Tips for applicants

How to prepare a Gianni Bonadonna fellowship application
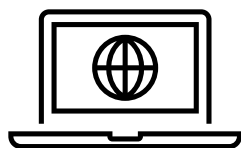
For eligibility requirements and rules, please refer to the 2023 AIRC Calls

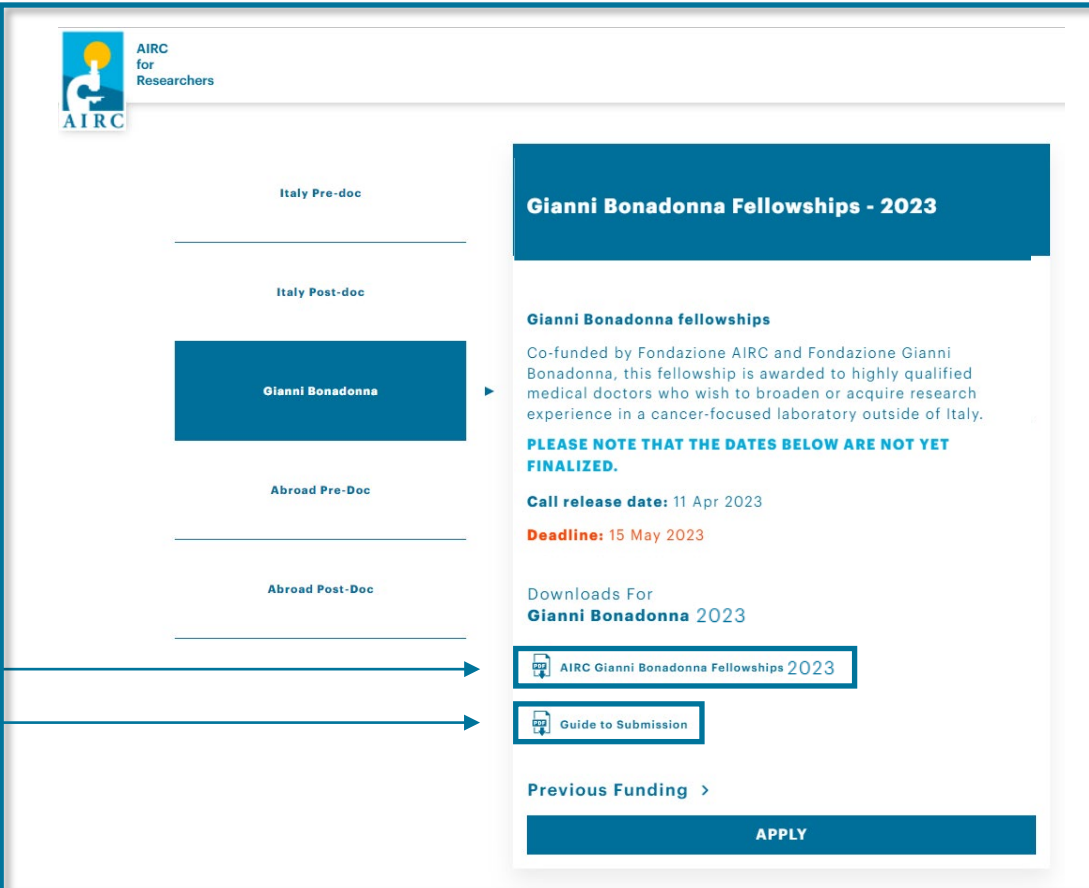https://www.direzionescientifica.airc.it/funding-for-research/fellowship/

Introduction

This presentation is meant as a series of suggestions for writing an application to AIRC Fellowships.

To apply, please read the AIRC "**Call for proposals 2023**" and the "**Guide to proposal preparation 2022**", where all the eligibility requirements and rules are listed.

https://www.direzionescientifica.airc.it/
funding-for-research/fellowship/

Glossary - I

Who is the PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI)?

The young researcher, or applicant, who applies to the Call for proposals and who, in case of funding, will be the fellowship holder.

Who is the HEAD OF HOSTING LAB?

The scientist that will supervise the fellow during the fellowship appointment at the Hosting Institution. He/She is supposed to help the applicant in the preparation of the application and is requested to sign the Letter of Acceptance of the Hosting Institution.

Glossary - II

The Principal Investigator (PI) and the Legal Representative of the Hosting Institution must digitally sign the fellowship application.

What is the HOSTING INSTITUTION?

The research center where the PI will carry out the research activity supported by the fellowship.

Who is the LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE?

The person with the legal authority to sign documents on behalf of the Hosting Institution.

If a legal representative is already associated to the Hosting Institution in the AIRC system, please check that all data are correct.

What DIGITAL SIGNATURE should be used?

Please, follow our instructions for "Firma Elettronica Avanzata" (FEA)

Do you fulfill all eligibility criteria?

Make sure you have all the **requirements** described in the Call and in the Guide to proposal preparation and upload the documentation that certifies your eligibility in the application.

In 2022, **2%** of all applications for fellowships **were not admitted to peer review** because they did not fulfill all formal requirements.

Mark your calendar and do not miss the deadline!

The application cannot be submitted and cannot be modified after the submission deadline.

Choose an effective title

Examples of strong titles

- "Control of immune-mediated antitumor activities of IRF-8 by epigenetic drugs in colorectal cancer"
- "Dissecting p63 functions in skin cancer initiation and progression"
- "Plasma microRNA profiling as first line screening test for lung cancer detection: a prospective study"

Examples of weak titles

- "Post-translational modification of proteins" *too vague*
- "Terminal differentiation opposes transformation, functional bases" *too vague*
- "The energy sensing LKB1-AMPKα1 pathway regulates IGF1 secretion and consequent activation of the IGF1R-PKB pathway in primary hepatocytes." *too long, too specific, too many abbreviations*

! If you need to use acronyms, use only those that are widely known in the field, and do it sparingly.

Write a focused and balanced abstract

By reading the abstract, reviewers get their first impression on the proposal and on the PI.

Answer the following questions:

- Why is your **question** important?

- What is your **key aim**?

- How will you **address the problem**?

- What is the **impact** on cancer?

- What **advances** will be made?
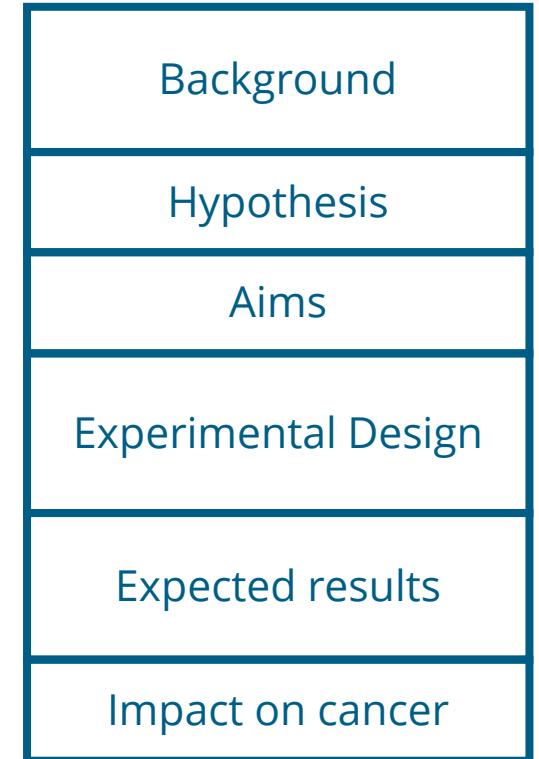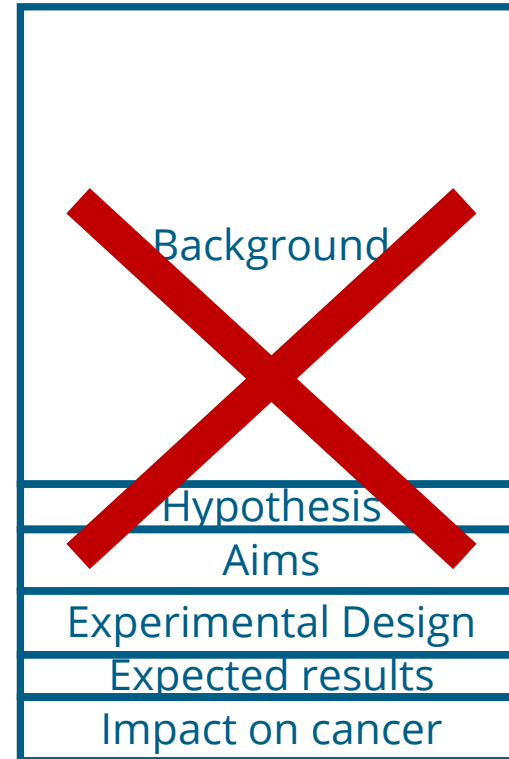
Choose keywords that describe the key features of your research plan

Keywords chosen by applicants and reviewers help make a tentative **match between an application and appropriate reviewers**.

APPLICATION keywords
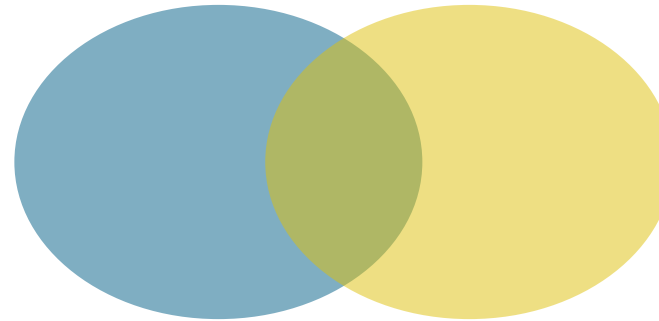
REVIEWER's keywords

The complete **list of keywords** is available here:
https://www.pages.airc.it/DataFiles/Calls/SupportInfo/Keywords.pdf

Choose keywords that describe the key features of your research plan

You can select up to 5 keywords – we suggest to follow this approach:

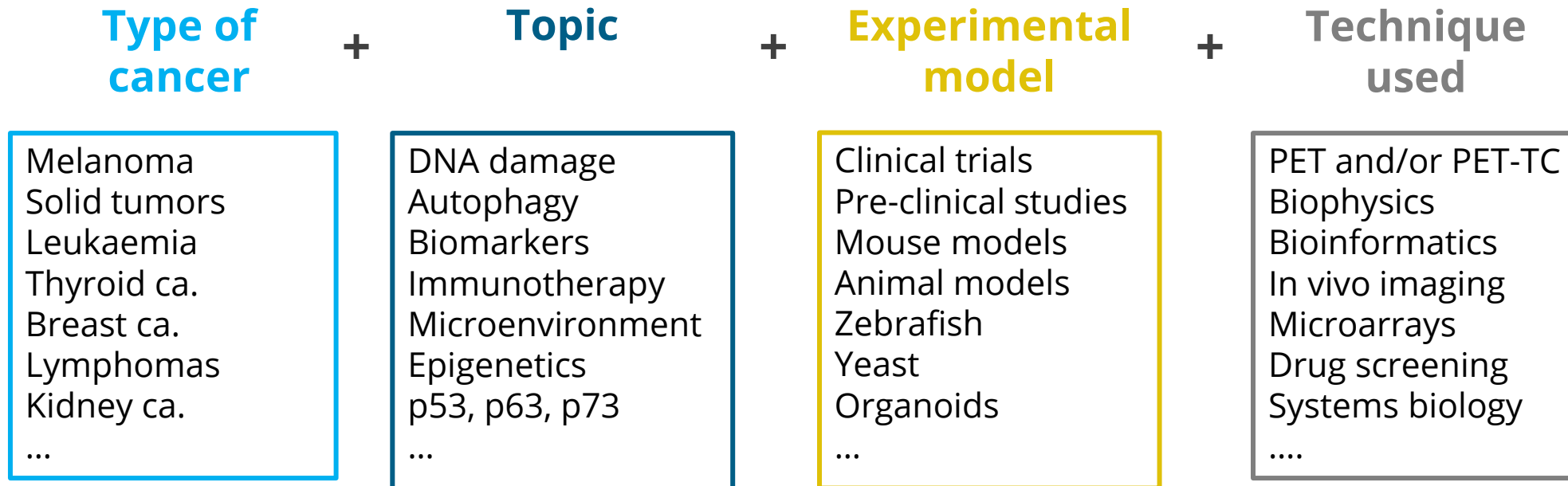| Type of cancer	+	Topic	+	Experimental model	+	Technique used
Melanoma Solid tumors Leukaemia Thyroid ca. Breast ca. Lymphomas Kidney ca. ...		DNA damage Autophagy Biomarkers Immunotherapy Microenvironment Epigenetics p53, p63, p73 ...		Clinical trials Pre-clinical studies Mouse models Animal models Zebrafish Yeast Organoids ...		PET and/or PET-TC Biophysics Bioinformatics In vivo imaging Microarrays Drug screening Systems biology ....

Avoid choosing a set of keywords that are:
- too vague (*e.g.,* genetics + animal model + genomics)
- too similar with each other (*e.g.,* DNA damage + DNA repair)

The Proposal Main Body must be ORIGINAL
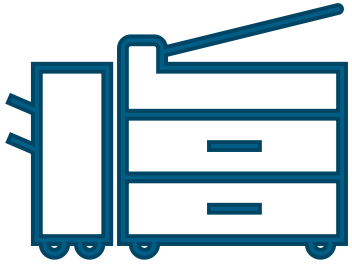
An **anti-plagiarism software** is used to check that the main documents are original.

If the research plan bears a high level of identity to that **presented by someone else** (*) without including proper reference, the application will be excluded from the peer review process.

(*) this also applies to:
- applications by another member of the hosting lab or by the supervisor
- proposals submitted within different AIRC funding schemes
- applications submitted in past years, regardless of whether they have been funded or not

In the form "**Declaration on originality of the application**", answer YES to disclose any possible homology with other applications. Use the justification box to insert details about the original AIRC application (PI, Call) and the reason for the text duplication.

Use figures in the Proposal Main Body

Use figures, schemes, tables to make a concept more evident
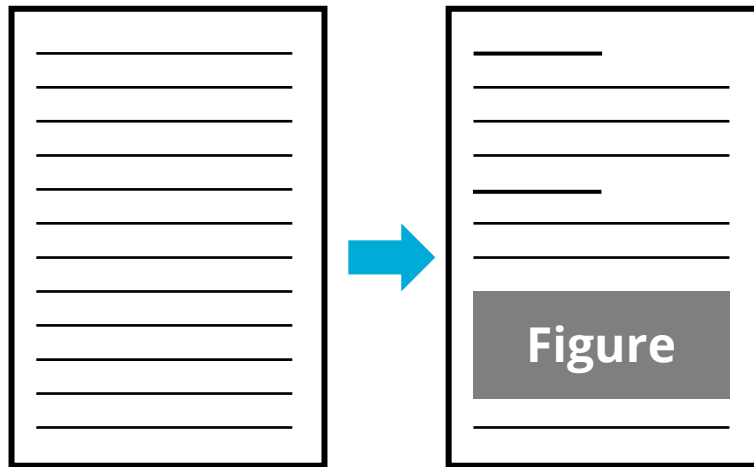
Sections and figures help reviewers focus on the most relevant information

Simplify figures
Remove anything that doesn't contribute to information transfer (such as 3D, shadowing and unnecessary colors)

Make figures readable by human eyes
Verify that text in figures can be read if printed. Remove unnecessary information.

Provide short titles for figure legends

Resubmissions

Resubmissions of previously rejected proposals are admitted, as long as you meet all eligibility requirements.

A point-by-point reply to the criticisms and issues raised by the reviewers is not mandatory.

However, we strongly suggest you take advantage of the reviewers comments and address the issues raised accordingly.

Proposal Main Body:
Lessons from reviewers' comments

Define a clear and cancer relevant hypothesis

"There is a lack of clear goals/aims/impact when it comes to cancer research except for some rather general statements"

"Overall, the project is diffuse. Since no clear questions are put, no clear answers can follow"
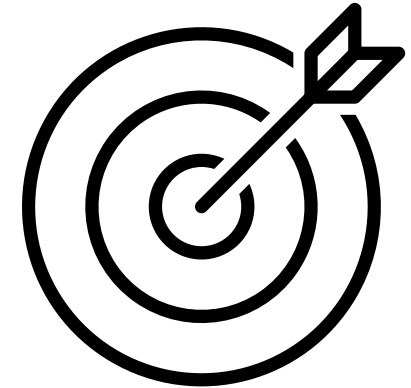
"After reading the aims page, I still had no initial idea what this proposal entailed"

Focus and keep it simple

"The PI does not realize that sometimes less is more"

"The usage of many acronyms does not help - e.g., inhibitors are called PPI or DI etc."

"The present proposal seems to be «a little of everything on very many topics»"
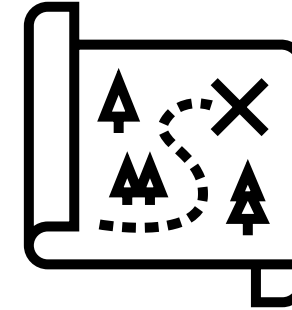
Proposal Main Body:
Lessons from reviewers' comments

Write a compelling story

"A collection of tasks not related to each other is not a project"

"It is not terribly well-written and sometimes it looks like a collage of somewhat unrelated work-packages with no logically stated and organized aims"

Describe a feasible project

"...however, the project is a bit over-ambitious, with the impression of a grant proposal which was squeezed into an individual fellowship"

"While the hosting lab and the CV of the applicant are convincing, the project is complex and can be accomplished only if subsequent steps are successfully and timely completed, which does not seem highly feasible for a single fellow in two years"

Caveat and pitfalls: make sure you have a «plan B»

"If the first experiment fails (i.e., the hypothesis was wrong and you disprove it), they have nothing to do"

How to highlight your strengths

Online form	Suggestion
«Personal Statement»	Describe your motivation and interest in **cancer research** → Mention here **submitted papers** (you cannot add these papers in your publication record!)
«Education and training» and «Research and professional experience»	List your experiences in different labs, in Italy and abroad, when applicable
«Participation of the applicant to scientific conferences»	Insert your active contribution (poster or oral presentations) to international conferences
«Additional courses of the applicant»	Describe attendance to theoretical and/or practical courses (scientific training and/or transferable skills training)
«Awards of the applicant»	Report awards that you have been honored with (e.g., «Best poster»)
«Patents»	List patents granted in the last 10 years

How to highlight
the training potential of your fellowship

| Online form	Suggestion
«Letter of acceptance by the Hosting Institution»	It should be **tailored specifically to YOU**, so it should include: ■ the specific mentoring and training you will receive (e.g., frequency of one-on-one meetings with your supervisor, frequency of data presentations at lab meetings or to collaborators, etc.) ■ opportunities to gain additional skills, not just technical expertise (e.g., communication skills, grantsmanship, knowledge of ethical issues, intellectual property rights) ■ opportunities to participate to seminars and international meetings
«Personal Statement»	Describe how you expect the fellowship to impact on your career ➔ if you recognize a major **weakness** in your CV, explain how you plan strengthen your resume during the fellowship appointment
«Experience of the head of the hosting lab as a research supervisor »	It should indicate the number of researchers trained by your supervisor and if some of them have become successful independent scientists

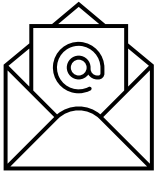# Don't let your application look like this …
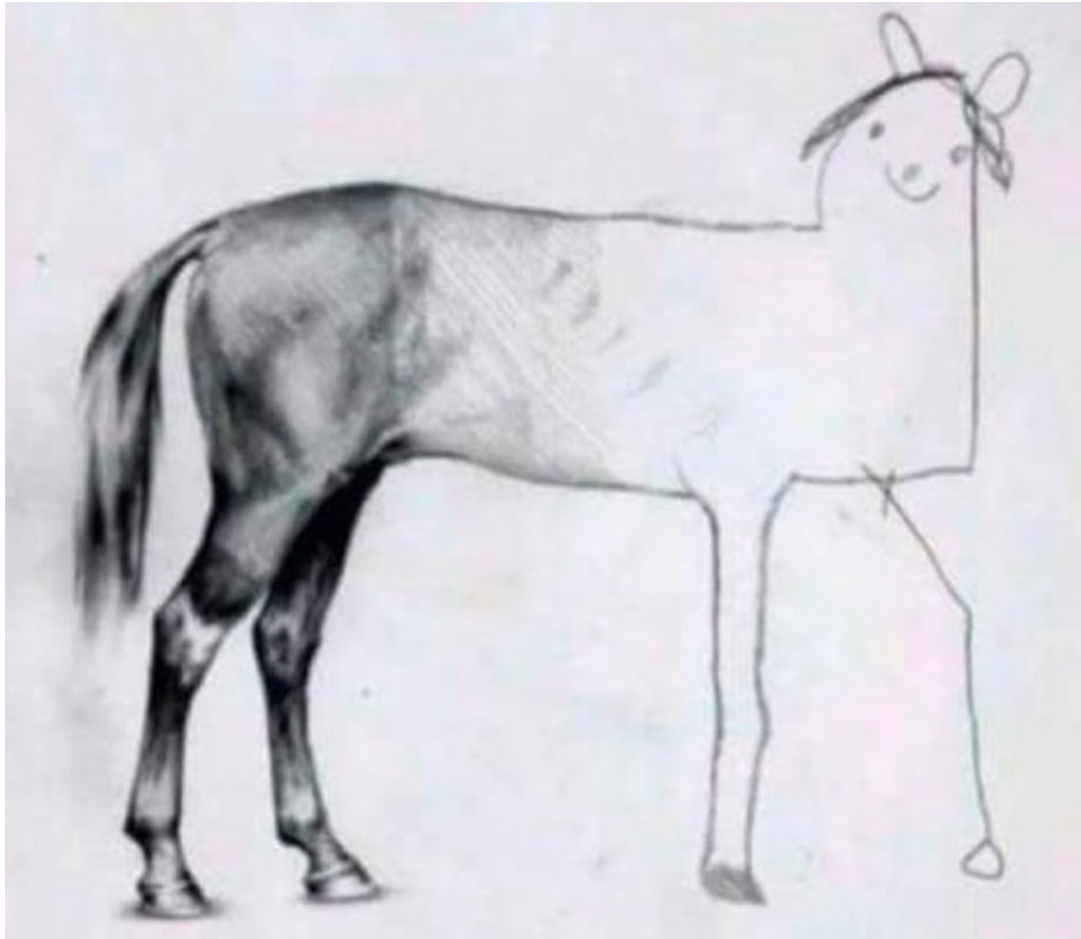
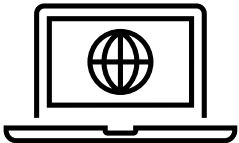Reviewers evaluate information present in different parts of the application.

⬇

Use the
same degree of care
in preparing all sections of the application!

Contact us

fellowships.applicationsupport@airc.it

AIRC Calls for proposals and supporting documents can be found at:
https://www.direzionescientifica.airc.it/funding-for-research/fellowship/