

CRIG partnership grants – 1st call (2022)

Guidelines, regulations and criteria

Purpose

CRIG's core mission is to stimulate and to facilitate cancer research. Two of our major aims are: (1) to provide support for innovative cancer research projects at UGent, UZ Gent, and VIB-UGent; and (2) to stimulate the interaction between the lab and the clinic. Therefore, CRIG launches '*partnership grants*' for duos within CRIG – consisting of a health care professional (e.g. clinician, psychologist, nurse, social worker, dietician, ...) and a fundamental/translational researcher (and their respective teams) – to initiate innovative cancer research projects. Importantly, the purpose of these grants is to create leverage by stimulating and increasing the success rate of future larger project applications through other funding agencies, and to maximize chances to build further on the project (for example via fruitful and durable collaborations that bridge the gap between fundamental research and the clinic, by generating concrete benefit for the patient, increased output, valorization potential, ...).

Guidelines, regulations and criteria

1. Scope (eligibility) of the projects

- Project applications must focus on oncology.
- Project applications on different aspects in oncology are welcome, but the value for the patient in the short or mid-long term must be evident.
 - For example, a given partnership grant may focus on a clinical trial, or have the ambition to start a clinical trial in the near future. Project applications that contain fundamental and/or preclinical research aspects are not per se excluded, but the potential value for the patient must be evident and motivated (for example, but not limited to: biomarker development, improved diagnostic/prognostic tools, novel therapeutic approaches, ...).

In general, the aim of the CRIG partnership grant is to stimulate the interaction (and bridge the gap) between the fundamental research and the clinic, and the projects will be evaluated with this overarching aim in mind.

- The desired outcome of the partnership grants is to create leverage by stimulating and increasing the success rate of future larger project applications via other funding agencies, and to maximize chances to build further on the project (e.g. based on the data generated during the CRIG partnership grant). Therefore, innovative and creative project proposals with high potential for future output are encouraged (including novel and durable collaborations that bridge the gap between fundamental research and the clinic, concrete benefit for the patient, increased output, valorization potential, ...).

- Projects focusing on (or with applications in) adult or pediatric cancers are both welcome. Important note: in the context of CRIG's partnership with *vzw Kinderkankerfonds*, part of the budget for CRIG partnership grants is allocated to support projects that justify funding by *vzw Kinderkankerfonds*. Therefore, for this first call, it is the aim to support at least one partnership grant focusing on pediatric oncology. If no projects with focus on pediatric oncology meet the evaluation criteria and required quality (above all, all granted projects must be qualitative and promising), it is possible that no projects with focus on pediatric oncology are granted in this first call.
- **We define two types of project applications – either 'general' projects or projects with a scope on 'psychosocial or nursing cancer research' – and the two types of projects will be evaluated separately from each other** (composition of the jury is also different, see further). Rationale and more info: in the context of CRIG's partnership with Kankercentrum UZ Gent (and its Kankerfonds UZ Gent), part of the budget for CRIG partnership grants is allocated to support projects with a psychosocial or nursing cancer research focus. Therefore, in this first call, it is the aim to support at least one partnership grant focusing on psychosocial or nursing research. If no projects with focus on psychosocial or nursing research meet the evaluation criteria and required quality (above all, all granted projects must be qualitative and promising), it is possible that no projects with focus on psychosocial or nursing research are granted in this specific call.

2. Eligible applicants

2.1. Criteria for both applicants of the duo

As indicated above, we define two types of project applications (that will be evaluated separately from each other):

- **'general' projects** (all projects without focus on psychosocial or nursing cancer research)
- **projects with focus on 'psychosocial or nursing cancer research'**

However - regardless the type of project that is applied for - the general criteria for eligible applicants are the same and as follows:

Applicants (a duo of A and B) must meet following criteria:

A) The health care professional:

- is employed at UZ Gent for clinical activity
- is employed for the total duration of the CRIG partnership grant (2 years; 2023-2024)
- preferably holds a PhD degree or professorship position (but is not required per se; also see note (*) below)

B) The fundamental/translational researcher:

- is employed (at least 50%) at UGent, UZ Gent or VIB-UGent
- is employed for the total duration of the CRIG partnership grant (2 years; 2023-2024)
- at least holds a PhD degree; a ZAP mandate (professorship) is preferred (but is not required per se; also see note (*) below)
- is actively involved in research activities at UGent, UZ Gent or VIB-UGent

(*) Note: at least one of the two applicants in the duo must have a ZAP mandate (professorship), to maximize continuity of the project and opportunities to apply for external funding afterwards (often promoters are required to have a ZAP mandate in order to apply at external funding agencies).

2.2. Both applicants of the duo (and their respective teams) must declare not to have budget from other sources (funded research projects) that is already available to perform the study described in the application. However, it is perfectly possible that the CRIG project is further supported with co-funding or additional resources from the applicants (and/or teams) – please read paragraph 3.5.2.

2.3. Each applicant can only be involved in one project proposal per application round.

2.4. The applicants are strongly encouraged and expected to submit future project applications – preferably as a duo – to other funding agencies on the basis of the results that are generated in the CRIG partnership grant.

3. Frequency of calls, duration, number of grants and budget

3.1. Frequency of calls for partnership grants

- This has not been fixed yet, and will depend on several factors, including the number and quality of applications in the first call, the evaluation/feedback by the jury and candidates, and the funding that is available within the next years (which is difficult to predict since the budget comes from donations, actions and legacies)

3.2. Duration of a partnership grant

- **maximum two years** (start projects foreseen beginning of 2023)

3.3. Number of projects to be granted in the first call

- Budget from CRIG is foreseen to grant about 5 (general) projects. Additional budget from CRIG's partnership with *vzw Kinderkankerfonds* is foreseen to cover (at least) 1 additional project with focus on pediatric oncology. Additional budget from CRIG's partnership with Kankercentrum UZ Gent (and its Kankerfonds UZ Gent) is foreseen to cover (at least) 1 additional project with focus on psychosocial or nursing cancer research. As such, the aim is to grant about 7 partnership projects in the first call.
- Important: **the total number of partnership projects that will be granted is not certain yet**, and will depend on the scope of the project applications that are submitted (general, pediatric oncology, psychosocial/nursing research, ... see higher) and most of all also depend on the quality (above all, granted projects must be qualitative and promising). The eventual amount of granted projects and funding may therefore differ from the above projections.

3.4. Budget that can be applied for per project proposal: max. 40 000 EUR

- In the project proposal, applicants have to include a financial plan and description of the required budget for the project (prices should include all relevant taxes).
- If the jury (see further) believes that more budget was requested than actually required for the proposed project, it can be decided to reduce the requested budget accordingly. The requested amount does not influence the chances of a particular project to be awarded, and is not a selection criterion.
- Budget not spent on the project within the agreed timeframe must be refunded to CRIG.
- If one applicant of the duo leaves UGent, UZ Gent or VIB-UGent prior to the start or during the project execution, the budget that is not spent must be refunded to CRIG (or it should be extensively motivated that the project can be continued through replacement of the researcher that has left).
- Both applicants of the duo (and their respective teams) must declare **not to have budget from other sources** (funded research projects) that is already available to perform the study described in the application! Please also carefully read paragraph 3.5.2 on co-funding.

3.5. The budget can only be used to cover direct project related expenses

3.5.1. The CRIG partnership budget can only be used to cover direct project related expenses, e.g.:

- Reagents, consumables, lab animals, other direct costs
- Certain services (e.g. outsourcing to CRO, costs for service/core facilities, samples, ...)
- If well motivated, the budget can also be used for travel and lodging costs in case the research can only be performed in a collaborating lab.
 - In this particular case, applicants should still try to apply for funding via external or internal channels (e.g. FWO travel grants, FWO short visit grants, or the faculty mobility fund, or CRIG's PrIOMiC mobility grants). CRIG can thus in advance cover the costs, which could be recuperated later upon successful application of funding elsewhere.
- In exceptional cases, and only if well motivated and essential for the project, the budget could be used to cover equipment or personnel costs (salary).

In conclusion, we aim for maximal flexibility for the partners to use the budget, but the financial plan should be clear and motivated (it should be clear that the budget is essential and will be optimally spent for successful completion of the project)

3.5.2. Co-funding or additional resources from the applicants (and/or teams) is not obliged but can be an advantage

- As indicated before: the applicants (and their respective teams) must declare not to have received any other funding to perform the project that is described in their CRIG partnership grant application
- However, the applicants (and their respective teams) could bring in additional funding and/or resources that are available in the team and can be instrumental for the partnership project – e.g. expertise, personnel assisting with the project (lab technicians, PhD students, bioinformaticians, study nurses, ...), platforms, technologies, equipment, samples, ...

3.6. Important: only outstanding and qualitative projects will be granted. The quality of all submitted projects is assessed by the review board (see further). In case the number of high quality applications is too low, the review board reserves the right to grant fewer applications than foreseen based on the available budget.

4. Application and evaluation procedure

4.1. Submission of a project proposal by the duo

All information should be provided in English. Use the separate application form that is provided. Project proposals should be submitted by email to CRIG@UGent.be (in cc: Anna.Rose@UGent.be). The exact submission deadline will be communicated by mail.

- Part I: General and personal information: title project, applicants details, current positions and affiliations, collaborating researchers, focus, ...
- Part II: Project outline: a graphical abstract (overview figure) + max. 1 page on the research question & project description
- Part III: Financial plan: requested budget, motivation, other resources available, ...
- Part IV: Advancement in the field (max 1 page): convince the jury about the novelty, feasibility, (potential) leap forward and leverage effect, and cross-disciplinary nature of your project proposal. Clearly mention the potential concrete benefits for the patient.
- Part V: Synergy and complementarity of the duo: why are you (both applicants of the duo) well-qualified to execute the project, why do you need each other and what will you do to maximize the interaction and synergy?
- Part VI: Date and signatures of the applicants

4.2. Evaluation by the jury

- All submitted project proposals will undergo reviewing by the jury (also see further)
- There will be no second selection round; thus the **projects will not have to be presented or orally defended by the applicants**. Selection of the projects will be based on the written application only.
 - Note: is it however possible that the jury has specific questions or remarks on the written project application that need to be addressed. In that case, the applicants will be contacted to provide additional data or to answer any remaining questions.

5. Review and selection criteria

5.1. Review/evaluation of the submitted applications

5.1.1. As indicated in paragraph 2, we define two types of project applications that will be evaluated separately from each other:

- Project applications within the 'general' category (also see section 2 above) will be evaluated by a jury consisting of:
 - the CRIG steering committee members (see <https://www.crig.ugent.be/en/management>), representative for the multidisciplinary character of cancer research at CRIG
 - expanded with the medical coordinator(s) of Kankercentrum UZ Gent (to ensure thorough evaluation of the clinical aspects and/or potential benefits for the patient in each project)

- Project applications with a focus on ‘psychosocial or nursing cancer research’ will be evaluated separately from all the other project applications. The jury that evaluates these project applications on psychosocial/nursing research will have another composition, with multiple representatives from Kankercentrum UZ Gent (e.g. members of the ‘Wetenschappelijke Werkgroep’) that have expertise in these research domains, and a limited number of representatives from the CRIG steering committee

5.1.2. Measures to ensure confidentiality and minimize conflict-of-interest

Each member of the jury will score the submitted projects. Jury members that are involved in a particular submitted project (e.g. applicant themselves), cannot score this project. The scores by all jury members per project will be compiled (note: the individual jury members do not see each other’s individual scores, to maximize confidentiality and minimize potential conflict-of-interest). Projects are ranked according to all scores/evaluations.

5.2. Selection criteria

Following selection criteria will be used by the jury to evaluate each project application:

- Scope of the project & focus on oncology
- Novelty and excellence of the project
- Feasibility of the project - as the duration of a project is limited to 2 years, the described planning and expected results should be feasible within this time frame. Feasibility does not mean guaranteed successful outcome; high-risk (high-gain) projects are perfectly acceptable
- Leap forward or potential to use the results as proof-of-concept in future larger grant applications, to build long term partnerships and larger collaborations, to generate impactful output (benefit for the patient, valorization, ...)
- Financial plan (is the requested budget essential? Is the motivation clear and sound?)
- Synergy and complementarity of the duo.
 - From the project application, it must be clear that both partners from the duo need each other to successfully complete the project and that the duo will create synergy. The input and investment from both partners should be substantial.
 - Clear plan to maximize the interaction between (the teams of) the clinical and the fundamental researcher (e.g. embed/integrate the clinical researcher in the team of the fundamental researcher, ...)
 - The partners engage to continue their collaboration after the CRIG project has ended, and to submit joint grants applications afterwards (e.g. larger European financing, KOTK, valorization projects, ...)
- The track record of the applicants is not a selection criterion. CRIG aims to support researchers with excellent ideas, regardless of prior research or track record. The quality of the submitted project proposal is the most important aspect (novelty, feasibility, potential, synergy of the duo - see higher)

Following items are not selection criteria per se, but can be considered as potential advantages (possible priorities):

- Priority can apply for studies with a clear clinical (studies in humans) or translational character (studies using patient material and/or research that is expected to result in clinical studies within a few years)
- Cross-disciplinary research is a bonus
- As the aim of the partnership grants is to increase the number of (durable) connections between health care professionals and fundamental/translational researchers, we highly value new partnerships
- Co-investments and/or resources that are available in the team(s) and can be instrumental for the partnership project can be an advantage (e.g. providing supporting personnel, platforms/equipment, expertise, samples, ...). See paragraph 3.5.2 for more info.
- ...

6. Regulations and guidelines for partners (duos) that are granted

6.1. The granted researchers (partners) manage the budget that is provided for the project, and are fully responsible and accountable for this budget

6.2. On each publication or presentation that includes data generated in the framework of the CRIG granted project, the support by the 'Cancer Research Institute Ghent' (and/or Kankercentrum and its Kankerfonds UZ Gent for projects with focus on psychosocial/nursing research) must be acknowledged.

6.3. Within two years after the start of the project, the budget should be spent and research completed. Exceptions (e.g. request for prolongation) need to be extensively motivated.

6.4. Granted duos are encouraged to undertake public outreach activities, and communicate about their research projects and results to other scientists as well as to the broad public. Granted duos will also be contacted by CRIG in this context, and are expected to collaborate in outreach activities that are organized and supported by CRIG (such as the making of short movies on the projects) and/or Kankercentrum UZ Gent.

6.5. At the end of the project, the granted researcher must submit a report :

- Description of the results and future perspectives (1 page) - clearly indicate if the project was not/partially/completely successful and what advancement was achieved. Also include the planned applications at other funding resources, follow-up of the project, collaborations, ...
- Overview and motivation of the expenses (max. 1 page). In addition, an export from SAP (the UGent and/or UZ Gent accountancy system) must be provided, including a detailed overview of all the expenses that were booked on this budget, with allocation to the different work packages (if any). Attention: failure to comply with these regulations could result in exclusion from future applications rounds, or request by CRIG for refunding of expenses that could not be motivated in the context of the project outline. Deviations from the project outline are only possible upon prior written request to and approval by the jury.

- In addition, the laureates should also write a brief paragraph in layman's terms (for a broad audience)

6.6. Granted researchers (that successfully generated data during the partnership project) engage themselves to apply for (larger) funding from other funding agencies after the end of the partnership project, preferably as a duo.

- Submission of these future project applications (with referral to proof-of-concept generated during the CRIG project) should be reported to CRIG at any time.
- In case this is not possible (for example due to failed experiments, or weak results), it should be reported and motivated to CRIG.

6.7. Agreements on IP and valorization in the context of a CRIG partnership grant

- It will occur that the partners in a granted project have different institutional affiliations (e.g. clinician from UZ and fundamental researcher from UGent, or different combinations of UGent, UZ and/or VIB affiliations). In that case, it is important to discuss and agree on matters concerning intellectual property (IP), valorization, clinical data (e.g. patient samples, informed consent for prospective studies, ...) upfront. By discussing and making agreements at the earliest stages of the collaboration/project, potential conflicts or delays in the project or issues in follow-up projects can be avoided, which is important for the researchers themselves as well as for the institutions. Each case and partnership is different, and therefore an *ad hoc* approach, tailored to each granted project and its collaborations, seems preferable.
- Since CRIG is not a legal entity (but a consortium between UGent, UZ Gent and VIB), CRIG cannot interfere in regulations on (shared) IP and valorization. These matters belong to the legal entities to which CRIG researchers (or health care professionals) are affiliated – namely UGent, UZ Gent and/or VIB – and for which frameworks exist (including valorization regulations that exist at UGent and UZ Gent, and which need to be taken into account by all personnel). However, CRIG stimulates the partners of a duo that want to submit a CRIG grant to discuss the above matters with each other, and to consult upfront the appropriate contact persons at their respective institutions (e.g. business developers and Tech Transfer at UGent, HIRUZ at UZ Gent, business developers / tech transfer office at VIB, ...). In case the CRIG application is granted, concrete agreements between all parties should be made as quick as possible. If necessary, we can help you to get in touch with the right contact persons.