FAQ for Milner Therapeutics Consortium call for proposals 2021

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 proposals in target or biomarker discovery:** Proposals often focus on strengthening the hypothesis and human biology around a potential target, including support of 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 proposals 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 proposals 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.

Can an application be submitted from a team of researchers across different Schools? For many topics of interest (e.g., in technology development), an interdisciplinary team is essential. We would encourage groups to come together across Schools for interdisciplinary collaborative proposals.

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 and anticipated decision points. Depending on results, there is the potential for projects to be extended in some cases to continue the collaboration.

What resource is available to support a project? Support for projects would be decided on a case-by-case basis, but typically might include funding for a postdoc and consumables. In other cases, in-kind contributions including the provision of reagents, know-how in a particular disease or technology may be what is needed for the success of a project.

PROPOSAL SELECTION PROCESS

My proposal focuses on a topic that is not listed as a priority but is in the long list of areas of interest. Is it still worth me applying? Yes, the priority topics are those that are of interest across several companies whereas the longer list specifies those areas that are of significant interest for a smaller number or individual companies. For many topics, there is significant interest in overarching mechanisms rather than a particular disease type.
Who will decide on which proposals to take forward? All expressions of interest will be reviewed by the Milner team and a panel of representatives from each of the ten pharma companies. This will include consultation with scientific teams at the companies who would then be involved in development of a full collaboration.

How will proposals be matched with a particular company? All relevant companies will be offered the opportunity to review an EOI proposal. Interested companies can then request a meeting with an academic to discuss the proposal before inviting them to develop a full collaborative proposal together.

Will companies provide advice and support in developing a proposal? Yes. Researchers who are invited to develop a full proposal will meet with researchers at the company in July to shape aims and focus of the project; agree who will do what; 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 a proposal? The Milner Consortium also aims to initiate research collaborations where 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 brought to the collaboration. 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, there is an additional internal review process at the company/ies to ensure the full proposal is on strategy at this stage. The review process is also competitive 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, and they will then draft and review the proposal. 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) would normally be signed off for project initiation by October.

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 is aimed for the clinic there could be restrictions on disclosing 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.
April 2021. Call launch
Launch of call and Q&A
events by Milner team.

Live for 8 weeks

May 2021. Application process
Researchers assemble
teams and submit EOI
by closing date.

June 2021: Application and review process
Closing date: June 8th
Call for applications by Milner team for advisory panel. Selection of proposals at advisory panel meeting, following internal consideration at companies.
Meetings with selected PIs.
Feedback provided by Milner team for unsuccessful applicants.

July-Sept 2021. Full proposal
Joint development of proposal between company and academic.
Submitted to Research Office for review and approvals.

Oct-Nov 2021. Project initiation
Agreement finalized by both parties and project initiated.

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