FAQ for Milner Therapeutics Consortium call for proposals 2024

TYPES OF PROJECTS

What stage of research project is suitable for Milner Consortium projects? Our collaborations are pre-clinical and often focused on increasing understanding of disease mechanisms, target identification and validation, biomarker discovery, and development and application of disease-relevant models that are more predictive. The projects are expected to lead to joint publications with the company partners.

- *Key considerations for projects in target or biomarker discovery.* These projects often focus on strengthening the hypothesis and human biology around a potential target, including support for a causal link of the target to a disease phenotype and biological understanding of its function. Other considerations that are desirable but not essential are assessment of potential tractability and tool compound availability.

- *Key considerations for projects in disease models or assays*. There is strong interest in models that are patient-derived and have been demonstrated to be disease relevant. Key considerations will include how well the model reflects and predicts disease pathology, how well it can be used for screening assays and whether it could be scalable.

- *Key considerations for projects on technology development.* There is strong interest in interdisciplinary teams who are developing technologies, methods or modalities in other disciplines and working with life science researchers to apply these in disease biology.

- *Key considerations for projects where the academic lab has a potential therapeutic*. Proposals where there is a new vector, compound series, biological, cell or gene therapy for which biological validation already exist can be considered. Additional legal and commercial discussions might be needed if a full proposal is requested by an interested Consortium Pharma partner.

Can an application be submitted from a team of researchers across different Schools at the University? Yes, and this is encouraged by several of the Consortium companies. For some topics of interest (e.g. technology development), an interdisciplinary team is viewed as essential. Where possible, we would encourage groups to come together across Schools for interdisciplinary collaborative proposals.

Can an application be submitted from a team of researchers that include members at Institutes and Universities outside of Cambridge? The Consortium model has been set up for working with researchers at Cambridge University, the Sanger or Babraham Institutes, and we do not encourage applications to include teams from other organizations. However, if an EOI is selected for a full proposal that does include researchers based elsewhere then additional legal agreements will be needed to enable their participation. This will increase the time taken from initial project discussions to a collaboration agreement being finalised.

What is the expected timeframe for projects? This is decided on a case-by-case basis. Projects might be considered as pilots (e.g. 6 months) or full projects (e.g. 1-2 years) depending on the stage of the research, the key experiments that are planned, anticipated decision points and budget. In some cases, and dependent on results, there is the potential for projects to be extended to continue the collaboration. It is useful to consider what a pilot phase of your project might look like and note this on the EOI submission.

What resource is available to support a project? Support for projects would be decided on a case-by-case basis by the pharma partner(s). In-kind contributions, including the provision of reagents or know-how in a particular disease or technology, might be what is needed for the success of a project rather than funding. If a project requires funding, then typically this might include salary for a postdoc and consumables.

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST APPLICATION FORM

There are several sections in the Expression of Interest (EOI) form requesting information beyond the scientific rationale and potential project outline. Some key pointers are included below to ensure that the information provided will enable us and the Consortium companies to consider all aspects of your project and how you might work with an industry partner.

How will both parties benefit from this collaboration? The Consortium companies are interested in cutting edge science that will improve the capacity to develop new treatments for specific human diseases. These partners are looking to be able to add value to and/or contribute to the collaborations proposed. In some cases, this might be putting industry scientists together with academics and providing tool compounds to test a hypothesis that might benefit the treatment of a specific disease. In other cases, this might be working with academics through providing funding and insight from internal disease research programmes e.g. to build a new *in vitro* assay to better understand mechanisms of drug resistance in cancer. Adding one or two sentences about how an industry partner will benefit from collaborating with you, and why this is the right stage of the project to collaborate, will help them to understand how they can add value to your proposal.

Will you be working with primary human tissue (ex vivo samples)? The Consortium agreement is drafted to enable this. However, it will help the process substantially if you note this in the *IP/freedom to operate* box at the end of the form, indicating where the tissues will be sourced from.

Will you be working with new cell models? If your proposed research includes cell lines that have been created (genetically manipulated for example) by a third party and **are not** commercially available, please include this information in the *IP/freedom to operate* box at the end of the form.

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST SELECTION PROCESS

My expression of interest (EOI) focuses on a topic that is not listed as a challenge but is in the longer list of areas of interest. Is it still worth applying? Yes, the challenge topics are those that have been identified as a priority area of interest for external collaboration at this time, whereas the longer list specifies other areas that are also of interest for a smaller number or individual companies. For some topics, there is significant interest in overarching mechanisms rather than a particular disease type.

Who will decide on which proposals to take forward? All EOIs will be curated by the Milner team and sent to a panel of representatives from each of the fourteen pharma companies. The companies consult with their internal scientific teams to review the EOIs and determine whether the projects could be of interest for collaboration. The Milner team is not involved in the decision-making process.

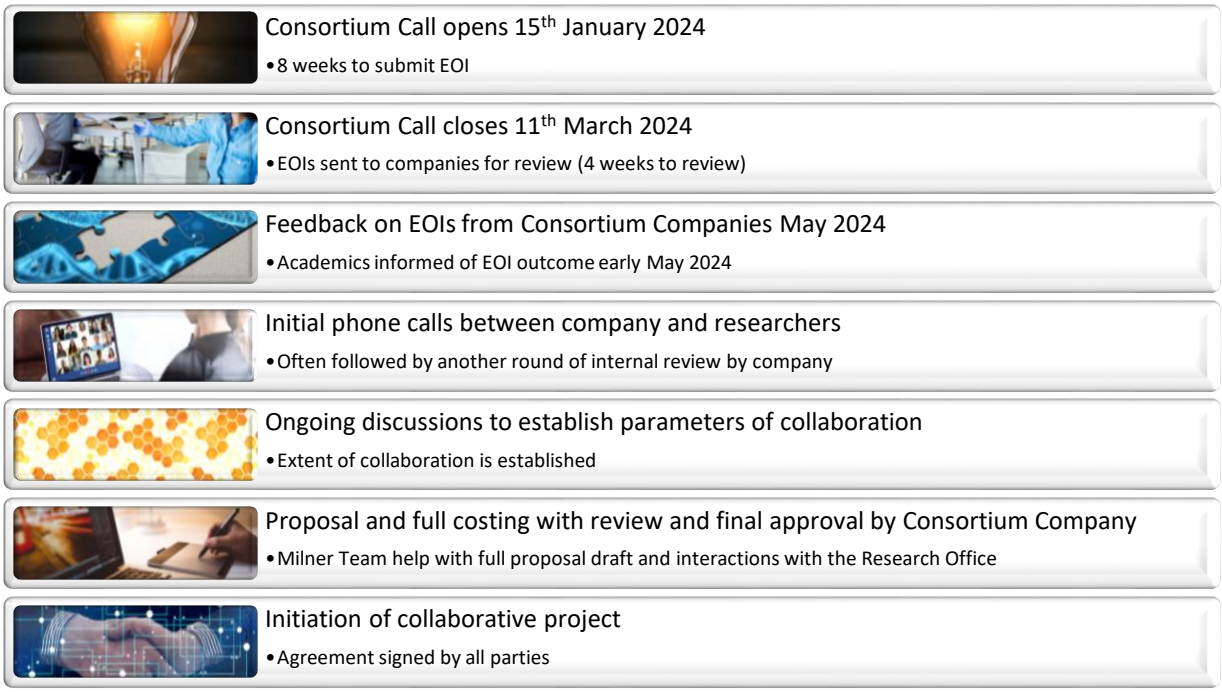
How will EOIs be matched with a particular company? All Consortium companies who have an interest in the challenge topic (or research area) covered by the proposal will be offered the opportunity to review the EOI. Interested companies can then request a meeting with an academic to discuss the proposal before deciding whether to invite them to develop a full collaborative proposal together.

Will companies provide advice and support in developing a proposal from an EOI? Yes. Researchers who are invited to develop a full proposal will meet with scientists at the company to: shape aims and focus of the project; agree who will provide what; determine what the anticipated outcomes would be; and what resource might be required. In our experience, while the project is academically led, this discussion provides essential input into the development of a project and leads to a much more successful collaboration that is of mutual benefit.

What if several companies are interested in an EOI? In addition to projects with individual companies, the Milner Consortium also aims to initiate research collaborations where multiple companies work together on a pre-competitive basis to co-fund a project; this spreads the cost of a project and allows combined expertise to be provided. This is particularly attractive for companies to work in research areas that might be considered as higher risk.

When will a firm decision be made whether to fund my project? Companies will only invite full proposals where there is significant interest in funding a collaboration. However, once the proposal is fully drafted and costed there is an additional internal review process at the company/ies to ensure the full proposal is on strategy. This review process is **competitive** with other internal and external company projects, so not all proposals will necessarily be funded.

How long does it take to start a project? Researchers who are invited to develop a full proposal will meet with scientists at the company to discuss the focus and aims of a project. They will then draft a proposal, which will be reviewed and likely discussed at 1 or 2 follow-up meetings with the company. The final proposal will need to be approved by the Research Office at the University, but as Milner projects use a template agreement, the terms of which have been agreed by the University and companies, this makes the contract and approval process more efficient. An agreement that is submitted for approval in July with no complications (e.g. patient-derived material (ethics) or additional funder requirements) could be signed off for project initiation by October.
[*Please see Timeline graphic on next page*]



Who will own the results from this project? The terms of the Milner agreement specify that IP of any results generated remain with the academic, and companies are given a non-exclusive licence to work with the results. There is also a strong emphasis on co-publication of the study. In rare cases, if a compound provided by a company is being developed for the clinic and has not yet been published there could be restrictions on disclosing compound chemistry, synthesis and characterisation, as well as confidential results.

What support will I receive in planning and initiating a project proposal? The Milner team are focused on supporting the academic in the development of the proposal, drafting of the research agreement, working with the Department on the costings (at full proposal stage) and facilitating the communication with the team at the company. The Research Office at the University will support the set-up and initiation of the project.