

NCRI and Macmillan Cancer Support Sandpit Guidelines

What is a sandpit?

A sandpit is an intensive and interactive residential workshop over several days, aimed at developing innovative and multidisciplinary research ideas. It brings together participants from a mix of backgrounds, experience and expertise to address a particular research challenge.

During a sandpit, participants are asked to form project teams in order to facilitate networking and collaborative multidisciplinary working. This is the key benefit of the sandpit process, bringing together people who would not normally interact so they can share ideas, be inspired and seek solutions together. This collaborative thinking process fosters creativity and the crystallisation of innovative research proposals over days instead of months or years.

A sandpit is led by a Director and Mentors – the sandpit panel – who help facilitate the discussions. The panel encourages and supports participants to develop, refine and present their research ideas.

On the final day, project teams present their final ideas. The panel will judge the ideas and award seed funding to the best research proposals.

Making your research matter to people living with and beyond cancer

There are an estimated 3 million people living with and beyond cancer in the UK in 2020.¹ This number has been steadily increasing by around 3% a year and is predicted to reach over 5 million by 2040.

Thanks to advances in diagnosis and treatment, more patients are surviving their cancer diagnoses for longer. However, this also means more and more people each year living with the consequences of cancer and its treatment – short- and long-term side effects, late effects, psychological impact, financial impact, chronic pain, debilitating fatigue and more.

There is an urgent need for more research and a better evidence base to address the unmet needs of this growing population, and to better support our health and social care systems to cope with the increasing demand for help.

In 2018 the NCRI launched the [top UK Living With and Beyond Cancer \(LWBC\) research priorities](#). They were established through a Priority Setting Partnership with the [James Lind Alliance](#). Over a two-year period 3,500 patients, carers and clinicians participated to help identify the LWBC research questions that matter most to the people affected. These are the questions for researchers and funders to focus on.

Macmillan Cancer Support and the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) are committed to addressing the LWBC research priorities identified by patients, carers and health and social care professionals.

¹ <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/evidence/using-cancer-data/calculating-cancer-prevalence.html#355989>

Sandpit research challenge – Cancer-related fatigue

The NCRI and Macmillan sandpit is dedicated to discovering novel and innovative research ideas that seek to understand/address:

- **What causes fatigue in people living with and beyond cancer?**
and
- **What are the best ways to manage cancer-related fatigue?**

This sandpit is about trying a different approach to addressing LWBC research priority number 4:

*‘What causes **fatigue** in people living with and beyond cancer and what are the best ways to manage it?’*

Fatigue is one of the most common cancer symptoms, one that severely affects a patient’s quality of life, as well as of those close to them. Yet despite so many cancer patients suffering fatigue, its cause remains poorly understood, and evidence for effective interventions is lacking.

“Fatigue, following cancer treatment, is very debilitating and can have an impact on people’s lives for a very long time after their treatment ends. What is research doing to combat this to enable people to return to ‘normal’ as swiftly as possible?” Healthcare professional respondent, LWBC PSP survey

“What can I do about my utter exhaustion, this really affects my life.” Patient respondent, LWBC PSP survey

“He suffers severe fatigue some days and can hardly function how can this be helped.” Relative/Carer respondent, LWBC PSP survey

“Current understanding of the aetiology of cancer-related fatigue is poor. It is likely that it is a result of a complex interaction of multiple factors related to both the disease process itself and side effects of treatment, but it is also likely to be influenced by a range of other factors such as medications, nutrition, sleep disturbance, pain, anxiety, and depression” (Purcell et al 2009)²

“In order to develop interventions to alleviate CRF, the mechanistic pathways must be characterized. Translational investigations offer the opportunity to gain new insights into the etiology of CRF. Although the current evidence is limited in proving causality of any biomarker to influence CRF development, there are promising interventional targets that insist some consideration.” (Saligan et al 2015)³

To help tackle the two fatigue themes of understanding cause and best management, we are keen to gather up to 40 participants from a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds, spanning the research pathway from basic through translational to applied health research. If you are keen to put your expertise and experience towards transforming this research field, we invite you to apply.

² Purell, Amanda, et al. “Cancer-Related Fatigue: A Review and a Conceptual Framework to Guide Therapists’ Understanding.” *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, vol. 72, no. 2, Feb. 2009, pp. 79–86, doi:10.1177/030802260907200205.

³ Saligan, Leorey N et al. “The biology of cancer-related fatigue: a review of the literature.” *Supportive care in cancer : official journal of the Multinational Association of Supportive Care in Cancer* vol. 23,8 (2015): 2461-78. doi:10.1007/s00520-015-2763-0



During the sandpit you are free to focus on either research question, or even both if you wish. The sandpit is a collegiate and free-thinking environment, and there is no restriction on how many project teams you can join.

The sandpit collaborative thinking process is an intensive one, but there will be opportunities built into the timetable for you to relax, reflect and, most importantly, to get to know your new colleagues. As well as facilitating innovative research ideas on fatigue, this event is also a rare opportunity for people from opposite ends of the fatigue research pathway to come together, gain better understanding of each other's work, and build a UK fatigue research support network.

The sandpit will be led by a panel of two Co-Directors and three Mentors:

- Co-Director: Professor Trudie Chalder, Professor of Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapy, King's College London
- Co-Director: Dr Gillian Prue, Senior Lecturer in Chronic Illness, Queens University Belfast
- Mentor: Dr Ollie Minton, Macmillan Palliative Medicine Consultant, Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust
- Mentor: Mr Jim Elliott, Consumer, NCRI Consumer Forum
- Mentor: Dr Ian Lewis, Head of Strategy and Initiatives, NCRI

The Directors and Mentors will take part in the sandpit but are not eligible for the awards. However they are not excluded as co-applicants in any potential/future grant applications arising from the sandpit. Participants will be expected to engage constructively with each other, the sandpit facilitators and the sandpit Directors and Mentors.

The stages of the sandpit process break down roughly into:

- Defining the scope of the challenge
- Sharing understandings of the challenge and expertise brought to the sandpit by participants
- Evolving common languages and terminologies among people from a range of backgrounds and disciplines
- Breaking down preconceptions of researchers and stakeholders
- Break-out sessions focussed on challenges and creative thinking techniques
- Producing outputs in the form of study proposals
- Funding decision on proposals at the sandpit

During the sandpit a number of speakers will provide different perspectives to challenge and give participants impetus to develop new questions or novel ideas for studies.

Proposals

The two best research proposals will be awarded £5k each. This seed-funding is intended for the successful project team to use towards developing their research proposal into a full grant application. This can be a grant application for a pilot and feasibility study, or, if the project team is confident enough, a programme grant application. The project team will have 6 weeks to develop a full proposal after which the NCRI will support them in submitting it to an appropriate funder from the NCRI partnership (eg NIHR, MRC). Further guidance on this post-award process will be provided at the workshop.

The selection process

Applications received by the deadline will be reviewed to ensure a mix of disciplines, skills and experience. Selection criteria will include:



- Potential to work in a trans-disciplinary environment
- Potential to develop innovative and adventurous approaches to research
- Ability to work collaboratively with others
- Relevant research experience and expertise where applicable
- Ability to communicate and engage with non-academic stakeholders

Ensure that you demonstrate on your application how you meet these criteria.

Who can apply

We're looking for creative, open-minded applicants from a broad variety of relevant backgrounds and disciplines, that include:

- Researchers at all levels, across disciplines and across the research pathway from basic to applied health research
- Healthcare professionals with an interest in fatigue
- Specialists in other long-term conditions interested in collaborating with cancer researchers on cross-conditional research into fatigue
- Consumers (patient and carer representatives) involved or looking to become involved in developing fatigue research

Applications are welcome from academic, industry and community sectors.

If you have the skills, knowledge and ideas, and are motivated to apply them to our research challenge, we encourage you to apply.

We regret that applicants based outside the UK are not eligible to apply.

How to apply

1. Download the application form.
2. Read the Sandpit Guidelines.
3. Submit your completed form, your up-to-date CV*, and a statement of support** from your organisation (if applicable) to lwbc@ncri.org.uk.

*For patient/carers, please provide a brief summary of your research involvement instead of a CV.

**Before applying you must ensure that you have the approval of your organisation. Your organisation must be willing and able to support any collaborative research project you are involved in as a result of the sandpit.

We will review your application and successful applicants will be notified mid- to late-May. We regret that we will be unable to provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

Participants **must be available to attend for the full three days of the event**. By submitting your application you confirm that you are able to attend for the full duration of the event. If you are a clinician applying, please ensure ahead of time that you are free to attend these dates should your application be successful.

Participants should arrive at the hotel on Monday evening, ready to commence early Tuesday morning. The sandpit will finish on Thursday afternoon approximately 5pm.



Your cost for attending the event will be met by the organisers. You will be able to reclaim standard class travel expense, and the organisers will provide three nights' accommodation (Monday to Wednesday) with full board (breakfast, lunch, dinner, and morning and afternoon refreshments).

Timetable

- **3 May 2020** – Deadline for applications to sandpit
- **18–25 May 2020** – Successful applications notified
- **Evening of 15 June 2020** – Participants to arrive at hotel
- **16–18 June 2020** – Sandpit workshop

Contact

For further information please contact lwbc@ncri.org.uk.

About the organisers

Macmillan Cancer Support

We put the current and future needs of people living with cancer at the centre of our research, to ensure we understand the numbers, needs and experiences of people living with cancer. We directly provide, work in partnership with or influence others to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can.

Our partnership with the NCRI supports this and enables us to work together with the other cancer research bodies in the UK to achieve this mission. We're here to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can, providing physical, financial and emotional support. So whatever cancer throws your way, we're right there with you.

Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales (261017), Scotland (SC039907) and the Isle of Man (604). Also operating in Northern Ireland.

www.macmillan.org.uk

National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI)

The NCRI is a UK-wide partnership between research funders working together to maximise the value and benefits of cancer research for the benefit of patients and the public. A key strength of the NCRI is our broad membership with representation across both charity and government funders as well as across all four nations in the United Kingdom.

We are working together to improve health and quality of life, by accelerating progress in cancer related research through collaboration.

NCRI is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (registration number: 1160609).

www.ncri.org.uk