

Research grant award process



CCLG: The Children & Young People's Cancer Association 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 expert review (sometimes called peer review), ensuring that all new research funded by CCLG has been independently assessed by experts in children and young people's cancer (including those with lived experience, research and professional insight). It is the advice of independent experts about the scientific quality and potential clinical value of research that informs decisions about which proposals are funded. The aim of this process is to draw from leading insight from across the children and young people's cancer research field 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 care and treatment of children and young people with cancer to help build a brighter future.

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 expert review forms the foundation for our process.

- Step 1: Grant round defined & advertised
- Step 2: Internal Triage
- Step 3: Written Expert 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 six principles of expert review as set out by the AMRC. These principles are embedded within the six stages of the process used to select new research grants.

- **Proportionality** - Charities must ensure the review process is 'fit for purpose' with reviews proportionate to both the size and scale of the award, and the expertise sought sufficient and relevant to provide effective review. Charities must seek additional review for applications where there is a lack of expertise on a particular subject area on any research review committees or among in-depth reviewers used by the charity, or where the funding requested is substantial in relation to the charity's research spend.
- **Independence** - Charities must take account of advice provided by experts who are independent of the charity's administrative staff and trustees.
- **Diversity** - Charities must seek recommendations from a range of experts with relevant knowledge or experience, who appropriately reflect the views of a range of stakeholders. Charities must also consider the diversity of experts involved in the review process in terms of location, career stage, gender and ethnicity or other factors as appropriate.

- **Rotation** - Charities must rotate the experts involved in decision making to ensure they are regularly incorporating fresh ideas and new perspectives into their expert review processes. This allows charities to incorporate the views of a range of individuals, including those who may not have been otherwise represented. It also allows charities to change the membership of their research review committee(s) as appropriate and required to meet their research strategy.
- **Impartiality** - Charities must publish and adhere to a conflicts of interest policy, specific to research funding. This policy must clearly articulate the types of conflicts that may arise in research funding contexts and specify the actions that conflicted committee members should take so that they are not able to influence funding decisions. Additionally, where research funding is awarded to trustees of the charity, this must be done according to the Charity Commission rules in Annex 1, AMRC's conflicts of interest guide, and the charity's governing documents (e.g. articles of association) must permit this.
- **Transparency** - Charities must publish their research strategy and expert review process online so that external audiences can see the rigorous methods used to make research funding decisions, including the names of the experts involved in the decision-making process. It is important that charity funders share transparently how and why animals are used in research. When funding research involving animals, charities must consider the 3Rs through expert review.

Step 1: Grant round defined & advertised

The types of research funded by CCLG: The Children & Young People's Cancer Association are outlined in the CCLG Research Strategy, which is available to download from our website. This strategy sets out four key ambitions including defining our approach to research funding. At its core is a commitment to support high-quality research that delivers the greatest possible impact. We aim to achieve this by funding the best research and researchers, focusing on priority areas, and working in collaboration with our community to share best practices and build research capacity in the field of children and young people's cancers.

The Research Strategy is reviewed regularly to ensure it reflects advances in the wider research landscape and responds to emerging challenges and opportunities in paediatric and young people's cancer care.

Funding Sources

Funding for the grant schemes managed by CCLG comes from a variety of sources, including:

- Internal CCLG funds
- CCLG's Special Named Funds
- The Charities Research Network
- Grants and awards managed by CCLG on behalf of other charities

The origins of funding for each CCLG research grant scheme are clearly outlined in the grant advertisements. While the process for awarding grants is consistent across schemes, regardless of funding source, minor procedural variations may occur, such as differences in which Trustees provide final approval.

Advertisement

New grant schemes are advertised broadly to the research community. This includes:

- CCLG website
- Email circulation lists
- Social media announcements
- Direct communication with current and past grant holders

Full details about each grant scheme can be found in the *For researchers* section of the research area on the CCLG website. This includes information on:

- The specific remit, theme, and priority areas of each call
- The source of the funding
- The maximum amount of funding available and project duration
- Application submission deadlines

All applications must be submitted via the **CCLG Flexi-Grant portal**.

Application Guidance and Review

Comprehensive information on CCLG's grant application process, including submission criteria, guidance documents, and details of the peer review process and Research Advisory Group (RAG), is available on the website. Relevant policies and downloadable resources are also provided.

Applicants can find:

- Profiles of RAG members
- An overview of the peer review process
- Lists of current funding opportunities
- A record of previously funded research and the broader research portfolio

Prospective applicants are encouraged to contact CCLG staff for advice on topics such as project scope, collaborations, and funding eligibility. However, CCLG staff cannot provide feedback on the scientific content of applications.

Use of Animals in Research

CCLG supports the AMRC position on the use of animals in research. In line with AMRC guidance, applicants must describe how they have addressed the 3Rs—**Replacement, Reduction, and Refinement**—in their proposals. Peer reviewers and the RAG will evaluate these responses as part of the review process.

Grants awarded through CCLG must comply with:

- The Annual Research: Reporting of In Vivo Experience (ARRIVE) guidelines
- The Responsibility in the Use of Animals in Biosciences Research expectations as set out by the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research

Resources to support applicants in meeting these standards are available on the CCLG website.

Step 2: Internal Triage

All submitted applications are first reviewed by internal CCLG staff to ensure they meet the submission criteria for the relevant funding round. This initial triage assesses:

- Eligibility of the applicant and project
- Strategic alignment with the funding call
- Completeness of the application

Importantly, no assessment of research quality is made at this stage. The purpose of this triage is to ensure

that only applications within the scope of the grant scheme move forward to expert review.

Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria will be returned to the lead applicant, along with a clear explanation of why the application was deemed ineligible.

Step 3: Written expert review

CCLG draws on a broad range of expertise to inform its research funding decisions. This includes academic researchers and clinical professionals with specialist knowledge across various types of children and young people's cancers, as well as experts spanning the full research pipeline, from basic science to clinical research and implementation in practice. Importantly, expertise is not limited to researchers and clinicians; it also includes individuals with lived experience, such as patients, family members, and carers, and may also include nursing and allied health professionals, industry representatives, and regulators. These diverse perspectives help ensure robust assessment of feasibility, quality, relevance, and cost-effectiveness.

Expert Review Process

All research applications are assessed by independent external experts, who provide written appraisals and scores based on a structured matrix. For each application, a search to identify published research relevant to the proposed project is used to identify experts from across the UK and internationally in the research field. In addition, expert reviewers may be selected from across CCLG's research and professional community, such as from the Special Interest Groups which form part of CCLG's professional membership service. Detailed written reviews may also be provided by members of CCLG's Research Advisory Group. All reviewers are bound by CCLG's **conflict of interest policy** and **grant review code of conduct**, both of which are available on the CCLG website and shared with reviewers in advance.

Expert review criteria include:

- Research need and scope of the proposal
- The hypothesis, supporting data and design of the proposed study
- Quality, relevance and potential value of the research for children and young people's cancer
- Leadership and capability of the research team
- Justification of resources and value for money
- Public and patient/family involvement and engagement (PPIE) in research and broader impact
- Path to translation and potential to impact the care and treatment of children and young people with cancer

All research funded using CCLG's funds will also be assessed by members of CCLG's Parent/Patient Involvement Research Group. This includes parents, carers, and individuals with personal experience of childhood cancer. Their input offers expert insight on research priorities and relevance from a lived experience perspective. Applicants should consider how they might involve families with experience of children and young people's cancer in the development and progress of their research and should set out their plans for involvement and engagement with families and the wider general public, and demonstrate how their project will have a broader impact.

Step 4: Research Advisory Group

The Research Advisory Group (RAG) is CCLG's independent research review committee, composed of external experts who provide impartial advice and recommendations on which research grant proposals should be funded. A list of current RAG members is available on the CCLG website.

RAG members are not involved in the day-to-day operations of CCLG and act independently of the charity's

Board of Trustees. However, some RAG representatives may also serve as members of the **CCLG Executive** to provide a link between these groups.

Role and Structure

For grants funded through CCLG sources, the RAG makes recommendations to the CCLG Executive and Board of Trustees.

For schemes managed in partnership with other charities, RAG recommendations are provided to the partner charity's Board of Trustees.

The RAG is comprised of experts with different professional and disciplinary expertise and is formed of 20-30 members. CCLG maintains a larger membership base to:

1. Provide a broad range of expertise
2. Assist with managing conflicts of interest of RAG members within particular schemes
3. Support the development of less-experienced researchers in the review process
4. Preserve institutional knowledge and continuity as members complete their terms

The quorum of RAG committee meeting is five members. Sub-groups may be formed for particular schemes by selecting RAG members who have suitable expertise.

All RAG members and external reviewers must adhere to:

- The CCLG Grant Review Code of Conduct
- The Conflict of Interest Policy

These policies ensure the independence, impartiality and confidentiality of the expert review process used for the assessment of grant applications. Any expert reviewer or RAG member with a vested interest in a proposal must declare this and will be excluded from its assessment. All policies and codes are available for download via the CCLG website.

Grant Round Meetings

RAG meetings are convened for each funding round. Prior to the meeting:

- All expert reviewer scores and comments (including external experts, internal RAG, and lived experience reviews) are collated and shared with the RAG.
- Each application is assigned to a lead RAG member, who presents the findings to the group.

Following discussion of all feedback, the RAG determines whether proposals are considered fundable and provides scores which are used to produce a ranked list of recommendations. All the information collected during the expert review assessment process is compiled into a report by the CCLG research leadership team, who liaise with the CCLG Executive under the delegated authority from the Board of Trustees.

Step 5: Charity Trustees

For research projects funded through CCLG sources, including those supported by Special Named Funds, the Research Advisory Group (RAG)'s recommendations are submitted to the CCLG Executive under delegated authority from the Board of Trustees. Final funding decisions are confirmed by the CCLG Board of Trustees.

For grant schemes funded through external sources, such as those administered via CCLG's Charities Research Network, the final approval of awards is made by the Board of Trustees of the partner charity providing the funding.

Step 6: Project Monitoring

All newly funded grants through CCLG are subject to CCLG's grant terms and conditions, which applicants must formally agree to prior to funding being released. As part of this agreement:

- Grant holders must inform us when positions funded by their grant are appointed
- Grant holders must submit annual progress reports throughout the duration of the project
- Grant holders must discuss with us of any changes or issues that may affect the progress of their research
- A final report is required at the conclusion of the funding period
- Grant holders must continue to update CCLG about any relevant publications, outputs and other dissemination and engagement activities following the end of the grant duration
- A declaration of funding must be completed once the work for the grant has been completed

Step 7: Engagement & Dissemination

CCLG's research programme is rooted in a community shaped by the experiences of families affected by childhood cancer. Grant holders are encouraged to engage with this community in meaningful ways, which may include:

- Hosting lab visits for lay representatives
- Involving lay ambassadors throughout the project
- Participating in or hosting dissemination events tailored for non-specialist audiences

Depending on the source of funding, researchers may be invited to build connections with:

- Families associated with CCLG's Special Named Funds
- Partner charities through CCLG's Charity Research Network
- Members of CCLG's Lived Experience Network

These activities help ensure that research remains patient- and family-focused, and that findings are shared in accessible ways with those directly impacted by children and young people's cancer. This engagement helps highlight the relevance and importance of the project within the broader community.

- Information about new grants and project progress will be shared through CCLG's website and social media channels
- Grant holders will be invited to participate in CCLG-hosted events as well as events organized through their own networks

After the completion of the project, grant holders are expected to maintain regular communication with CCLG regarding any:

- Relevant publications
- Dissemination activities
- New grants related to the funded research
- Career development and new positions obtained by research staff funded by the grant

Grant holders are expected to complete a post-grant report update every year for three years after the completion of the grant. This ensures ongoing sharing of knowledge and progress within the CCLG community.