VALIDATE Fellowship Application Guidance

Summary

The VALIDATE Network aims to accelerate vaccine research and development for three groups of complex neglected intracellular pathogens that cause significant mortality and morbidity throughout the world, particularly in low-and-middle-income countries (LMICs): Mycobacteria (causing tuberculosis, leprosy and other diseases), Leishmania (causing leishmaniasis) and *Burkholderia pseudomallei* (causing melioidosis). A second, important aim of the VALIDATE Network is to facilitate career progression for its members, particularly Early Career Researchers (ECRs), and (recognising career progression inequity) researchers from LMICs and researchers identifying as female and/or non-binary.

To support these aims, we are running a VALIDATE Fellowship 2025 call. The VALIDATE Fellowships will fund two years' independent scientific research, with the aim of producing initial/pilot data and a funding and experience track record that can be used by the Fellow to go on to obtain independent external funding and launch their career as a Principal Investigator and/or Group Leader.

The Fellow's proposed research must be scientifically excellent, and fall within the VALIDATE remit. Any aspect of research that will accelerate development of an efficacious vaccine for our focus pathogens is eligible, including biological, physical and social sciences, and humanities.

Applicants must:
1. Be an Associate member of VALIDATE based for work at an LMIC institute
2. Not have received a prior VALIDATE Fellowship

We strongly advise you to get input and seek help/guidance from more experienced Senior Scientists in your institute to review, and help you improve, your application prior to your submission. Ensure your application is focused, has clear objectives that are achievable within the timeframe, and that your hypothesis and methods are scientifically rigorous. You may need Institution/finance approval sign off for your application so ensure you leave plenty of time to obtain this prior to the call deadline.

Fellowships are via competitive application to the VALIDATE Network Management Board ([NMB](#)). Please submit your application form and associated documents **as one pdf document** by **4pm BST** on the closing date to the Network Management Team at VALIDATE@ndm.ox.ac.uk.

It is important that you read the further details below about this award and how to apply, and follow this guidance. Do contact the VALIDATE Team (VALIDATE@ndm.ox.ac.uk) with any further queries. **There will be an online Q&A session about this Fellowship call on 5 February 2025 at 1400 GMT** (to find out more and register, visit our [events](#) webpage).

Please note that successful VALIDATE Fellows will be invited to present their project plans at the 2025 VALIDATE Annual Meeting (costs to attend will be covered by VALIDATE) – so please hold the date in your diaries!

LMIC Support

To encourage and support LMIC applications to this call, VALIDATE is offering the following to LMIC-based applicants:

- VALIDATE can connect you with a grant writing mentor who will support you with your grant planning and writing. Please register your interest in this support by emailing VALIDATE@ndm.ox.ac.uk **by 7 February 2025.**
- If English is not your first language, we may be able to offer translation services, if this would be helpful – contact VALIDATE@ndm.ox.ac.uk to find out more.

Grant Call Details

Funding eligibility

Applicants:

- Funding is for VALIDATE Associate members only (for free VALIDATE membership please apply here).
- Members based at academic institutes, governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and in industry are all eligible.
- Collaborators must be members of the VALIDATE Network but can be at any level. Please ensure that in section 1 each applicant's role on the project (i.e. what they will do) is clearly stated, along with a short summary of their relevant expertise and the value they bring to the project as a collaborator.
- Due to VALIDATE's funding, under UK and USA government rules we cannot fund any members based in Belarus, China, Iran, Democratic People's Republic of Korea or Russia, or any individuals/entities subject to UK or US sanctions.

LMIC/HIC:

It is important to know for your application whether you count as 'HIC' (high-income country) based, or 'LMIC' (low-and-middle-income country) based:

- If you are based for work in a country listed in any column on this page, then you are LMIC, with the exception of:
  - Belarus – we cannot fund members based in Belarus
  - China – we cannot fund members based in China
  - Democratic People's Republic of Korea – we cannot fund members based in North Korea
  - India – the Indian government does not want to receive UK ODA funds, so for this call members based in India count as HIC
  - Iran – we cannot fund members based in Iran
  - Russia – we cannot fund members based in Russia
- If you are based for work in any country not on the list, or in India, then you are HIC.

Timeframe:

Fellowships should run for 24 months. Narrative and financial progress reports are expected to be submitted at 6, 12, 18 and 24 months.

Budget:

Maximum total budget is: £100,000

Eligible costs:

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All proposed research must be within the scope of the VALIDATE network and its remit (further information on this can be found on our website). The direct costs should cover 24 month's salary for the Fellow, plus consumables:

Cost types	LMIC applicants
Salary	Should cover 24 month's salary for the Fellow.
Consumables	As well as lab consumables, the consumables can include animal purchase & housing, sample shipment etc. Please state animal costs on a separate line in the project budget table.
Equipment (items costing £10,000 or upwards)	Not eligible
Travel	A small amount of costs for training (e.g. tech transfer from another VALIDATE laboratory) or travel costs for meetings with essential collaborators may be included in the consumables budget if relevant and justifiable. Costs stated must be reasonable, and travel must be via economy class only.
Other direct costs	Other direct costs, such as access fees, may be included. Please specify what these costs cover in the project budget table.
Indirect costs/ overheads	A contribution towards overheads will be considered, where it can be shown that it will assist in developing research capacity at your institute (maximum of 20% of directly incurred costs).
Maximum budget	£100,000

Please explain the costs your budget consists of, how you calculated your budget costs, and how these costs relate to your project, in the resource justification section of the application form.

Costs must be in Great British Pounds (GBP). Note that the awardee institute is responsible for any currency exchange alterations/fluctuations, so please consider this carefully in your budget.

Activities & costs not eligible:
Research outside the VALIDATE objectives and remit; applications from VALIDATE Investigator or Affiliate members; applications from HIC-based Fellows; applications from researchers who are not VALIDATE members; equipment purchase.

Please note that the Universities of Oxford and Stellenbosch are subject to head funders terms and conditions and relevant national legislation, including Export Control, Sanctions Regulations, National Security and Investments Act, and the Academic Technology Approval Scheme. In a very small number of cases it may be that legislation prevents us from making an award. If you are concerned that this may apply to your application, please seek advice from your research office and/or check whether sanctions apply to you/your organisation prior to submitting an application.

CV Guidance:
Fellowship grant applicants and their collaborators are required to submit a CV (max 2 pages) and publication list (max 1 page) in support of their grant application. We do not require the CVs of Research Group Leader/Line Managers or Heads of Departments.

The below list indicates the information we require to be detailed in your CV. Please note that any additional information supplied is optional.
- Full name
- Email address

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- Education history (Bachelor's degree and above)
  - Dates of education
  - Course name
  - Institution name
- Employment history (10 years)
  - Dates of employment
  - Institution name
  - Job title
  - Brief summary of your role
- Grants obtained (dates, funder, project title, amount, your role on the project)

Letters of Support:
- Applications must include a letter of support from all collaborators
- Applicants must include a Letter of Support each from their Research Group Leader/Line Manager (to confirm they are happy for the ECR to take the time needed for the project, if successful)
- Applicants must include a Letter of Support from their Head of Department (to confirm that the Institute is happy to host your Fellowship)
- All letters of support included in your application must be genuine and from the signatory – any fraudulent documents will result in disqualification of the application and likely member disbarment from VALIDATE
- Letters of support from collaborators must include a statement that that they have read and agreed to the VALIDATE Privacy Policy, and an acknowledgement of reading the CV guidance

Privacy policy:
Fellowship grant applicants and their collaborators are required to have read the VALIDATE Privacy Notice.

Project Collaborators

Fellowship applications do not need to include collaborators, but you can include collaborators if they would improve your project. As a Fellowship, however, the project should be led and managed by the Fellow, and the main bulk of the project's work and research should be undertaken by the Fellow.

Collaborators are fellow researchers who are expected to actively participate in the undertaking of the proposed project alongside the project lead applicant. At the time of application submission, the contribution of collaborators should be planned and agreed fully.

All collaborators for the proposed project should be listed on the application form, with their personal and contact details provided (Section 2), contribution to the project described (Section 2 & 7), and the percentage of their time, with any costs associated detailed (Section 10).

A letter of support from the collaborator is required to be attached to the application file, to detail their support and understanding of their involvement in the proposed project. A CV (2 pages) and publication list (1 page) of each collaborator is also required to be supplied, and it is **essential** that these documents have been supplied directly by the collaborator for the purpose of supporting this application. **We take fraudulent activities and documents very seriously: anyone who falsifies collaborator information, including creating their CVs or cover letters, will be classed as committing fraud, their application will be ineligible, and they will have their VALIDATE membership rescinded and receive a lifetime ban from VALIDATE membership and activities.**

Service providers do not fall under the classification of collaborator and therefore do not have the same requirements as collaborators and do not need letters of support or CVs provided. These can be named in the methods and costs sections of the application form, for example to detail where bespoke consumables will be purchased from, but should not be listed in any of the collaborator specific sections.

Use of Human Samples or Data

VALIDATE expects all research involving human participants to be undertaken in accordance with UK-level ethical behaviour (as VALIDATE HQ is in South Africa and the UK), as well as international good practice and all local and national regulations and guidelines for where the research takes place. These include but are not limited to (use superseding guidelines where these have been released):

- UKRI Policy on Good Research Practice (https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-policy-on-the-governance-of-good-research-practice/)
- Good Research Practice (2012)
- Medical research involving adults who cannot consent (2007)
- Medical Research Involving Children (2004)
- Human Tissue and Biological Samples for Use in Research (2014)
- Personal Information in Medical Research (2000)
- Research involving human participants in developing societies presents specific ethical challenges and the UKRI guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants in LMICs must be followed
- Independent Research Ethics Committee approval is required for research that involves human participants (whether patients or healthy volunteers) or records. Such approval is also required for certain studies of human tissues.

A good resource for our expectations can be found at the UKRI's Human Participants in Research webpage.

In the case of social science research, VALIDATE recommends that award holders follow the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics which highlights the responsibility of the research organisation for ensuring that the research is subject to appropriate ethics review.

All projects should assess and mitigate the impacts of study participation on study volunteers/patients (e.g. potential for stigma, violence etc) in the Fellowship application.

Award holders whose research involves the removal, use or storage of human tissue as specified in the relevant legislation must:
- comply with the appropriate legislation, e.g. the Human Tissue Act 2004
- follow the relevant standards and Codes of Practice issued by the Human Tissue Authority (HTA) (the MRC Regulatory Support Centre has summarised these)
- follow the MRC guidance detailed in Human Tissue and Biological Samples for Use in medical Research.

All legal requirements for the import/export of biological materials must be adhered to.

Use of Animals

VALIDATE supports the principles of the 3Rs (Replacement, Reduction and Refinement). Award holders are expected to abide by the core principles set out in the cross-funder guidance 'Responsibility in the use of animals in bioscience research: Expectations of the major research councils and charitable funding bodies' and the UKRI's guidelines (as well as local equivalents).

For research in the UK, the provisions of the [Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986](#) must be observed (with equivalent local and international guidelines followed by those working outside the UK). All VALIDATE awards are made on the absolute condition that no work which is controlled by the Act will begin until the necessary licences have been obtained from the Home Office (or equivalent body if work is outside the UK). Any recommendations arising from the VALIDATE review process with regards to animal use must be followed. When animals are purchased from commercial suppliers, in-country suppliers should be used wherever possible, to minimise the risk of suffering during transport.

All research involving non-human primates must comply with the [NC3Rs Guidelines: Primate accommodation, care and use](#) (or local equivalent; whichever is more stringent).

Use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)
National regulations and international best practice must be followed. Researchers who carry out genetic modification should be familiar with the legislative requirements and with the [Scientific Advisory Committee on Genetic Modification (Contained Use) guidance](#).

Use of Dangerous Pathogens
Research organisations accommodating projects involving the use of dangerous pathogens must comply with the safeguards recommended by the [UK Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens](#) and in their relevant guidance documents (or equivalent local guideline; whichever is more stringent) as well as local national regulations.

Application process
Complete the application form as directed on the form itself, adhering to the word limit where stated. Ensure you complete all sections, and make clear the importance and impact a) of your proposed research to the acceleration of vaccines against VALIDATE's focus pathogens, and b) that the Fellowship would have on your career. Make sure you attach all the required supporting documents (listed in section 14 of the application form).

The application form and supporting documents must be submitted **as one pdf** by email by 4pm BST on the closing date to the VALIDATE Management Team at VALIDATE@ndm.ox.ac.uk. You will receive acknowledgement of your application within four working days.

Application Review
All applications received in the funding round go to the VALIDATE Network Management Board ([NMB](#)) for competitive assessment. NMB members review and score applications using a standard template. NMB members will not participate in discussions about an application where they have a conflict of interest (see below for details on conflicts of interest). Following review of all applications, a ranked list is used to select applications for funding. Quorum for the review meeting is the NMB Chair plus 5; the NMB Chair will accept written reviews from members who cannot attend the meeting.

The VALIDATE Scientific Advisory Board ([SAB](#)) have oversight of the NMB and the NMB review of Fellowship applications to ensure transparency, fairness and consistency. All information submitted is held in strictest confidence; all NMB and SAB members have signed a confidentiality agreement as a requirement of their Board participation.

Notification of Review Results
Successful Fellows will be sent award letters confirming the funds available within three weeks of the NMB decision. Your Fellowship must start within one month of the date of the award letter, so it is

advised that any contractual issues between collaborators are discussed prior to your Fellowship submission.

Unsuccessful applicants will be informed promptly and the Network Manager may pass on specific feedback if available.

Post-award Administration

VALIDATE will issue a simple award letter, followed by a contract for the awardee; projects must start within one month of the date on the initial award letter. Projects may not start until the fully executed contract is in place with University of Oxford; the actual start date must be confirmed to the VALIDATE Team.

Fellows must consider whether a collaboration agreement is required for the project. If required, collaboration agreements must be put in place before the research starts. These agreements must not delay the completion of the Fellowship so we strongly advise you start collaboration agreement discussions and drafting promptly.

Funds must be spent as detailed on the application. Awardees are required to submit narrative and financial progress reports at 6, 12, 18 and 24 months into the project. These reports must be submitted to the VALIDATE Management Team before the grant funds will be released. Payment is usually made in arrears to the awardee's Institute in four 25% tranches, on approval of each project report (NB for some LMIC institutes, we may be able to arrange payment in advance for some of the tranches, to help with cashflow). Payment will be for actual expenditure up to the value agreed in the original award letter.

VALIDATE does not require receipts to be submitted but these **must** be kept by the host institution as they may be required for future audits. The grantee's host institution must follow their standard procedures for financial accounts.

Any underspend on grants will be retained by VALIDATE.

Fellows are encouraged to submit their project's results for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, or as a case-study. A non-confidential brief summary of the project's outcomes, taken from the final report, will be published on the VALIDATE website and in other publicity. A data set list of all data from funded Fellowships must be sent to the VALIDATE Executive Manager within six months of the end of the project, to be added to VALIDATE's shared data list to aid the progression towards development of efficacious vaccines for these pathogens.

Publicity and Data Protection

Successful Fellowship will be listed on the VALIDATE website and in other publicity, with a non-confidential abstract outlining the work proposed. Copies of applications will be made available to the VALIDATE NMB and SAB who will use information provided for reviewing the proposal and post-award administration. VALIDATE may share information with its funders, as appropriate. VALIDATE and its funders may choose to publish further details of awards, awardees, and information about successful projects. VALIDATE Fellows are required to present their work at the VALIDATE Annual Meetings.

Conflict of Interest

Examples of a conflict of interest include:
- Employed by the same department in the same institution as the applicant(s)
- Close active collaboration impacting on the application being reviewed

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- Holding a current position on the governing body of the applicant(s) organisation
- Personal/family relationship with the applicant(s)