Ovarian Cancer Early Detection Pilot Award

Competition Guidelines

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B. Key Dates

Competition materials available online	September 13, 2024
Application submission deadline	October 25, 2024
Application review period	November 2024
Competition results communicated to researchers	December 2024
Funding start date	January 2025

C. Competition Funder

Ovarian Cancer Canada (OCC) is the only national organization dedicated to overcoming ovarian cancer (OC). Our mission is to boldly and unapologetically take action against OC until the number of deaths from this disease is zero. Central to this is our commitment

to investing in all stages of research from bench to bedside to drive scientific progress and improvements to patient-centered care in OC prevention, early detection, treatment and survivorship (https://ovariancanada.org/about-our-research).

D. Project eligibility & evaluation criteria

Research into the early detection of OC is the most consistently expressed research priority by our patient community, with 73% of OCC's Every Woman Study: Canadian Edition respondents identifying this as one of the three most important priorities for improving OC-related outcomes (*Current Oncology.* 2022 May 5; 29(5): 3318-3340; PMID: 35621661).

Early detection of OC is a complex issue, owing to the distinct origins, biology and clinical behaviour of the different types of OC and the substantial technical challenges inherent in accurate detection of precursor lesions or small volume disease. This is **especially relevant for high-grade serous ovarian cancer** - accounting for 90% of cases diagnosed at stage III/IV – that predominately originates in the distal fallopian tube and can spread when the primary tumour is very small and before symptoms develop.

This competition will fund discovery, pre-clinical and translational research pilot projects with the greatest potential to drive advancements in the early detection of OC. Bold, innovative ideas are encouraged. Projects should reflect and leverage important advances in the OC research field in recent years, including but not limited to:

- A deepened understanding of the biology and "omics" of the different types of OC;
- An increased variety of biospecimens available for study (e.g., circulating DNA, surgical tissue removed during risk-reducing surgery in people at highest risk, biorepositories/tissue banks);
- The development of more sensitive and sophisticated technologies (e.g., single-cell analysis, methylation sequencing).

The following criteria will be considered when evaluating applications:

- Project fit
- Innovation/novelty
- Scientific merit/research strategy
- Potential for impact
- Patient engagement

- Clarity of communication
- Readiness/feasibility
- Strength of supporting/preliminary data
- Qualifications of research team/research environment
- Budget & timelines
- National scope: projects involving multiple sites across Canada are encouraged
- Canadian content: projects building on Canadian science will be prioritized

E. Study term & budget

Applicants can apply for a maximum of **$100,000 total over a period of 1 or 2 years**. Funding will start in January 2025, upon execution of the funding agreement with the Principal Applicant's host institution.

Eligible expenses

- Salary support to staff (e.g., research coordinators, assistants, associates, technicians) or trainees (e.g., graduate students and post-doctoral fellows) responsible for the work;
- Research consumables and service costs (e.g., core facilities) required to carry out the work;
- Costs related to acquisition, processing and molecular characterization of biospecimens;
- Costs associated with data collection and analysis;
- Costs related to engaging patients in the planning and implementation of the project, including but not limited to honoraria for patient partners;
- Costs related to sharing of materials (e.g., clinical biospecimens, research models) and data to facilitate multi-institutional collaboration;
- Publication fees up to $4,000;
- Up to $2,000 per year for attending meetings, seminars or conferences (e.g., registration, travel, accommodation).

Ineligible expenses

- Remuneration of Principal Applicant, Co-Applicants or Collaborators;
- Purchase of equipment, unless approved in advance;
- Indirect costs to institutions;

- Sabbatical or maternity/parental leave;
- Publication fees in excess of $4,000;
- Meeting, seminar or conference expenses in excess of $2,000 per year.

F. Applicant eligibility criteria

Study Principal Applicant/s must hold a research position at a Canadian academic institution and be able to hold research funds at their institution. Study co-applicants and collaborators may be affiliated with institutions outside of Canada; however, funds must be spent within Canada.

G. Multiple applications

There are no limits on the number of applications submitted, as either a principal applicant or co-applicant.

H. Application process & instructions

Ovarian Cancer Canada will administer and manage this single-stage (application only) competition. All applications must be submitted in English to facilitate peer review by international reviewers.

To be considered a complete application, the following information must be compiled into a single PDF document and emailed to afarrell@ovariancanada.org with the subject line **"Early Detection Competition_Application_lastname"** by **October 25, 2024 @11:59pm ET**:

1) **Application form** – includes basic project information and applicant demographics (for summary-level reporting only).
2) **Written components** – description and page limits indicated below. *Formatting guidelines for each: single-spaced, minimum of ¾" (2 cm) margin all four sides, 12pt font. Please note that non-compliance to the guidelines could lead to an administrative rejection of a submitted application prior to its scientific evaluation.*
    a) **Scientific abstract (max 1 page)**
        - Describe the rationale, research aims, methodology, anticipated outcomes and their potential impact for patients.

b) **Lay summary (max 1 page)**
   - ❖ Summary of the research project in lay terms, to be understood by those who are not in biomedical research.

c) **Research proposal (max 5 pages)**
   - ❖ Describe the proposed research project, considering the following elements:
     - Rationale and background;
     - Proposed aim(s)/objectives and hypotheses;
     - Study design/methodology
     - Patient engagement plan;
     - How the proposed project fits eligibility/evaluation criteria;
     - Significance of the proposed research and expected outcomes;
     - Study timelines.

d) **Research team (max 1 page)**
   - ❖ Describe the expertise and contributions of the applicant, co-applicant(s) and other research personnel involved in the proposed research.

e) **Budget summary and justification (max 2 pages)**
   - ❖ All budget items, including salaries and stipends, must be justified in terms of the objectives and milestones of the project. For every item in the budget, the applicant must provide a complete breakdown of the amounts requested for the project. Where there are subprojects, clearly itemize the budgetary requirement for each one.

3) **Figures & Tables (max 3 pages)**
   - ❖ Preliminary data and/or study schema

4) **References (no page limit)**
   - ❖ List of references cited in the Research Proposal

5) **Letters of Support (no limit)**
   - ❖ From lead institution, ensuring that the necessary infrastructure support is available for the project (mandatory)
   - ❖ From collaborators and service providers, as applicable (optional)

6) **Abbreviated CV for Principal Applicant and all co-applicants**
   - ❖ Academic degrees;
   - ❖ Details of employment since graduation;
   - ❖ 3-5 research and clinical contributions;
   - ❖ List of publications (including submitted manuscripts and manuscripts in preparation) during the last 5-full time or equivalent working years;
   - ❖ Grant support received in the past 5 years + relevant pending support – please note any potential overlaps with the current submission.

7) **Completed Sensitive Technology Research Area Declaration form.** See Section I for more information.

The submission deadlines will be strictly enforced. Only complete applications received by the submission deadline will be considered. Proposals that do not respect the guidelines will be rejected.

I. Sensitive Technology Research Area Declaration

OCC has developed a *Research Safeguarding Policy* (https://ovariancanada.org/for-researchers#policies), to ensure that all OCC research activities which receive full or partial federal research funding comply with the Government of Canada's guidelines about the integrity and security of sensitive technology research. This includes diligence in identifying sensitive technology research areas, scrutinizing researcher affiliations, and adhering to attestation and validation requirements in grant applications.

In accordance with Strategic Science Fund requirements, all Principal Applicants must review this policy and complete and submit a *Sensitive Technology Research Area Declaration Form* on behalf of the study team, as part of the application process.

J. Scientific resources available to researchers

We encourage all researchers to take advantage of the following national resources (most recent reports available at https://ovariancanada.org/for-researchers):

- ❖ **OCC Tissue Banking Network** – a virtual network of biobanks which collect, store, and distribute biological samples (e.g., tumour tissue/cells, normal tissue/cells, blood) generously donated by individuals with ovarian cancer to enable ovarian cancer

research in Canada and abroad. Scientists interested in accessing human ovarian cancer biospecimens for their research are encouraged to contact the individual biobanks for more information.

- **OvCAN Collection** – a virtual collection of high-fidelity research models of ovarian cancer, whose development and/or characterization has been funded by OCC. The purpose of the OvCAN Collection is to facilitate the creation and sharing of these gold standard models among the ovarian cancer research community, to enable and expedite high-quality research focused on improving ovarian cancer outcomes. If you are interested in incorporating one of these models into your study, please contact the individual lab for more information.

K. Patient engagement in research

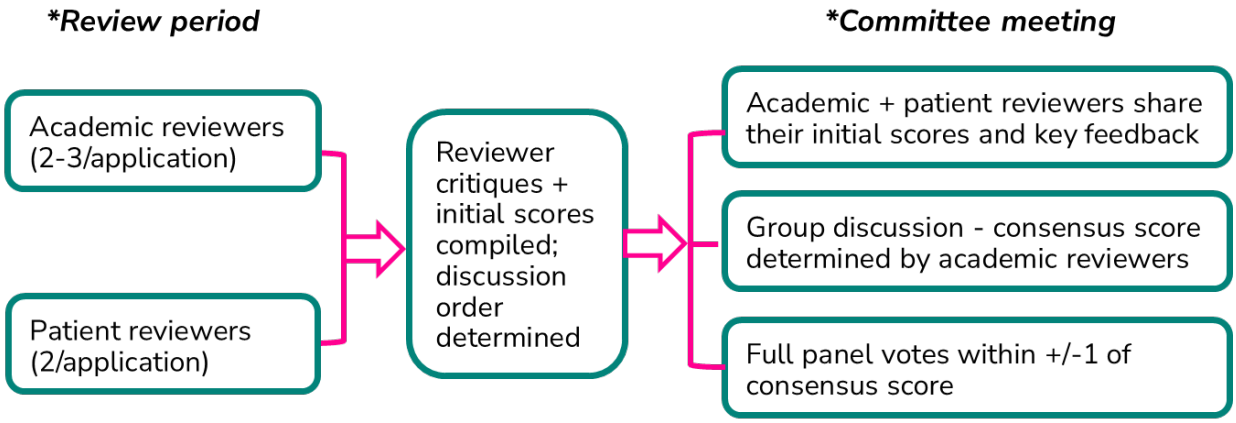
All projects funded through this competition are **required** to meaningfully engage patient partners throughout the study period. We encourage (although do not require) applicants to collaborate with OCC's Patient Partners in Research (PPiR) program to facilitate patient-researcher partnerships. A brief overview of the PPiR program and considerations for patient engagement are included in **Annex A**.

To collaborate with members of PPiR, send an inquiry to atone@ovariancanada.org with the subject line **"PPiR Research Inquiry"** and a brief description of the research engagement as well as some general availability/timeframe for a follow-up meeting.

L. Independent review process

All Full Applications will be evaluated by an independent expert review committee, made up of Canadian and/or international clinical and scientific experts ("academic reviewers") and individuals with lived experience of ovarian cancer ("patient reviewers"). The selection of reviewers will be made in compliance with OCC conflict of interest policies and guidelines, and all committee members will be required to sign a Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest agreement prior to receipt of their assigned applications.

Each proposal will be initially reviewed and scored by 2-3 academic and a team of 2 patient reviewers. At the final committee meeting, the proposal will be presented, discussed and scored (see process below).



**academic and/or patient reviewers excluded from reviewing or discussing any application/s for which they have a conflict of interest*

Final application scores and rank order will be reviewed by OCC leadership, with funding recommendations made to the OCC Board of Directors for approval.

M. Research ethics & institutional policies

Prior to commencing OCC-funded research activities, researchers shall ensure that the research protocol is consistent with the principles set out in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and is reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board at each participating institution. All Research Ethics Board approval letters shall be forwarded to OCC's Director, Research at atone@ovariancanada.org.

It remains the responsibility of the Principal Applicant, co-applicants and collaborators to respect the rules and policies of their institutions.

N. Reporting requirements

All award recipients will be required to provide regular updates on progress to OCC as a condition of funding. Reporting templates and deadlines will be provided to recipients upon notice of funding.

O. Contact

For questions regarding the competition, please contact Ally Farrell (Research Coordinator; afarrell@ovariancanada.org)

For other questions related to research at OCC, contact Alicia Tone (Director, Research; atone@ovariancanada.org)

Annex A: Patient engagement guidelines

The Patient Partners in Research (PPiR) program was developed in 2020 by OCC to keep the voices of those with lived experience at the forefront of research (https://ovariancanada.org/get-involved-in-research/patient-partners-in-research), and has since become an integral component of all research at OCC. Engaging ovarian cancer patients as partners in research reflects our philosophy that the relevance, importance and impact of scientific and clinical inquiry can be enhanced by valuing the input and viewpoints of those affected by this disease. The PPiR program is led and managed by two OCC research staff and two patient advocates. Our PPiR team includes a diverse representation of ovarian cancer types, age, sexuality, cultural backgrounds, and geography with each member bringing their unique perspective and shared experiences as ovarian cancer patients, caregivers or loved ones.

The role of the PPiR program is to train and match patient partners to research opportunities with the goal to complement and maximize the impact of research being done by Canadian researchers. All team members are required to complete the Science of Cancer online course, in addition to task-specific training dependent on the engagement opportunity. Some examples of activities that PPiR team members have participated in include:

- Serving as patient reviewers on grant funding (pre-clinical and clinical) and trainee award review panels;
- Participating as embedded research team members on OCC-funded projects (both clinical and pre-clinical). Roles have included:
  - Review of grant applications and submission of letters of support;
  - Consultation on research study design, research questions, eligibility criteria and recruitment plans;
  - Review of lay language material (e.g., public summary, recruitment materials and informed consent forms);
  - Evaluation of patient surveys;
  - Participation in working groups led by research teams;
  - Co-development of patient decision aids and educational tools/modules;
  - Attendance at regular team meetings;
  - Review of manuscripts, meeting abstracts and other knowledge mobilization materials.

- Consulting on strategic planning, PPiR program guidelines, research partnership agreements, programmatic design and patient engagement best practices
- Participating as speakers and/or panelists at OCC events and external research conferences
- Participating on graduate student advisory committees
- Sharing their experiences and learnings with research teams and clinical trainees
- Participating in research and system advocacy alongside OCC staff and members of the research community.

The goal of PPiR is to build sustainable partnerships between patients and researchers, so that patient partners are updated regularly on the research progress and how their contribution is shaping the research project. Please consider the following when designing your patient engagement plan:

- Use the buddy system: we recommend including two patient partners for your study; this helps them feel more comfortable and also mitigates the impact of members' changing health status on the dynamics of the research team.
- For long-term partnerships, Ovarian Cancer Canada will schedule check-ins every 6 months to ensure the partnership is successful. Research teams are encouraged to have a closing meeting, where they present the results and conclusions of the research study as well as share how the input of patient partners has impacted their research project. Patient partners may also present their own reflections on their experience collaborating on the research project, to help researchers hone their patient engagement skills.

- Ask yourself these questions:
  - Why is this a good research opportunity to engage patients?
  - What will the role of the patient partner(s) be?
  - How will their input be used in the research process?
  - Are there any requirements to participate in the research opportunity? (e.g., living in a specific geographical region)
  - Does the patient partner need to have any specific experiences that they can speak to? (e.g., specific ovarian cancer type, experience with a specific treatment)
  - Will OCC need to provide task-specific training to best prepare the selected patient partners?
  - What level of participation is required from the patient partners (hours/month)?

- What stage will the patient partner begin to participate in the research process?
- How long will the patient partners be involved?
- Is this a one-time engagement event or are there regular meetings?
- Will patient partners be compensated? *Note: this is not a strict requirement; however, patient partners should be made aware from the beginning*.

❖ Below are some helpful resources on patient engagement in research:

- Richards DP, Poirier S, Mohabir V, Proulx L, Robins S, Smith J. Reflections on patient engagement by patient partners: how it can go wrong. *Res Involv Engagem.* 2023 Jun 12;9(1):41. PMID: 37308922
- Richards DP, Cobey KD, Proulx L, Dawson S, de Wit M, Toupin-April K. Identifying potential barriers and solutions to patient partner compensation (payment) in research. *Res Involv Engagem.* 2022 Feb 23;8(1):7. PMID: 35197113
- Liabo K, Boddy K, Bortoli S, Irvine J, Boult H, Fredlund M, Joseph N, Bjornstad G, Morris C. Public involvement in health research: what does 'good' look like in practice? *Res Involv Engagem*. 2020 Mar 31;6:11. PMID: 32266085
- Richards DP, Jordan I, Strain K, Press Z. Patients as Partners in Research: How to Talk About Compensation With Patient Partners. *J Orthop Sports Phys Ther.* 2020 Aug;50(8):413-414. PMID: 32736501
- *"A How-to Guide for Patient Engagement in Research"* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research; link)