



# CALL FOR PROPOSALS 2026

---

## NEXT GEN CLINICIAN SCIENTIST GRANT

**DEADLINE FOR PRE-SUBMISSION:** JUNE 19, 2026

**DEADLINE FOR FULL PROPOSAL:** NOVEMBER 13, 2026

(BY 17:00 CENTRAL EUROPEAN TIME)

**FONDAZIONE AIRC**  
**PER LA RICERCA SUL CANCRO ETS**

Viale Isonzo 25, 20135 Milano

Tel. +39 02 7797411

E-mail: [grants.applicationsupport@airc.it](mailto:grants.applicationsupport@airc.it)

## Table of contents

Foreword	3
1. How to apply	3
2. Eligibility Criteria	3
3. Intellectual Property, exploitation and dissemination of results	7
4. Disclosure of Financial Conflicts of Interest	8
5. Funding	9
6. The Review Process	10
7. Deadlines	12

### AIRC MISSION

AIRC raises funds to support cancer research in Italy. Its mission is to understand, prevent and cure cancer through research and outreach activities. AIRC aims to find solutions to challenges in cancer research, awarding grants to the most deserving projects, as well as supporting training fellowships. **You can read more about our research strategy [here](#).**

Guide to proposal preparation, FEA instructions, Eligible costs, templates, Keywords and results from the previous round of peer review are available at: <https://www.direzionescientifica.airc.it/funding-for-research/individual-grants/>

## Foreword

Fondazione AIRC per la ricerca sul cancro ETS (AIRC) is inviting applications for **Next Gen Clinician Scientist (Next Gen CS) Grants** in the area of cancer research. This grant is intended to foster a new generation of talented physician scientists wishing to **optimize clinical practice**. Applications falling within the following cancer research areas are particularly encouraged: academic-driven clinical trials, studies about novel biomarkers and patient stratification, research on innovative diagnostics, and new methods to improve the efficacy of surgery and radiotherapy. The scientific activity must be carried out in a research **organization located in Italy**, organized under public or private law, whose primary goal is to independently conduct biomedical research (university, hospital or other research center).

This grant will start on **July 1, 2027** and will provide support for a period of **five years** (provided that AIRC has available funds and that the outcome of the mid-term review, to be carried out during the third year of activity, is positive). The grant is **up to € 1.500.000 in five years** (with an average of € 300.000/year) and will be awarded once in a lifetime. Grantees are expected to establish an independent line of clinical research and be the leading author of all publications originating from the funded activity. Failure to respect this commitment may result in withdrawal of the grant.

---

## 1. How to apply

**The Next Gen CS Call foresees three consecutive phases of selection.**

**A pre-submission inquiry is mandatory.** The pre-submission must contain a **3-page Letter of Intent (LOI)** detailing: i) the proposed work and projected achievements; ii) a statement proving the capability of the Hosting Institution in managing and carrying out clinical research studies; iii) a description of the qualifications of the applicant, henceforth defined also as Principal Investigator (PI).

Eligible applicants presenting the most competitive pre-submissions will be invited to submit a full proposal. A shortlist of candidates will be invited for a final interview with the reviewers.

## 2. Eligibility Criteria

Applicants cannot have more than one AIRC individual funding active at the same time. Nevertheless, applications are welcomed within the final year of the previously funded project.

Only one application per applicant can be submitted within the 2026 AIRC Calls for individual funding, either grant or fellowship. Candidates who have an application submitted in response to any AIRC Call will not be allowed to apply for another one before receiving notification with the results of their current application.

The same research project cannot be presented by more than one applicant within any Call at any time.

### 2.1 Applicants

Applicants can be of any nationality and are expected to have operated to the highest standards of integrity during their whole career. PIs must be involved in the project for at least 50% of their time.

**To submit a proposal, applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:**

- Have obtained a **medical degree (MD)**;
- **Hold a PhD or a Specialty degree attained in June 2011 or after. For applicants with both PhD and Specialty, the date when the first degree was attained will count for eligibility.** Exceptions to this limit are allowed only in case of research interruptions (see the “Research Interruptions and Justifications” section of the Guide to proposal preparation);
- **Have a strong track record, including at least 3 primary research papers as first/co-first, last/co-last or corresponding/co-corresponding author**, in press or published in the last 5 years (i.e.2021-2026) in peer-reviewed journals; papers in press must be accepted for publication, not just submitted, by the pre-submission deadline. Reviews, editorials, case reports, letters to the editor without data, book chapters, meeting abstracts and proceedings (even if they contain original data or are published on journals with Impact Factor) do not count for eligibility.

Significant clinical or laboratory research experience at a competitive institution outside Italy is not required, but it will be considered a competitive advantage.

AIRC recognize that extended research interruptions due to maternity/paternity leave, illness, or personal circumstances may affect an applicant’s productivity. Therefore, for properly justified career breaks equal or longer than 12 months, the five-year track record period will be extended (see the “Research Interruptions and Justifications” section of the Guide to proposal preparation for details).

**Applications by candidates who do not meet these requirements will be rejected (“triage”).**

**Applicants are not eligible to apply if they:**

- **received a score  $\geq 4$  in the 2025 MFAG presubmission;**
- **received a score  $\geq 18$  in the 2025 IG call;**
- **were classified as ‘not eligible for funding’ in the 2025 Call for Fellowships in Italy.**

## **2.2 Hosting Institution**

The research project must be carried out in a Hosting Institution, i.e. a research organization (such as university, hospital or other research center), irrespective of its legal status (organized under public or private law), **located in Italy**, whose primary goal is to independently conduct non-economic biomedical research and to disseminate its results. Possible revenues coming from non-economic research activity must be completely reinvested in the non-economic research activities. Where the Hosting Institution also pursues economic activities, the financing, the costs, and the revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately. Shareholders, members, or other individuals that can exert a decisive influence upon the Hosting Institution cannot enjoy a preferential access to the intellectual property of the results generated by the non-economic research activity.

The Hosting Institutions must promote the highest standards of integrity in research, in compliance with the [relevant AIRC policy on this matter](#). AIRC is not responsible, and does not accept any liability, for scientific misconduct of personnel involved in a funded research project. For the funded project, the PI and the

Hosting institution shall commit to open science and FAIR principles as determined by the time of grant acceptance.

By signing the application, the Legal Representative of the Hosting Institution commits to allow the PI to be or remain affiliated with the Hosting Institution and carry out the proposed research project for the entire duration of the grant.

AIRC will not fund proposals from PIs who, although jointly affiliated to an Italian institution and an institution abroad, do not meet the criteria for substantial presence (at least 70% of their working time) in the institution in Italy during the funding period. To make sure this requirement is met, supporting official documentation will be requested from all institutions the PI is affiliated with.

Any change occurring in the relationship between the applicant and the Hosting Institution (e.g., termination, leave of absence, sabbatical, contract type etc.) or in the Hosting Institution legal entity or organization (e.g., changes in institution name, merging, Legal Representative turnover, changes in addresses) must be promptly notified to AIRC.

The Hosting Institution will provide the facilities, equipment, and infrastructure necessary to carry out the proposed research. In case the applicant is not yet affiliated to the Hosting Institution at the deadline for submission, the Hosting Institution and the PI **must have already negotiated the terms and conditions of his/her employment contract** and defined the recruitment procedure in case the grant is awarded. This is to ensure that the project can start promptly on July 1, 2027, as indicated in this Call (see Deadlines).

The Hosting Institution must provide a letter that confirms its commitment to support the clinical research project led by the PI and her/his research unit, describing spaces, infrastructure, qualified personnel and resources that will be available to the PI. The Hosting Institution must also guarantee that the PI will be allowed to autonomously manage the resources received to carry out the research project. The letter must include a pledge that **the PI must be listed as leading author** in publications stemming from research carried out with Next Gen CS funds (see "Institutional Commitments" in the Guide to proposal preparation). AIRC reserves the right to verify that these conditions are met. Failure to respect this commitment may result in withdrawal of AIRC support to the investigator.

## 2.3 Research plan

Research plans must be consistent with the AIRC mission and address unmet clinical needs or **outstanding questions to optimize clinical practice** in oncology. Projects must have a research plan covering of 5 years, with a dedicated budget consistent with this time frame.

In particular, AIRC encourages applications addressing clinical research, including but not limited to the following areas:

- Investigator-driven clinical trials, especially early phases clinical trials and drug repurposing studies;
- Studies about biomarkers and patient stratification, including diagnostic, predictive and prognostic markers;
- Research on innovative diagnostics, spanning imaging, liquid biopsy, digital health, and AI-based

methodologies, as well as interdisciplinary approaches involving engineering, computational sciences, and other enabling technologies;

- Innovative surgery and radiotherapy focusing on personalization, combination approaches, and technological innovation to improve efficacy and minimize toxicity, and enhance patient quality of life;
- Clinical and translational research in rare tumors, including prospective observational studies, aimed at improving biological understanding, patient stratification, and clinical management in underserved populations.

At the same time, phenomenological, descriptive-at-best, proposals are discouraged.

The following kinds of proposals **will not be funded** and therefore will be **excluded from the peer review** (triage):

- Phase III and IV clinical trials;
- Phase I and II clinical trials that are company-driven, with the PI or the Hosting Institution excluded from intellectual property rights ownership, with no possibility of publishing the results and of freely exchanging data, reagents and information. This does not exclude collaborative studies with industry;
- Requests for ongoing routine collection of data and materials, such as cancer registries or cell and tissue banks.

**Proposals must contain thorough provisions of study design, statistical analysis and sample size.**

For studies involving human subjects, human biological samples or animal experimentation, the approval of the relevant institutional or national authorities is mandatory. AIRC reserves the right to check compliance with this requirement at any time, and up to ten years after the termination of the grant. AIRC does not accept any liability for harm to participants in AIRC funded trials.

AIRC recommend responsible use of AI. Any use of AI shall comply with existing laws for the protection of personal data. In addition, should the project foresee the use of AI-driven tools to support data analysis and enhance research workflows, the adoption of such technologies shall respect intellectual property rights. Any content entered into AI systems, as well as any output they generate, should not endanger the ownership, confidentiality, or legal protection of proprietary information. It is therefore essential to implement appropriate safeguards to ensure that the use of AI does not inadvertently expose confidential knowledge, unpublished results, or protected materials, thus preserving the integrity and protection of the project's intellectual assets.

**The proposal must be original.** Scientific overlap with other AIRC applications must be disclosed and justified in the "Declaration on originality of the application" form. Submissions of proposals previously presented to AIRC by another PI will not be accepted.

AIRC verifies documents with an anti-plagiarism software. AIRC is aware that copying may be accidental and that parts of an application (e.g., materials and methods) may include duplicate material, originally produced by the PI for other goals than the present application. Nevertheless, **proposals that contain blatantly and**

**substantially copied materials originally presented by other PIs will be rejected** (for details, please see the form “Declaration on originality of the application” in the appropriate section of the Guide to proposal preparation).

Information about the proposed research (name of the PI, title and abstract), if funded, will be published on AIRC journals and websites; the websites of potential co-funders also contributing to the funding scheme; and other public databases collecting data on national and international funding in cancer research, such as ICRP (International Cancer Research Partnership). Such information may also be shared with donors who wish to support specific research projects with donations or bequests. The sharing will be done in the full respect of the EU General Regulation 2016/679 on data protection.

## 2.4 Resubmissions and Revised Applications

Eligible applicants may resubmit a rejected proposal. Those submitting a project that was rejected within the last 5 years may submit a "Revised application", please consider that:

- revised applications that do not meet all eligibility criteria described in this Call will not be sent out for review;
- PIs must provide a detailed response to the reviewers' comments through the “Revision” section of the online form available in the full submission. When in pre-submission, they should include a brief rebuttal in the “Pre-submission research plan”.

## 3. Intellectual Property, exploitation and dissemination of results

With the purpose of ensuring that the research funded by AIRC has the best chances to result in new medical interventions for patients (i.e., new therapeutic or diagnostic processes), when outcomes of research programs are candidates for practical exploitation, the recipient Hosting Institution shall comply with the following principles:

- Intellectual property and patents resulting from research funded wholly or partly by AIRC will be solely owned and managed by the Grantee and/or Hosting Institution.
- The Hosting Institution shall use its best efforts to ensure proper protection, under applicable intellectual property laws, to research results that show therapeutic or diagnostic potential irrespective of whether the research was funded wholly or partly by AIRC. In such cases, the Hosting Institution shall ensure adequate and prompt action both for timely protection and subsequent exploitation;
- Intellectual property and patents resulting from research carried out with AIRC grants will be solely owned and managed by the grantee and the Hosting Institution.
- The Hosting Institution, through its Legal Representative or a designated individual (i.e., Tech Transfer Officer, Principal Investigator, or Program Manager) shall inform AIRC in writing of any new

results undergoing intellectual property protection (including, *inter alia*, patent filings or patent applications, utility models, registered designs, trademarks, copyright registrations, etc.) and of any valorization initiative, such as licensing agreements, spin-off formation, or any other forms/types of potential commercial exploitation of such results. Whenever these activities fall within the duration of a funding period, relevant notice shall be given *via* the administrative annual report. Otherwise, such notice shall be given within 10 working days *via* registered letter with return receipt or PEC addressed to [airc.direzione-scientifica@pec.it](mailto:airc.direzione-scientifica@pec.it);

- Subject to requirements necessary to ensure effective patent protection, the Hosting Institution shall use its best effort to disseminate research results through scientific publications and shall duly acknowledge funding by AIRC;
- In addition to scientific publications, funding from AIRC shall be given prominent notice, whenever possible, in all forms of public dissemination of news concerning the funded research;
- Unless otherwise agreed in specific agreements with AIRC, the results of research funded by AIRC must be primarily directed towards generating scientific and medical progress. In the ultimate interest of patients, this shall ensure valorisation processes that maximize the impact of new medical interventions (i.e., distribution of new diagnostic and therapeutic processes). The Hosting Institution shall promptly inform AIRC in writing about any royalties and/or revenues deriving from the results of AIRC's supported activities, it being understood that such royalties and/or revenues shall be reinvested in independent, non-profit oncological research.

At any time during regular business hours and upon at least 5 working days prior written notice, AIRC shall have the right to (i) monitor all funded institution's intellectual property-related activities, either directly or through a third party independent expert bound to confidentiality, and (ii) require the Hosting Institution to enter into an appropriate revenue sharing agreement, to be discussed on a case-by-case basis, should the funded institution enter into any valorization agreement with third parties.

AIRC shall further have the right to adopt any measure or start with any legal action it deems necessary or appropriate to safeguard, protect, or enforce its rights and legitimate interests.

All funded initiatives shall strictly and fully comply with [AIRC's intellectual property policy](#) principles, as in force and as may be amended from time to time, and the funded institution shall be bound to implement, without delay or exception, any requirement, guideline, or modification arising therefrom.

## 4. Disclosure of Financial Conflicts of Interest

PIs are required to disclose any financial conflict of interest with the proposal, as described in the [relevant AIRC policy on this matter](#). Reviewers will be asked to determine if the declared conflicts may affect the objectivity and integrity of the proposed research plan. Appropriate measures will be taken against applicants who have deliberately or recklessly failed to disclose conflicts of interest, including: the termination of the grant, the obligation to return grant money to AIRC, the ineligibility to apply to future AIRC grants and the exclusion from AIRC review panels and other bodies.

## 5. Funding

Grants awarded within this Call are for a 5-year period: they will officially start on July 1, 2027 and terminate on June 30, 2032. Funding for the fourth and fifth year will be granted, provided AIRC has available funds and a positive outcome of the mid-term review, planned within the third year. The grant covers up to **€1.500.000 in 5 years** (with an average of € 300.000/year). If crucial for the development of the project, the PI can allocate different amounts of funding across the 5-year period, providing a clear justification in the budget section of the application.

**First year of funding.** Once awarded, the grant is assigned to the PI to carry out the project described in the application. Funds will be made available to the Hosting Institution under terms and conditions that AIRC will provide once the application is approved. Funds must be at the grantee's disposal within 30 days from the time the Hosting Institution has access to them. AIRC reserves the right to visit the applicant and monitor prompt start of activities.

**Each year.** The PI must submit a renewal request. Funding for subsequent years will depend on the submission of the renewal requests, which will have to be endorsed by the AIRC Board of Directors (*Consiglio di Amministrazione*), provided that AIRC has available funds. At the end of each funding period (one year + three months), an administrative report must be submitted.

**Year 3.** During the third year of the project, along with the renewal request, the PI will have to submit a detailed scientific progress report that will be evaluated. A site visit will be scheduled as well. Funding for the last two years will be granted only after a positive assessment, provided that AIRC has available funds.

**Year 5.** A scientific final report will be required and will impact on the evaluation of future AIRC grant applications.

The PI is fully accountable for the budget allocation in compliance with AIRC grant management guidelines and the Hosting Institution's purchasing procedures.

The Hosting Institution must provide the PI with the necessary infrastructure (access to patients and primary samples, lab/office space, personal computers, furnished labs, major equipment, etc.), personnel, administrative and grant management assistance, and employ the PI for the whole duration of the grant. The Hosting Institution shall promptly communicate to AIRC any changes relative to the project development that may affect the signed agreement.

**Transfer of grant money to other laboratories and/or institutions either in Italy or abroad is not allowed.** This does not exclude the possibility to support all units involved in multicentric clinical studies.

AIRC supports 100% of the additional costs generated by a funded project.

The following costs are eligible:

- Direct research costs:
  - a) Consumables and supplies

- b) Small bench instrumentation
- c) Equipment: the purchase of large instrumentation will not be looked upon favourably. However, if it is of central importance for the development of the project, it can be requested only if thoroughly justified
- d) Services
- e) Maintenance
- f) Publications
- g) Meetings and travel
- h) Personnel: support for up to three units of personnel (only PhD students, early-stage researchers, research nurses, data managers and technicians) at 100% of time on the project. The salary for the PI cannot be requested. AIRC recommends that personnel working on the project is hired under an employment contract with adequate and equitable social security provisions (contribution to pension funds, health and accident insurance, parental leave, etc.) in accordance with existing national legislation and with national or sectorial collective bargaining agreements. Furthermore, these arrangements must reflect the principles and standards outlined in the [European Charter for Researchers](#), which promotes transparency, equity, and the recognition of researchers' rights and responsibilities within the European Research Area. Personnel already holding a permanent position at the Hosting Institution at the time of the grant award cannot be paid with the grant money.
  - Indirect costs
  - Overheads

Further information about the terms and conditions of the grant, including renewal requests, scientific and administrative reports, will be provided once the application is approved. Hosting Institutions of grantees might be asked to set up an [agreement with AIRC](#) regulating the terms and condition of the grant.

**AIRC reserves the right to site visit the PI's unit and the Hosting Institution anytime while the grant is active and to audit the administrative management of the project anytime and up to 10 years after the project is concluded.**

## 6. The Review Process

### 6.1 Eligibility check

All applications are checked for compliance with guidelines and eligibility criteria; those that do not conform will be rejected at this stage.

Eligible applications undergo a peer review process that ensures an expert, fair and independent evaluation of their scientific quality. Only the most scientifically meritorious applications, identified in a rigorous and objective manner through the peer review process described below, will be funded.

## 6.2 Pre-submission evaluation

For this Call, AIRC has appointed a dedicated Study Section composed of outstanding non-Italian experts with complementary expertise covering various clinical cancer research areas. The Study Section is in charge of the entire review process, including the evaluation of the pre-submission enquiries. The identity of the reviewers will not be disclosed.

In all stages of the review process, reviewer assignments will be made in compliance with conflict of interest and appearance of conflict rules to ensure a review free from inappropriate influence. When accepting to evaluate an application, reviewers agree that they will maintain the confidentiality of the application and associated materials they have received. The [AIRC policy on conflict of interest](#) is available on our website.

Each pre-submission is evaluated by the members of the Study Section, who select the most meritorious applications based on the review criteria listed below, indicating whether the applicant should or should not be invited to submit a full proposal. No detailed feedback will be provided to applicants rejected at this stage.

## 6.3 Full proposal evaluation

Full proposals are independently reviewed by three members of the Study Section with expertise in the specific area of the research plan. The three reviewers act as *primary reviewer*, *secondary reviewer* or *discussant*. The primary reviewer might also ask to recruit a *reviewer specialist*, should he/she think that the expertise available within the Study Section may not be sufficient for a thorough assessment of the research proposal. The reviewer specialist is recruited from a panel of about 600 well established international investigators working in institutions outside of Italy. Each of the three members of the Study Section provides a score, while the reviewer specialist only expresses a priority for funding.

The review criteria are:

- significance and impact on clinical practice for cancer patients;
- innovation;
- approach, feasibility and scientific rigor of the proposed research;
- PI's international standing in cancer research, leadership and track record adequate to successfully complete the proposed clinical study;
- PI's commitment to cancer research in terms of contribution of PI's specific expertise to advancements in the field or the scientific interest of the applicant to cancer throughout his/her career;
- quality of the Hosting Institution: environment, international standing, resources, facilities, infrastructures and successful history in carrying out clinical studies;
- adequacy of the budget requested.

Once all evaluations have been submitted, reviewers are invited to read the critiques from other reviewers who assessed the same proposals and, if necessary, provide additional comments.

## 6.4 Interview

When all reviews are completed, applications are ranked in order of scientific merit (the *preliminary score*,

which is used to rank the applications at this stage, is calculated as the mean of the scores received from the three reviewers who evaluated the application). Based on the preliminary ranking, shortlisted candidates will be invited to an in-person **interview in Milan either on February 24 or February 25, 2027** (details on the date of the interview will be provided). All applicants are requested to hold this date; all candidates will be notified by the end of January 2027. The interview will include a short presentation followed by Q&A with the members of the committee. Further details will be provided to the shortlisted candidates. The final ranking, which is based on the *final score* of each application, is calculated as the mean of the scores received from all reviewers during the discussion.

The final ranking and the financial availability of AIRC will determine the recommendation for funding, to be endorsed by the AIRC Board of Directors (*Consiglio di Amministrazione*).

All applicants will be notified of the final decision on their application with an official communication from AIRC (the notification date is reported in the “Deadlines” table), and they will have access to the reviewers’ comments. **The funding decision cannot be appealed.**

**Please note that PIs whose pre-submission enquiry will receive a score  $\geq 4$  within the 2026 Next Gen pre-submission will be ineligible to apply to any AIRC call (fellowship or grant) in 2027.**

## 7. Deadlines

**Deadlines are strictly enforced: applications submitted after the deadline will not be accepted.**

**Deadlines for applications** (by 17:00 Central European Time, of the indicated dates).

<b>Pre-submission inquiry (mandatory)</b>	<b>Publication of Call and application form release</b>	May 19, 2026
	<b>Online submission</b>	June 19, 2026
	<b>Online submission with digital signatures of the PI and Legal Representative</b>	July 2, 2026
	<b>Notification of results</b>	October 13, 2026
<b>Full proposal (only if pre-submission is approved)</b>	<b>Full submission form release</b>	October 13, 2026
	<b>Online submission</b>	November 13, 2026
	<b>Online submission with digital signatures of the PI and Legal Representative</b>	November 27, 2026
	<b>Papers in press *</b>	January 7, 2027
	<b>Interview</b>	February 24 or 25, 2027
	<b>Notification of results</b>	April 30, 2027
	<b>Start of grants</b>	July 1, 2027

\* Requests from applicants that do not meet the eligibility criteria at the time of the submission deadline will not be considered. Communications regarding these papers will be forwarded to all reviewers evaluating the proposal. Please refer to the “Guide to proposal preparation” for details.

**The PI and the Legal Representative must digitally sign both the pre-submission and the full proposal:** refer to the [FEA instructions](#) (“Firma Elettronica Avanzata”) for details. **If the digitally signed applications are not submitted by the indicated deadline, they will not be sent out for review.**

Deadlines for renewal requests, administrative and scientific reports will be communicated in the award letter.