout, there must be a strong and clear case that the proposed project is a new stream of work and not additional development of the initial technology that was licenced to the spinout. It should also be clear that the spinout is the most appropriate company to support this particular project. A clear statement of how conflict of interest will be managed must be included.

Format

It is envisaged that the available funds will finance in the region of 12-15 projects, with the Translational Research Office providing project management support for the scheme and projects where appropriate.

Funding available from MLSTF will **be up to £75k** per project; awards will be made from MLSTF for **direct costs only**. Whilst a 'match' contribution is not mandatory, it is strongly encouraged. The cost of individual projects in this case can be up to £150k with applicants being required to demonstrate at least 50% matching from another source of the direct costs awarded. Applicants should note that the [University Challenge Seed Fund](#) is currently open for applications (closing date: 14th May 2020). *Researchers should engage with both the TRO and Oxford University Innovation to discuss potential match funding models.*

Projects should be in the region of **6-12 months**, with funding for 12 month projects requiring full justification. Awards will normally commence within 3 months of the award being issued, additional flexibility will be offered in 2020/21 due to current restrictions, please discuss requirements with the TRO. All projects must be completed by 31st March 2022 in line with overarching MRC grant conditions. Please ensure that your project is scheduled accordingly and that the timeline is appropriate to the objectives and milestones set out.

Please note funding will not support: entire translational projects; bridging funding or PhD studentships; continuation of normal research grants; and costs relating to protection of intellectual property. Please also note that PI or co-applicant salary is not an eligible cost. Awards will be managed from the Translational Research Office on behalf of the University. Applications, scores and reviewer comments may be shared with other internal University panels to ensure maximum value for money. An award condition is acceptance of a 'mid-term' review meeting with the Translational Research Office to discuss progress made towards milestones

Novo Nordisk Innovation Fund

The Novo Nordisk Innovation Fund is a pilot programme for 2020 which will run under the umbrella of MLSTF. Projects addressing unmet patient need in diabetes and other cardiometabolic disease (obesity, NASH, atherosclerosis, heart failure and chronic kidney disease) as well as within the field of rare endocrine and rare non-malignant blood diseases are eligible to apply for this stream. High priority will be given to projects that will identify and/or robustly validate novel targets in relevant diseases. Proposals should have or aim for strong human relevance (such as the use of human data, genetics and cells/tissues). Novo Nordisk are also interested in novel therapeutic modality development and drug delivery technologies, including technologies for oral delivery of peptides and proteins, technologies for intracellular delivery or tissue targeting of drugs as well as novel gene therapy approaches. **Researchers with relevant programmes of activity are strongly encouraged to apply.**



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To facilitate the co-development of projects with an appropriate Novo Nordisk researcher, Oxford-based investigators should submit a *non-confidential* **Expression of Interest (EOI) to the Translational Research Office(TRO) by 12pm on 12th May 2020**. This EOI should provide a summary of the proposed project, including a summary of supporting background data, objectives and proposed outcomes of the project and a justification for support explaining how your proposal is aligned to the Novo Nordisk priority areas identified above.

Funding provided will be in line with MLSTF, up to £75k per project with awards being made for direct costs only. It is anticipated that Novo Nordisk will be co-funding two projects through this scheme in 2020. Intellectual property rights arising from NNIF-supported projects will vest in the University of Oxford, with Novo Nordisk having a time-limited first right to negotiate an appropriate commercial licence. For further information please contact the TRO (translationalresearchoffice@medsci.ox.ac.uk).

Eligibility

Any researcher from the University holding a contract extending to at least the end of the proposed project may apply, assuming they have host departmental approval. Applicants should clarify their eligibility with departments, and departmental approvers are required to check eligibility of their applicants before advancing any applications. The Committee welcomes applications from Early Career Researchers and applicants seeking to establish individual research careers should they fit this criteria.

Application, selection and award process

Applicants should complete an online application through **IRAMS**, which requests information about the principal applicant and any co-applicants or editors, a lay summary (*non-confidential*), a financial breakdown of your proposal (X5 report must be appended) and a **case for support form** uploaded to the IRAMS application system. You must incorporate all requested components of the case for support into one document (see below) and upload this in the template provided on IRAMS as a PDF. IRAMS Guidance in the form of quick reference guide documents for applicants, departmental approvers and administrators can be found on [Research Support](#) pages.

Please note that applications must be reviewed and approved in IRAMS by a Departmental Approver before they will be reviewed by the Committee; the advertised application deadline is the deadline for final submission to the MLSTF Committee. Departments may set an earlier internal deadline to allow for departmental review, so please check with your local admin team and submit your application to your Departmental Approver in advance of the advertised deadline.

A case for support (four pages max.) and CVs (one page max. each PI & CoI) for all applicants named in the application must be appended to the IRAMS application form.

The case for support must include:

- A 250-word abstract of the proposal requesting MLSTF funding;
- Project objectives and proposed outcomes, including information about proposed development milestones and potential next steps following completion of the project to include, for example, sources of follow-on funding, plans for commercialisation;
- A timeline for your project, aligning with milestones to demonstrate that these are realistic both in terms of the objectives set and the time necessary to achieve them; identification of 'critical path';
- A justification for support explaining how your proposal is aligned with the remit and objectives of the Fund;
- Details of any industrial engagement in your project and plans to advance this;



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- IP status: Are third parties involved and how will IP be managed with respect to these collaborators?
- A description of any matched funding secured.

The deadline for submission of applications through IRAMS is **5pm on Monday 15th June 2020**.

Projects will be assessed on: strength of rationale; quality of science; un-met medical need; future commercial opportunity; IP position; likelihood of developing a full proposal to be submitted to the MRC DPFS award scheme, or similar follow-on funding schemes, within the required timescale and budget. Should ethics and/or home office approvals be required for the projects, priority will be given to those applications that already have these in place.

Applications will be reviewed by the MLSTF Committee, chaired by Professor Matthew Wood. Please note, the Committee membership comprises both internal academic and external commercial experts to ensure robust, vigorous review in line with funder recommendations. All external members are required to sign a CDA prior to reviewing applications. For further information on Committee membership please see [here](#). The panel meeting is anticipated to be held in **July 2020**. Applicants will be notified by 31st July 2020 of the outcome. Award letters will be sent out in **August 2020**. Work must commence within 3 months of the award letter or otherwise agreed with the TRO.

Further information

All potential applicants are encouraged to discuss their proposed projects with the TRO (translationalresearchoffice@medsci.ox.ac.uk). The TRO can also assist with finding suitable collaborators and sourcing appropriate support and expertise through the Experts in Residence (ExIR) programme. Applicants are also encouraged to discuss their proposal with Oxford University Innovation (OUI) well in advance of submission. OUI will be able to advise and support on the industry engagement and IP aspects of bids as well as the potential for match funding through the UCSF scheme. Figure 1 summaries the proposed MLSTF and Novo Nordisk Innovation Fund application process. For any further information regarding this scheme please contact: translationalresearchoffice@medsci.ox.ac.uk

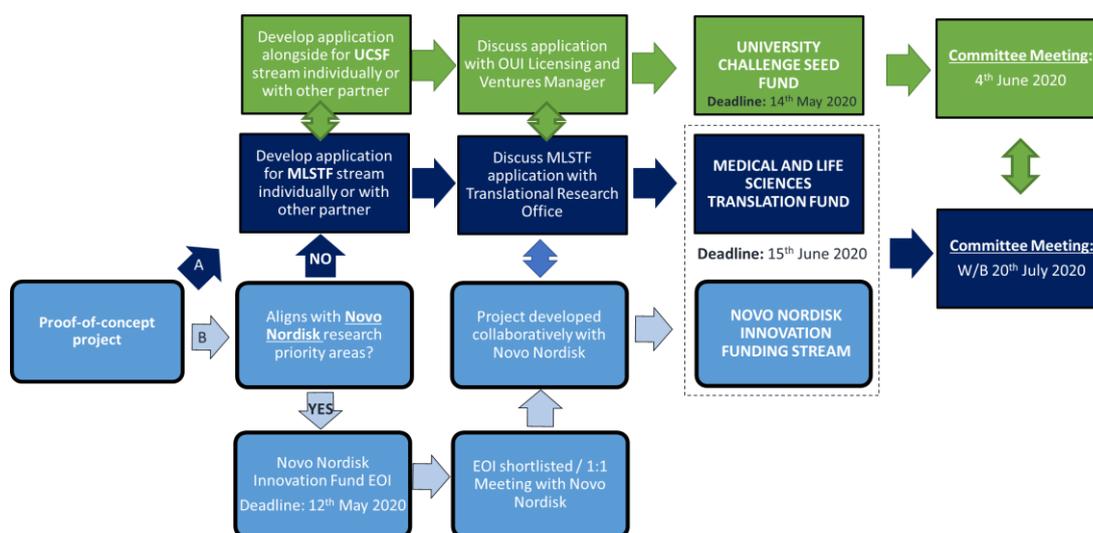


Figure 1: Proposed Medical and Life Sciences Translation Fund (MLSTF) and Novo Nordisk Innovation Fund process map. UCSF is a funding stream managed by OUI which provides researchers with an opportunity to match fund projects with MLSTF funding. Please contact the TRO and OUI to discuss this option in more detail.