



Strategic longer and larger grants: Frontier bioscience 2020/21

Opportunity status:	Closed
Funders:	Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)
Funding type:	Grant
Total fund:	£16,000,000
Minimum award:	£2,000,000
Publication date:	1 July 2020
Opening date:	1 July 2020
Closing date:	10 September 2020 16:00 UK time

Last updated: 7 January 2021

Your proposed research programme should be ambitious, innovative and collaborative.

It must be primarily motivated by contributing new fundamental biological knowledge and potentially lead to major advances in our understanding of the 'rules of life' which govern living systems.

These grants are for researchers based at eligible organisations and with established track records.

Your programme should be at least £2 million (100% full economic costing) and may last up to five years.

Please note that the full application for this opportunity is only open to successful outline applicants.

Who can apply

This funding opportunity is open to eligible researchers at higher education institutions, research council institutes, and UKRI-approved independent research organisations.

[Check your eligibility for funding](#)

Principal and co-investigators must meet our standard eligibility criteria, as outlined in section three of our [grants guide \(PDF, 374KB\)](#).

In addition to our standard eligibility criteria, the team of applicants (principal and co-investigators) must demonstrate that, collectively, they have the capability to realise the objectives of an integrated programme of work at the required scale and complexity of a strategic longer and larger grant (sLoLa) project.

Key indicators will include a track record of:

- making internationally important research contributions relevant to the proposed project. This may be evidenced through a variety of different measures of peer recognition and success which may include but are not limited to:
 - publications
 - keynote conference presentations
 - development and implementation of novel technologies
 - patents
- recent (within the last 10 years, excluding career breaks) significant financial support from major funding bodies. This excludes research equipment grants, studentships and grants that have not been competitively awarded.
- demonstrating the capability of the principal investigator to effectively lead and manage teams. This should be evidenced through their role in specific projects or programmes, and professional development undertaken in leadership or project management.

Inclusion of early career researchers as research co-investigators within teams is encouraged. Evidence of significant accomplishments commensurate with their career stage should be provided and they will be expected to contribute distinctive expertise to the proposal.

In such cases, the principal investigator must also commit to the mentoring and career development of the early career researcher, and demonstrate previous successful experience of this.

Applicants are encouraged to consider the expectations laid out in the [researcher development concordat](#), to which UKRI-BBSRC is a signatory.

The principal investigator must not already be a principal on an existing sLoLa grant (unless the grant is in its final year).

Multiple applications with the same principal investigator are not permitted.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

UKRI-BBSRC is committed to encouraging equality, diversity and inclusion by eliminating unlawful discrimination in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and encouraging applications from research teams exploiting the strength of diversity in the wider UK research and innovation community.

Applicants are expected to consider these issues from the earliest stage of building their teams through to the delivery of awarded projects.

Consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion is important for all applications to UKRI-BBSRC for funding, and we expect particular care to be taken for larger projects involving multiple co-applicants such as those supported through the sLoLa scheme.

What we're looking for

Advancing the frontiers of bioscience discovery is a strategically important long term objective of the [UKRI-BBSRC delivery plan](#).

The 2020/21 sLoLa funding opportunity invites proposals focused on frontier bioscience: leading-edge discovery research that addresses significant fundamental questions in bioscience.

Proposals are expected to be ambitious and have the potential to lead to a major advance in our understanding of the 'rules of life' which govern living systems.

We anticipate that innovative approaches, methods or technologies will be used to produce a significant and distinctive contribution to bioscience knowledge.

Proposals must provide a clear justification for the need for funding through the sLoLa mechanism, demonstrating a coordinated and fully integrated programme of work that could not be undertaken through a series of smaller awards.

A strong case must also be made regarding how the proposal will enhance the UK's international position in the area of investigation.

Funding available

The indicative budget for this opportunity is up to £16 million, subject to the quality of applications received.

Proposals must be over £2 million (100% full economic costing project value) and can be up to five years in duration.

We anticipate awarding between three and five grants in the 2020/21 round.

Proposals must address the scope of the opportunity and be predominantly within our remit. It is anticipated that awarded grants will start in the latter half of 2021.

Scope

Understanding living systems and how they function is at the heart of bioscience research and innovation.

Curiosity-driven research at the limits of our current understanding has a strong record of revealing, or rewriting, fundamental 'rules of life' which can lead to transformational developments within the life sciences, as well as more broadly stimulating social and economic benefits and contributing to the UK's international competitiveness.

In the 2020/21 sLoLa grants, we are seeking to support cutting edge, innovative and ambitious research that addresses key fundamental questions in bioscience.

We welcome applications working across any scales of biological organisation, and particularly those employing quantitative, multi-scale approaches that integrate bioscience research from different sub-fields.

To produce major advances, proposals are expected to employ (or develop) the latest technologies, methods and approaches that will result in world leading capability in bioscience within the UK.

There is no requirement for proposals to address our responsive mode priorities.

Requirements

Proposals must fully address the scope of the sLoLa scheme, clearly demonstrating a primary focus on generating a significant advancement in fundamental bioscience knowledge.

The work to be undertaken must be primarily within UKRI-BBSRC remit. We encourage multidisciplinary proposals but we strongly advise potential applicants to contact us before submission if aspects of the proposal are outside of our remit.

Proposals must provide a clear justification for the necessity for funding through the sLoLa scheme in order to deliver the programme of work.

The proposal must demonstrate overall coherence, connectivity, coordination and integration of the work to be carried out, to the extent that the work could not be undertaken through funding a series of separate smaller awards.

Exclusions

In addition to its focus on research excellence, UKRI-BBSRC takes a strategic approach to investment, considering overall balance of our portfolio in world-class bioscience research.

Proposals in areas in which there is already substantial UKRI-BBSRC investment, particularly existing sLoLa-scale awards or research in areas covered by current UKRI-BBSRC Institute strategic programme grants, are therefore likely to be at a competitive disadvantage and may be excluded at the registration or outline stage.

See list of [currently active UKRI-BBSRC grants over £2 million \(PDF, 138KB\)](#)

Proposals that are not primarily motivated by fundamental advances in biological knowledge are excluded.

For example, proposals where the primary aim is to tackle a user-driven challenge from within industry, including areas covered by the UKRI Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, are excluded.

However, work that is potentially impactful within one or more of the UKRI-BBSRC strategic challenges set out in the [UKRI-BBSRC delivery plan](#) – bioscience for sustainable agriculture and food, bioscience for renewable resources and clean growth, bioscience for an integrated understanding of health – is not excluded, but the primary driver must be to make fundamental advances in biological knowledge.

Proposals that fall within the context of UKRI-BBSRC or other UKRI programmes for strategic investment in bioscience that are driven by official development assistance (ODA) strategic aims (Global Challenges Research Fund and Newton Fund) are excluded.

Resources

Proposals must be over £2 million (100% full economic costing project value, net of any industrial contribution) and can be up to five years in duration.

It is anticipated that awarded grants will start in the latter half of 2021.

How to apply

The grants launch is supported by a webinar (two dates available) that will present an overview followed by an opportunity to ask questions.

A copy of the material presented will be provided here after the live sessions.

For more information, see:

- [webinar one](#): 12 May 2020, 10:00
- [webinar two](#): 21 May 2020, 14:00

- [webinar presentation slides \(PDF, 451KB\)](#)

We strongly encourage research organisations to consider the scope and eligibility of potential applications to the opportunity, and prioritise appropriately, prior to submission owing to the small number of proposals that will be supported through the opportunity.

We do not seek to implement an institutional cap for proposals but will take such measures if required to moderate demand to a manageable level.

There are three mandatory stages to the application process.

Stage one: registration (closed)

Potential applicants (principal investigators) must register their interest by completing and submitting either:

- the online survey (closed)
- the [registration survey \(DOCX, 65KB\)](#).

Please only submit your registration once, using either of these methods.

We encourage potential applicants to submit a registration as early as possible in order to allow sufficient time for consideration of any feedback and development of their outline.

Registrations submitted after 16:00 on 30 July 2020 will not be accepted.

Registration is intended to ensure outlines are appropriately targeted to this funding opportunity and to provide an early indication of the level of demand, team composition, and research areas.

UKRI-BBSRC may contact research organisations that appear likely to submit large numbers of outlines with the aim of moderating demand if the need becomes evident.

Failure to register will preclude application to the opportunity.

When registering principal investigators will be asked to provide information about:

- the anticipated team
- evidence of prior funding indicating the research team is primed to undertake a larger-scale research programme
- the scientific rationale for the proposed programme of work, including how it meets the frontier bioscience scope of the sLoLa scheme (maximum 250 words)
- the anticipated objectives of the programme (maximum 150 words)
- a brief explanation about why a sLoLa grant is required to address the research challenge (maximum 150 words).

No financial information is required at the registration stage.

After registering, potential applicants may be invited to discuss with us how their proposal relates to the scope of the sLoLa scheme, their relevant track record, our wider portfolio and future strategy.

Some applicants may be advised that their proposal is unsuitable for the scheme.

Stage two: outline (closed)

The outline stage is only open to applicants who have registered.

Proposals will consist of a six-page case for support and must be submitted through the [Joint Electronic Submission system \(Je-S\)](#) by 10 September 2020, 16:00.

Outline proposals will be assessed by the UKRI-BBSRC Strategic LoLa Committee (SLC).

Please note that only overall indicative costs are requested at the outline stage of assessment.

Changes to project costs are permitted between the outline and full stages, so research organisations are advised to take a pragmatic approach to estimating costings at the outline stage.

Stage three: full proposal (by invitation only)

Only proposals shortlisted by the SLC will be invited back as full proposals.

Proposals must be submitted through [Je-S](#) by 16:00 on 1 March 2021.

When applying select:

- council: BBSRC
- document type: standard proposal
- scheme: responsive mode
- call/type/mode: 2021 Strategic Longer and Larger Grants.

For more guidance on preparing your proposal, please see:

- [full guidance for sLoLa applicants \(PDF, 200KB\)](#)
- [the Je-S Handbook](#).

How we will assess your application

Applications to the sLoLa scheme will be assessed with reference to the scope of the opportunity and against the following assessment criteria:

- research excellence
- importance and transformative potential

- added value of funding via sLoLa grant
- ability to deliver and leadership quality
- management strategy
- resources.

Full proposals will be assessed in two phases:

Phase one

External peer review and assessment by a bespoke panel comprising members of the SLC and BBSRC's four responsive mode research committees (SLC-RM).

Highly rated proposals will be shortlisted for interview.

Phase two

The SLC will conduct interviews with the shortlisted applicants.

The SLC will make a final funding recommendation to BBSRC.

Read more about assessment in the [full guidance for sLoLa applicants \(PDF, 106KB\)](#)

Contact details

Please contact that Strategic longer and larger grants team on bbsrc.lolagrants@bbsrc.ukri.org.

Additional info

Supporting documents

- [Registration survey \(DOCX, 65KB\)](#)
- [Guidance for applicants \(PDF, 106KB\)](#)
- [Summary of currently active UKRI-BBSRC grants over £2 million \(PDF, 138KB\)](#)
- [BBSRC research grants: the guide \(PDF, 374KB\)](#)
- [Webinar presentation \(PDF, 451KB\)](#)
- [Frequently asked questions \(PDF, 39KB\)](#)

Adjustment of application deadlines

UKRI-BBSRC has taken the decision to proceed with the 2020/21 sLoLa round, recognizing this is against the backdrop of significant changes to normal working practices due to the covid-19 pandemic.

We have adjusted both the timing and timelines to ensure applicants have significantly more time to respond to this funding opportunity.

Please note that there is now deliberate overlap between the extended registration period and the opening of the outline stage, allowing applicants who are ready to proceed at pace whilst also providing additional flexibility for those who require it.

We will continue to monitor the impact of the pandemic on the research and innovation community and, if necessary, will take appropriate action to respond to emerging issues as this round progresses. However, we hope that during the course of sLoLa in 2020 and 2021 we can return to a more normal situation.

Applicants should note the stages involved and their corresponding deadlines.

Previous awardees

- [Frontier bioscience 2019/20](#)
 - [Frontier bioscience 2018/19](#)
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Timeline

- **12 May 2020**
Webinar
- **21 May 2020**
Webinar
- **1 July 2020**
Outline stage open
- **30 July 2020**
Registration deadline (mandatory)
- **10 September 2020**
Outline applications deadline

- **18 November 2020**
Outline assessed by panel
- **December 2020**
Outcome for outline applicants
- **1 March 2021**
Full application deadline (invite only)
- **To be confirmed**
Panel assessment of full proposal
- **To be confirmed**
Interviews by Strategic Lola Committee
- **To be confirmed**
Final outcome

Related content

[BBSRC delivery plan](#)

[Check your eligibility for funding](#)

[BBSRC: strategic longer and larger grants](#)

NOTE This is the first phase of our new website – let us know if you have [feedback](#) or would like to [help us test new developments](#).