

**Application Guidelines  
for  
THE NORWEGIAN CANCER SOCIETY  
PIONEER PROJECTS**



**NORWEGIAN CANCER SOCIETY**

## 1 ABOUT THE NORWEGIAN CANCER SOCIETY

The Norwegian Cancer Society (NCS)'s objective is to work for the prevention, control and alleviation of cancer. We fight cancer locally, nationally and globally through research and preventive measures, information, support, advice and lobbying. Consideration for cancer patients and their needs should always be central to the Norwegian Cancer Society's work to reach the goals. See our [Strategy 2020-2023](#), [statutes](#) and [ethical principles and guidelines](#) for more information.

Funding research is our main priority. Research implies hope for a cure for cancer in the future. It also implies optimal and quality cancer treatment for patients through excellent cancer research in Norway. The NCS provides a considerable amount of all direct funding for cancer research in Norway, thus contributing to promoting a research environment of top international standard in the country.

For all our calls, cancer relevance is a prerequisite for funding. Any specific themes or strategic choices will be outlined in the call text.

## 2 ABOUT THE PIONEER PROJECTS

The Norwegian Cancer Society funds Pioneer Projects with the aim of supporting early-stage exploration of novel and innovative ideas with potential for breaking new grounds in cancer research. The grants are intended to allow for testing a *high risk-high gain* research idea.

As the first key characteristic, a Pioneer Project should be truly novel and unlikely to be fit for conventional research programmes due to its high-risk nature. This could be through e.g. unorthodox thinking, a new and unique approach, a highly novel and original hypothesis, challenging existing research and/or using a non-standard methodology. You do not need to have supporting data, although the project should be grounded in relevant scientific knowledge.

Secondly, in order to be willing to fund high-risk early-stage ideas, the Norwegian Cancer Society is looking for projects that hold the potential to start a development of major importance for the cancer field, if successful. This could be potential to answer a long-standing question or transforming the understanding of a topic in cancer, paving the way for an important improvement in preventing, diagnosing, treating or managing cancer, or the like.

There are no restrictions as to scientific disciplines and we are also open for proposals from outside the life sciences and medical research area. The project manager needs to hold a PhD, but we will emphasise the project idea rather than previous accomplishments of the project manager. As a project manager you must have the appropriate expertise, together with any collaborators, to deliver the project. We welcome applicants from all career stages.

### ***The Pioneer Projects in brief:***

Key characteristics	Duration and funding	Who may apply
- Early phase idea	- 1-2 years	- Research organisations
- Novel and innovative	- 1- 2 MNOK from NCS	- Project manager at any career stage post PhD
- High potential for cancer field	- Max. 3 MNOK, own/other funding included	- All scientific disciplines
		- Collaborators are possible but not obligatory

### 3 THE APPLICATION

The application must consist of:

- **The application form with all mandatory fields completed**, submitted through our online management system, [ApplicationWeb<sup>1</sup>](#) (you can find all details by selecting *preview application form* under the call on ApplicationWeb)

*Note: The Norwegian Cancer Society Pioneer Projects-call has a simplified application form compared with our other calls*

- **A project description**, following the mandatory [template](#)

*Note: up to 3 pages, written anonymously i.e. without revealing the identity of the Project Manager, the institution or any collaborators.*

- **CV of the Project Manager**, following the mandatory [template](#)

*Note: 1-2 pages, describing your research agenda and a few main achievements.*

*Be aware that we do not ask for CVs of collaborators. Describe very briefly each collaborator's contribution and relevant expertise in the application form.*

A confirmation email will be sent the Project Manager after submitting an application. The Project Manager may re-open, modify, and re-submit the application until the deadline. After the application deadline, a confirmation email will be sent to both the Project Manager and the Project Administrator.

### 4 WHAT IS FUNDED

#### 4.1 POSITIONS

The Norwegian Cancer Society does not cover indirect costs or compensate for other costs related to leave of absence or investments.

The salary expenses should cover yearly salary payments, according to the Project Owner's payroll cost rate, employer social security tax and societal benefits. Salary increase is not covered. Some projects may require specific expertise that entails higher payroll costs. If this applies to your research project, you must specify why in your application. Consult with your Project Administrator/HR department concerning your institution's payroll cost rates.

#### **Researcher positions**

A researcher position, from 10 % - 100 %, where the candidate must as a minimum hold a doctoral degree. The applicant may apply for funding for his/her own position or for unnamed candidates.

#### **Post-doctoral researcher positions**

A post-doctoral fellowship position can be funded with a minimum of 50 % workload each year, according to [the terms of employment for scientific positions in Norway](#). The candidates must have submitted a doctoral degree before the institution can take the appointment decision. The fellowship may not commence until the doctoral thesis has been formally presented, defended and approved. The applicant may apply for funding for his/her own position or for unnamed candidates.

#### **Technical positions**

The technical positions, from 10 % - 100 %, may include laboratory technicians, study nurses, statistical personnel, or others that will offer technical assistance to the research project. There is no option to apply for a named candidate.

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<sup>1</sup> We recommend using the web browser Google Chrome.

Due to the 2-year project period and high-risk nature, the Norwegian Cancer Society Pioneer Projects does not fund PhD-fellowships.

## 4.2 RUNNING COSTS

The running costs can cover general costs related to the research project, including supplies, analyses, conference fees, travel, publications costs, minor equipment, etc., or cover project specific services on an hourly basis.

# 5 EVALUATION OF THE APPLICATIONS

## 5.1 ADMINISTRATIVE CHECK

The submitted applications are first manually checked by the NCS administration that may reject applications that clearly do not meet the formal requirements. Upon rejection, the Project Manager and the Project Administrator will instantly be notified.

## 5.2 PEER REVIEW

The proposals will be evaluated by 1-2 peer review committee(s), depending on the number of proposals we receive. The committee(s) will consist of qualified experts associated with universities, research institutions and hospitals throughout Europe and are appointed by the Norwegian Cancer Society. The committee members will have expertise in very diverse areas of cancer-related research. Please keep this in mind when writing your proposal.

The peer reviewers will base their evaluations solely on the information provided in the application, including uploaded attachments, and are not expected to independently retrieve additional information from other sources.

## 5.3 EVALUATION PROCESS

The proposals will be evaluated by the Peer Review Committee(s) in a 2-step process especially adapted to the NCS Pioneer Projects-call.

### Step 1

In step 1, the Peer Review Committee(s) will assess the proposals based on the 3-pages project description only, and without knowing the identity of the Project Manager, institution or any collaborators.

Each proposal will first be read and evaluated by all impartial committee members individually, according to the criteria and scoring system outlined in table 1 and 2. The Peer Review Committee will convene for a digital meeting. For each proposal, one reviewer will be appointed lead reviewer, and is responsible for leading the committee discussion of the proposal. The committee(s) selects the proposals to be shortlisted for a step 2 evaluation.

After step 1 is finalised, all applicants will be notified of the result; a proposal is either shortlisted and proceeds to step 2, or it is rejected. Please be aware that there will be no written feedback with grades and Peer Review Committee's comments to applicants that are not selected for step 2.

### Step 2

In step 2 there will only be one Peer Review Committee. For the proposals that have qualified to step 2, the reviewers will get access to the complete proposals, including the CV of the Project Manager, and the information in the application form such as host institution, project budget, any collaborators and their contributions.

All impartial members of the committee will first read and evaluate all proposals individually, according to the criteria and scoring system outlined in table 1 and 2. They will convene for a second digital meeting to discuss and agree on a unified assessment of each application. If the number of proposals in step 2 allows, the applicants will be invited to a short digital interview with the committee. Each interview will consist of the applicant presenting the idea followed by a questions and answers

session, and will probably last for about 20-30 min. More details about the interview will be given to the applicants beforehand.

Based on the evaluations of the Peer Review Committee members, and the interview and discussions in the meeting, the committee agrees on scores for each project, a ranked list of projects recommended for funding, and a ranked waiting list. The peer reviewers also agree on the *Peer Review Committee's comment*. This is a short comment rather than an evaluation report and should include strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for improvements.

**Table 1. Evaluation criteria**

Criteria	Definition	Used in step 1	Used in step 2
<b>1 Novelty</b>	The project is truly novel and innovative, through e.g. unorthodox thinking, a new and unique approach, a highly novel and original hypothesis, challenging existing research and/or using a non-standard methodology.	✓	✓
	The project is unlikely to be funded by more conventional funding mechanisms, due to its novelty and high risk-nature.		
<b>2 Potential</b>	The project has potential to break new grounds in cancer research, through answering a long-standing question or transforming the understanding on a topic in cancer, paving the way for an important improvement in preventing, diagnosing, treating or managing cancer, or the like.	✓	✓
<b>3 Implementation</b>	The Project Manager, together with any collaborators, have the appropriate expertise to deliver the project.	✗	
	The project is grounded in relevant scientific knowledge and has an appropriate project design.		✓

**Weighting of criteria:**

In step 1, criteria 1 and 2 will be given equal weight. In step 2, criterion 1 will be weighted 40 %, criterion 2 40 % and criterion 3 20 %.

**Table 2. Scoring scale used for all criteria**

Score	Definition
<b>4 Excellent</b>	The project accurately and relevantly addresses the criterion with no or very minor shortcomings.
<b>3 Very good</b>	The project accurately and relevantly addresses the criterion, but a few shortcomings are present.
<b>2 Good</b>	The project addresses the criterion, but various shortcomings are present.
<b>1 Fair or unsatisfactory</b>	The project inadequately addresses the criterion, and severe shortcomings and weaknesses are present.

**User involvement**

The intention of including user involvement in research is to increase the quality and relevance of the research. Please note that user involvement will not be a part of the application evaluation process for the Pioneer Projects-call. However, we strongly encourage to include user involvement in the projects where appropriate. For more information on user involvement, see the Norwegian Cancer Society's [user involvement resource page](#)

## 5.4 IMPARTIALITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All peer reviewers must sign a confidentiality agreement and have a legal duty to neither disclose any sensitive information acquired during the evaluation process, nor reveal the results of the evaluation process.

The statutes of the Norwegian Cancer Society § 10-5 regarding impartiality, applies in the research proposal evaluation process. The peer reviewers are hence disqualified from evaluating research proposals if they themselves, family members, or other near relations:

- have a professional collaboration with
- have recently supervised the PhD of
- have professional or personal conflicts with
- have supervising role to
- are in direct competition with

the applicant or any of the Project Partners or Participants.

Further, peer reviewers are not permitted to contact applicants concerning their submitted proposals during the evaluation process.

The peer reviewers must declare impartiality for each application to be evaluated and will not evaluate or participate in the discussion of an application where partiality is revealed.

## 5.5 DECISION PROCESS

The Board of the NCS is the appropriating body. The Board makes its final decision based on the peer review committee's ranking lists.

After the Board's decision, the Project Managers and Project Administrators receive an email with the outcome. All applicants receive the scores and comments for their application, as delivered from the peer review committee.

## 6 PROJECT ADMINISTRATION

The roles in the project administration are defined as follows:

### ***Project Owner***

The Project Owner is the institution that is legally and financially liable for fulfilling the project according to the terms and conditions described in the project contract. The Project Owner may be a Norwegian university, university college, research institute, hospital or other institution having research as a part of its non-commercial activities.

### ***Project Administrator***

The Project Owner must designate a Project Administrator who is authorised to represent and assume obligations on behalf of the Project Owner in relation to the NCS. The Project Administrator is responsible for approving the grant application, including the budget, before submission. The Project Administrator is also responsible for accepting any possible grant, entering into the project contract and collaboration agreements.

### ***Project Manager***

The Project Manager is the principal investigator/scientist who oversees the scientific progress and performance of the project on behalf of the Project Owner. If granted, this includes submission of annual and final reports, as well as applying for changes to the project throughout the project period, if relevant.

### ***Project Partner***

A Project Partner is a collaborating institution that is under obligation to implement the project together with the Project Owner, sharing its risks as well as its results. A Project Partner can contribute scientifically and/or financially to the project.

If the project is funded, the Project Manager must provide the Norwegian Cancer Society with collaboration agreements between the Project Owner and all Project Partners, before the contract can enter into force and payments to the project can start. A Project Partner must be represented by one or more Project Participants, or a Financial Contributor.

### **Project Participant and Financial Contributor**

A Project Participant is the actual scientific collaborator who contributes to the implementation of the project plan. A Project Participant provides clearly defined expertise necessary to complete one or more work packages. A Project Participant can be working in the same institution as the Project Manager (the institution will then be the Project Owner) or in another institution (the institution will then be a Project Partner).

If a collaboration between the Project Owner and a Project Partner involves only a financial contribution, an administrative representant (Financial Contributor) must represent the Project Partner.

## **7 CONTRACT AND GRANT TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

Granted applications must be accepted, and contract signed, by the Project Administrator within 14 days. The Project Managers or Project Administrators for waitlisted or rejected applications have 3 weeks to submit complaints. Details regarding complaints can be found in the NCS's [statutes](#) (§ 9).

Below is a selection of terms and conditions for funded projects. **Please read the contract [template](#) for all details.**

- **Double financing**

If the Project Manager has received funding for the same, or partly the same, project from another funding source, he/she is obliged to inform the Norwegian Cancer Society immediately.

- **Collaboration agreement(s)**

The Project Owner must provide collaboration agreements with all collaboration parties **listed in the application form**, with no exceptions.

- **Clinical studies**

If the project includes a clinical study, the Project Manager must register the study in an international registry before the first study participant is enrolled. The identification number of the study should be provided to Norwegian Cancer Society in the annual report if not available at the time of application. Remember to also include the funding source in the registry.

- **Reporting**

The Project Manager must deliver annual reports and final reports which will be notified by Norwegian Cancer Society.

- **Handling of deviations**

From 2020 the Norwegian Cancer Society requires that project changes must be applied for in the ApplicationWeb without undue delay by the Project Manager or Project Administrator on behalf of the Project Owner. Hence, requests for project changes are not to be included in the annual reports anymore.

- **Release of results and credit**

The Norwegian Cancer Society, and co-funding organisations if relevant, should be credited both in publications and presentations as specified in the Contract.