

Organ-on-Chip Technologies Network: Sabbatical funding – application guidance and regulations

Overview:

Funding is available to Organ-on-a-Chip Technologies (OOACT) network members for small pump priming sabbatical projects. The goals of funding are to:

- stimulate new collaborations between network members, and
- integrate research activity across traditional research disciplines.

We are strongly focused on facilitating preliminary work to support full funding applications.

All awards will be short term and used to establish a new collaboration and carry out the scoping work which will lead to full research proposals.

We focus on projects which integrate advances in engineering and physical science technologies with the necessary life science understanding, and also encourage integration with industrial partners (see the [Technology Touching Lives](#) (TTL) UKRI initiative under which we operate).

Key Features at a Glance:

- Projects should be early stage (pre-competitive) research activity in the organ on a chip field
- Projects must be sabbatical in style, whereby a researcher will travel to a host laboratory different to their current place of work
- Typical projects will be 1-3 months. Maximum project duration is 6 months.
- You can apply for:
 - salary: up to a maximum of £15,500
 - consumables: up to £5k
 - travel, accommodation & subsistence: up to £5k
- We will fund at 80% fEC which goes to the PIs' institution to manage as appropriate. Costings **must** have been approved by the PIs academic institution.
- We expect a minimum of 2 investigators on a project (one from the home and one from the host institutes for the sabbatical), but projects can involve further partners as appropriate.
- Normally, home and host investigators will be from different disciplines and different institutions. However, they must always constitute a new collaboration.
- Projects must be academic led. The PI must be from a UK academic institution, which can be either the 'home' or 'host' institute for the sabbatical.
- PDRA engagement is strongly encouraged. PDRA's can be named as co-investigators.
- PhD student involvement must follow [UKRI guidelines](#), limiting the hours they can work. Their salary cannot be requested in project costings.

Funding Criteria:

Applications will be assessed with reference to the following criteria. Each aspect will receive a rating of 1-6, after which the application will be given a complete final rating.

1: Unfundable; 2: poor or unclear; 3: Good; 4: Very Good; 5: Excellent; 6: Exceptional

Objectives & Project Plan:

- Is the proposed work well motivated and the benefits of the project clearly articulated?
- What are the strengths and weakness of the proposed approach?
- Are the objectives appropriate for the duration of the award?

Vision & Benefit to the Network:

- Is the longer term vision for the research work clearly articulated and motivated?
- Is it clear how this pump priming funding facilitates the wider research vision?
- Are the plans for leveraging the vision clear and appropriate?
- How does the vision benefit the research field and the network?

Value for Money

- Are all costs clearly justified and appropriate?
- Where do you see this project leading and is the spend likely to leverage further research activity?

Research Team:

- Is this a new collaboration?
- Are the rationale and benefits of the collaboration clear?
- Are the plans for supporting the researcher during the sabbatical clear and appropriate?
- Have potential benefits for the researcher been maximised?

Terms and Conditions:

All funded projects must agree to abide by the full terms and conditions of award as detailed in this document. **Please note, all projects must:**

- Comply with UKRI data sharing policy and upload non-IP sensitive data to Network web portal in accordance with [UKRI data policy](#):
- Complete an initial report on project outcomes (within 2 months of completing the project) and 1 year follow-up report
- Respond to requests to support the ResearchFish submission for the network
- Present at the subsequent OOAD network meeting

Submit your application to the network administrator: network@organonachip.org.uk **by the published deadline on webpage:** www.organonachip.org.uk/funding/sabbaticalfunding. Use the subject header: PoC application – (applicant surname) – (lead institution)

For Network Leadership Team queries, please email: network@organonachip.org.uk

Detailed Organ-on-a-Chip Network Funding Guidelines

1. Funding Eligibility

Table 1: Applicant criteria	PI	Co-I	Researcher Co-I	Named researcher
Permanent academic/clinical staff	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fellows & PDRAs		✓	✓	✓
Industrial staff		✓		
Students (PhD, MSc, BSc)				✓

Applicants

- 1.1 Applications must be received by the published deadline, details on: www.organonachip.org.uk/funding/sabbaticalfunding
Applications received after this time will not be considered.
- 1.2 All applicants on a project must be members of the Organ-on-a-Chip Technologies Network. Membership of the network is subject to [registration](#). Potential partners can be found or checked on our website for [OOAC membership](#).
- 1.3 Funding is available for pump priming sabbatical projects, such that a researcher is expected to travel to a new laboratory and facilitate a new collaboration - carrying out work to support a future, more substantive funding application.
- 1.4 All applications must be led by a Principal Applicant (PI) based in an academic department eligible for research council funding.
- 1.5 All applications must involve a minimum of two applicants; the “home” and “host” institutions for the sabbatical. The PI can be either the “home” or the “host”.
- 1.6 All applications must include a named researcher to undertake the sabbatical.
- 1.7 The Named Researcher is permitted to undertake their sabbatical overseas. However, the application must justify why this approach is needed; why the work cannot be done in the UK; and how this will benefit the UK.
- 1.8 Standard Research council [eligibility rules](#) apply. PDRA engagement is strongly encouraged. PDRAs can be named as co-investigators. **See Table 1: Applicant criteria.**
- 1.9 For projects with industrial or overseas collaborators: these collaborators can host sabbaticals or send researchers on sabbaticals as long as the project is UK academic-led, funding goes to the UK academic institution, and these collaborators cover their own costs. Industrial engagement is strongly encouraged. For overseas placements, a clear case for the benefits of the interaction should be made.

- 1.10 The researcher undertaking the sabbatical can also be a student, as long as the [UKRI guidelines](#) concerning funding are adhered to.
- 1.11 Salary can only be requested for the “Named Researcher” on the project - to the maximum of £15,500
- Industrial or overseas researchers cannot claim salary
 - PhD student involvement: Salary requests are not permitted; travel, subsistence and consumables **are** funded. Any involvement must follow [UKRI guidelines](#), limiting the hours they can work. We strongly advise discussing PhD student involvement with the [OOACT leadership team](#) prior to submission.
- 1.12 The contractual status for the Named Researcher can include the following:
- Permeant
 - Honorary – after their current contract finishes
 - Employed/in post when the project starts. They don’t need to be in post beforehand.
- 1.13 The sabbatical can also cover the following if clear benefits to made to these approaches in the application:
- Two PhD student exchanges between labs
 - Time to set up systems in home lab after sabbatical period

Biological tissue

- 1.14 There are no restrictions on the use of animal cells rather than human cells in sabbatical project applications - as long as relevance to the OOAC research field is shown and how it will help advance the systems for recapitulating human organs.

Note: Please ensure you comply with current legislation regarding use of any human or animal tissue under relevant regulations.

Intellectual property

- 1.15 Where IP is expected, a standard agreement has been drawn up, in which the PIs institution (covering the 20% fEC shortfall) will hold all IP. You are strongly encouraged to discuss IP in association with your project. If this arrangement does not suit your project, you are able to make your own arrangements which should be signed off at the same time as the project to ensure all parties are clear. (see 2.10)

2. Costings

Table 2: Funding information

Applicants can apply for:

Research salary: up to a maximum of £15,500 including salary associated overheads

Consumables: up to £5,000 (Consumables considerably more than 5K will unlikely be offered funding)

Travel, accommodation & subsistence: up to £5,000

NB: There is some flexibility in terms of funding allocation across headings if the total does not exceed £25,500 (100%fEC). All costs must be fully justified, particularly where flexibility in allocation between categories is requested.

- 2.1 Project costs should be submitted at 100% fEC on the application form. Costs will be reimbursed at 80% fEC with the awarded institution covering the shortfall. Funding must be signed off at an institution level to ensure this shortfall is acknowledged and will be met.
- 2.2 The total cost of a project should not exceed £25,500 (100% fEC), with typical maximum awards for each category of: 3 months FTE researcher salary, £5k consumables and £5k travel & subsistence.
- 2.3 Salary can be met to a maximum amount of £15,500 for the “Named Researcher” only. Salary cannot be claimed for any other project applicants, nor for industrialists, PhD students or overseas researchers.
- 2.4 Overheads can be requested, but only those associated with the Named Researcher’s salary.
- 2.5 For projects which require small equipment or additional spend on specific headers, there is some flexibility if the total amount does not exceed £25,500 (100% fEC). Any such projects should be discussed with the Network Leadership Team prior to submission.
- 2.6 Organ-on-a-Chip Network funds may be considered *de minimis* aid. By applying, applicants are confirming they will not breach the rules of *de minimis* aid. For further information see <https://www.gov.uk/state-aid>. Specific points of note associated with *de minimis* aid:
 - The network will support only pre-competitive research
 - Any funding in relation to industry involvement must comply with state aid rules
 - If you are planning to apply for any funding to support an ineligible industry partner’s work under *de minimis*, you must provide evidence you meet the requirements up front (i.e. you aren’t exceeding the overall threshold for this type of funding).
 - Please incorporate relevant information within the justification for resources
- 2.7 Project costs incurred by partners not eligible to receive UKRI funding will not be eligible for reimbursement under the Organ-on-a-Chip Network funding scheme.
- 2.8 Management of funds is the responsibility of the PI’s academic institution which will receive the monies. The academic institution and the host institution will be responsible for making any necessary arrangements for the transfer of funds to co-investigators.
- 2.9 The following factors need considering when setting project start dates for costing purposes:
 - The date for the Funding Prioritisation Meeting for the current call can be found on our funding webpage www.organonachip.org.uk/funding/sabbaticalfunding
 - A decision will be made within 14 days of this meeting and offer letters sent to successful applicants along with the funding agreement for signing.
 - The funding agreement requires signing by several parties including project PIs and Co-Is. Please be aware that this might take a couple of weeks to complete. The funding agreement template can you found on our funding webpage: see above.

3. Application and Evaluation Procedures

- 3.1 Applicants must complete all sections of the application form. Failure to complete the form will result in the application being rejected. Submitted forms will be collated after the closing deadline and held in confidence.
- 3.2 All reviewers are members of the Organ-on-a-Chip Technologies Network.
- 3.3 Each application will be assessed by a minimum of 2 reviewers, who will grade the proposal relative to the identified funding criteria. All applications (along with their associated reviews) will be discussed and ranked by the Sabbatical Funding Prioritisation Panel at the next Network Leadership Team meeting.

- 3.4 Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application as soon as possible after the Network Leadership Team funding prioritisation meeting.
- 3.5 All panel work by members of the Network Leadership Team and any additional reviewers will be covered by UKRI's code of practice that embraces the [seven principles of public life](#). Panel members and reviewers accept an obligation of confidentiality when dealing with proposals, and of respect to the original ideas research colleagues have disclosed.
- 3.6 Conflicts of Interest: Applicants must declare conflicts of interest with any members of the Network Leadership team on application. The leadership team can be viewed at: <https://www.organonachip.org.uk/people/>.
- 3.7 The Network Leadership Team and any additionally recruited reviewers will declare any conflicts of interest associated with a project application to the Chair of the Funding Prioritisation Panel and Network Administrator.

Examples of a reviewer conflict of interest include:

- Employed at the same institution at the applicant(s),
 - Actively involved in research collaborations or collaborated / worked closely with the applicant(s) over the preceding 5 years,
 - Involved in the governing body or holds an honorary position at the applicant(s) institutions(s),
 - In receipt of personal remuneration in excess of £5,000 per annum from the applicant's organisation,
 - Personal / family relationship with the applicant(s).
- 3.8 Reviewers with potential conflicts of interest will stand down and not review the relevant application(s); the network administrator will secure additional reviewers, to ensure a minimum of 2 reviews for each application. Members of the Leadership Team with conflicts of interest will not be permitted to review the application in question and will be asked to leave the room when the application is discussed at the Network Leadership Team meeting.
- 3.9 Funds will be allocated upon signature of the funding agreement between QMUL (on behalf of the Organ-on-a-Chip Network), the PI's institution and Co-Investigators. Please see funding agreement template on our webpage: www.organonachip.org.uk/funding/sabbaticalfunding

4. Payment, Monitoring and Reporting of Awards

- 4.1 All projects will be required to submit an initial report to the Network within 2 calendar months of the project completion date. This report must include:
- a financial summary from the awarded institution to indicate actual incurred costs;
 - a public (lay) summary of project outcomes;
 - the plan for exploitation and dissemination of the knowledge, including details of the approach to apply for further funding.
- 4.2 A further short project report is required within 13 months of the project completion date detailing:
- progress with project exploitation and dissemination, and
 - reports on additional project outputs and further funding applications (successful or not).
- 4.3 All project partners must respond to requests to support the ResearchFish submission for the network
- 4.4 Only actual incurred costs will be reimbursed. Any underspend will be reallocated by the network funds to assist in funding future applications.

- 4.5 Payment of funds will be made in arrears and only after satisfactory completion of the initial project report and its sign off by the Chair of the Funding Prioritisation Panel.
- 4.6 The lay summary of successful projects (submitted with the initial application), will be made publicly available on the Network webpages. The lay project report (submitted with the initial project report) will also be made publicly available on the website. Alongside these details, the project title, investigator team, amount of award, duration of award and details of other public outputs (papers; further funding) will also be made publicly available. All other submitted information will be treated strictly confidentially.
- 4.7 Projects must comply with [UKRI data sharing policies](#).
- 4.8 Project partners will be expected to present their results at the next available Organ-on-a-Chip Network event.
- 4.9 All funds awarded in each sabbatical round must spent by the round completion date which is available on: www.organonachip.org.uk/funding/sabbaticalfunding

References:

Organ-on-a-Chip Technologies Network website:

www.organonachip.org.uk

Organ-on-a-Chip Technologies Network: sabbatical funding webpage:

www.organonachip.org.uk/funding/sabbaticalfunding

Technology Touching Life:

www.ukri.org/research/themes-and-programmes/technology-touching-life/

UKRI guidelines:

www.ukri.org/files/legacy/publications/rcuk-training-grant-guide-pdf/

UKRI data policy:

www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/data-policy

Government state aid:

www.gov.uk/guidance/state-aid

Seven Principles of Public Life:

<https://epsrc.ukri.org/about/standards/employment/principlesofpubliclife/>

Standard Research Council eligibility rules:

www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/