

## Ovarian Cancer Research Models

### Competition Guidelines

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#### B. Key Dates

Priority setting meeting	September 5, 2024
Competition guidelines + application forms online	On or before October 1, 2024
Call for applications open	October 1-31, 2024
Application submission deadline	October 31, 2024
Community review of proposals	November 1-13, 2024
Evaluation form submission deadline	November 13, 2024
Consensus review meeting	November 15, 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

This competition will fund projects focused on: **1)** development and/or characterization of high-fidelity, sharable research models of OC; **2)** knowledge transfer and/or training opportunities related to the development and/or use of high-fidelity research models of OC. Top priorities for funding have been identified in collaboration with the Canadian OC research community, during an open forum in September 2024. A high-level summary of points raised at the priority setting meeting are included below:

- ❖ **Model Availability and Limitations:** Current models are valuable but may not fully cover the disease spectrum, particularly for rare OC types. More models may be needed, but it depends on current research priorities and capabilities.
- ❖ **Model Development Approaches:** Debate over expanding current models or developing fee-for-service models to address gaps in current resources. Emphasis on models with available molecular (*e.g.*, *BRCA1/2* mutation status, HRD status, MMR status) and clinical (*e.g.*, treatment status, platinum- and PARPi-sensitivity data) characterization data for relevance. Exchange of trainee expertise across labs was proposed to standardize and improve 3D cell culture models.
- ❖ **Challenges in Standardization:** There is significant variation in protocols and/or success rates across labs for 3D/organoid models, making it premature to standardize. International collaborations may be beneficial in accessing rare subtype samples, although cost and funding must be considered.
- ❖ **Opportunities for Collaboration and Cost Management:** International collaborations have been successful in model characterization. Leveraging funds from various collaborators could help address resource gaps.

- ❖ **Model Types:** Focus on humanized xenograft models, particularly for rare subtypes, but prioritizing consistency and protocol sharing is essential. Immune cell relevance in these models needs more attention.
- ❖ **Trainee Opportunities:** Strong interest in trainee exchanges to share protocols for model development. Potential for funding to support these exchanges, with a proposal to integrate training opportunities into funding applications.

**The following criteria will be considered when evaluating applications:**

- ❖ Useful general resource for OC research community
- ❖ Fills gap in currently available resources
- ❖ Innovation/novelty
- ❖ Scientific merit
- ❖ Potential for impact
- ❖ Readiness/feasibility
- ❖ Strength of supporting/preliminary data
- ❖ Qualifications of research team/research environment
- ❖ Budget ask & timeline is appropriate
- ❖ Possibility to aid in clinical decision making
- ❖ Knowledge exchange opportunities for trainees

**E. Study term & budget**

The total funding available to the community for this opportunity is **\$300,000**. Of available funds, **\$180,000** will be available immediately upon execution of funding agreements with the host institution of successful Principal Applicants and **\$120,000** will become available on April 1, 2025. All funds must be spent by successful applicants by March 31, 2027, with no options for extension beyond this date as per Strategic Science Fund requirements.

***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/or molecular characterization of biospecimens;
- ❖ Costs associated with data collection;
- ❖ Costs related to sharing of materials (*e.g.*, clinical biospecimens, research models) and data to facilitate multi-institutional collaboration.

### ***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. **Note:** *funds are available from OCC for reimbursement of publication costs up to \$4,000 CAD, for manuscripts resulting from funded projects;*
- ❖ Meeting, seminar or conference expenses.

### **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**

OCC will administer and manage this single-stage (application only) competition. All applications must be submitted in English to facilitate peer review.

To be considered a complete application, the following information must be compiled into a single PDF document and emailed to [afarrell@ovariancanada.org](mailto:afarrell@ovariancanada.org) with the subject line **“OC Research Models Competition\_Application\_lastname”** by **October 31, 2024 @11:59pm ET:**

- 1) **Application form** – includes basic project information and applicant demographics (for ISED 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) **Project summary (max 3 pages)**
    - ❖ Describe the proposed project/activity, considering the following elements, as appropriate:
      - Rationale and background;
      - Proposed aim(s)/objectives and hypotheses;
      - Study design/methodology;
      - How the proposed project fits eligibility/evaluation criteria;
      - Significance of the proposed project and expected outcomes, in terms of filling a gap in OC model resources available and/or knowledge transfer within the OC research community;
      - Study timelines.
  - b) **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.
  - c) **Figures & Tables if relevant (max 2 pages)**
    - ❖ Preliminary data and/or study schema
  - d) **References (no page limit)**
    - ❖ List of references cited in the project summary
  - e) **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)

**3) 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* ([link](#)), 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 ([link](#)). 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 ([link](#)). 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. Review of proposals**

All interested consortium members will be invited to review and evaluate the submitted proposals, except for those in which they are directly involved. Access to proposals for review purposes will only be granted following receipt of a signed confidentiality form, to be provided by OCC.

Completed evaluation forms are to be submitted via email to [afarrell@ovariancanada.org](mailto:afarrell@ovariancanada.org) by **Wednesday November 13 @11:59PM ET**. Scores and comments will be compiled, and highly ranked applications will be discussed in a 1.5-hour meeting (open to both reviewers and applicants). The goal of this review meeting will be to come to a group consensus on the rank order of applications based on the evaluation criteria.

Open discussions will be Chaired by a member by the research community not applying for funding, Dr. Anne-Marie Mes-Masson. Final application scores and rank order will be reviewed by OCC leadership, with funding recommendations made to the OCC Board of Directors for approval.

#### **L. Research ethics & institutional policies**

Prior to commencing OCC-funded research activities involving human biospecimens, 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](mailto:atone@ovariancanada.org).

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

#### **M. 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.



### **N. Contact**

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

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