Oxford-Brain@McGill-ZNZ Partnership in the Neurosciences

Policy, Organisation and Guidelines

General principles:

The XXI Century has already witnessed impressive advances in the brain sciences made possible by new research initiatives based on national partnerships and international collaborations. McGill, Oxford and the University of Zurich/ETH are universities of high international standing, and as such, their faculties can make important contributions to joint projects with other elite universities.

On June 25, 2013, Brain@McGill, the Neuroscience Center Zurich (ZNZ) and Oxford University formally launched a tripartite partnership in the neurosciences that culminates a series of successful joint projects carried out since 2009 between laboratories in all 3 venues.

Under the agreement, researchers are expected to leverage the seed funding obtained from the partnership to apply for external research grants. This outcome remains the key objective of this collaborative program and is evaluated as such at the reporting stage.

Student mobility and training are also an integral part of this joint program. By providing a framework to promote and sustain ambitious research projects in emerging fields of neuroscience, the agreement facilitates exciting new international synergies and exchanges, exposing researchers to different scientific cultures. Such partnerships also help to move research forward at a faster pace and maximize research opportunities and support.

Call for joint project proposals

Joint applications may originate from any two or all three of the partner institutions.

Projects may encompass any area relevant to the nervous system and its disorders. Preference is given to those pursuing new, innovative, or high-risk collaborative projects.

Where appropriate, applicants should consider the potential translational outputs of their project e.g. novel targets, *in vitro/in vivo* models, diagnostics, biomarkers and the development of novel therapies/interventions. In such cases, the potential application to the understanding and/or treatment of neurologic and mental health disorders in humans should be clearly outlined in the application.

Research projects should be new initiatives and funding will not be provided to extend existing awards/fellowships. Proposals should show scientific excellence with a clear evidence of added value and synergy between the groups of the partner institutions.

Applications may be made in two categories, 'joint workshops' and 'pilot projects'

Joint Workshops:
To discuss areas of potential collaboration, where Oxford, McGill and ZNZ research teams present their own data and showcase their own research capabilities. The maximum amount that can be requested for a workshop is C$10,000 or the equivalent in £GB/SFr.

Pilot projects:
Pilot projects can explore the feasibility of a new approach or research path and may have duration of up to one year. These may take the form of a staff, graduate or postgraduate student exchange. However, undergraduate student exchanges will not be supported. The objective of a pilot project would be to generate preliminary data that will be used to support external research grant applications which should be submitted within six to twelve months of the completion of the award. The maximum amount that can be requested for a pilot project is generally C$32,000 (C$30,000 in the case of an Oxford - ZNZ project) or the equivalent in £GB/SFr. The budget will usually be split evenly between partners covering the activities of their own participating groups.

High risk approaches will be considered. In these cases risk will be evaluated against the potential to deliver ground breaking results.

Under exceptional circumstances, larger awards may be made designed to support research projects of up to two years. These may include salary, consumables, travel (between partner institutions) and data preservation/dissemination costs. Research projects would be expected to either: establish multi-disciplinary collaborative partnerships, support technology transfer between partner institutions or boost capability in an area by creating critical mass or exploiting synergies (e.g. develop consortia). It is not expected that these awards would support student stipends. Funding decisions will be made on the basis of scientific excellence. Only early and mid career independent research scientists will be considered for the larger awards. Depending on the financial circumstances of the partnership in any given year financial support of up to C$100,000 per project may be made available. The budget would usually be split evenly between partners covering the activities of their own participating groups.

Timelines

There will be two calls for proposals annually.

Call 1

Announcement: 2nd June 2014
Application Deadline: 15th July 2014
Decision Expected by: 31st August 2014
Earliest start date: 15th September 2014

Call 2

Announcement: 1st December 2014
Application Deadline: 15th January 2015
Decision Expected by: 28th February 2015
Earliest start date: 15th March 2015

Relative Distribution of Awards

The distribution of awards will be decided on the basis of the scientific merit of the applications and the strategic objectives of the partnership as agreed at that time. The distribution of awards between each partner will be subject to the availability of sufficient funds available at the partner institutions.

Funds for successful applications will be allocated by the partner institutions involved in each award. The basis for the allocation of funding between institutions will be agreed by the steering committee.

Application Procedure

Application forms for Pilot Projects and Larger Research Projects are provided in appendix 1. Applications should include a completed application form, CVs of each investigator and budget breakdown. The budget breakdown should include a proposed breakdown of costs between the partner institutions, and should include all matching contributions to the project (personnel, equipment, consumables, etc).

The current exchange rate, at the time of application, will be used for all cost calculations.

Assessment Procedure

Each partner institution will establish a committee of approximately 3-5 senior researchers to evaluate proposals. Each proposal will be evaluated by the committees of the institutions involved in the proposed project. Partner institutions that are not involved in the proposal will not ordinarily be involved in the review process at this stage. Proposals will be evaluated on the basis of the assessment criteria provided in appendix 2. Applicants may not take part in the review of their own proposals.

The results of each institution's evaluation will be provided to the steering committee members representing the partnership at that institution, who may choose to seek further scientific expert advice if it is deemed necessary. It may be possible to ask applicants to resubmit, taking into account the reviewer's comments.

Funding decisions will be made by the steering committee. These may take into account the longer term strategic objectives of the partnership as agreed at that time; or any other factors deemed appropriate. The panel's decision will be final and there will be no appeal procedure.

Review committee comments will not be made available to applicants, unless they are invited to revise and resubmit their proposal. However, the committee may wish to provide feedback if it is deemed this will assist the development of early career researchers.

Reporting:

At project end, pilot projects and workshops should provide a brief (normally 1 page max) report detailing achievements. This should highlight key results, potential impacts of

continued research in the area, student mobility, abstracts, talks at scientific meetings, funding applications, publications in preparation and any media highlights.

Larger research projects should submit an annual report (1 page max) detailing achievements, progress towards project goals, budget status and highlighting any challenges/bottlenecks and actions being taken to overcome these. At the project end, a final report should be submitted (4 pages max). This should highlight key results, potential impacts of continued research in the area, student mobility, abstracts, talks at scientific meetings, funding applications, media highlights and publications submitted or in preparation.

Any publications generated as a result of either award type must acknowledge the partnership specifically referring to support from 'The Oxford McGill ZNZ Partnership in the Neurosciences'. Investigators should update the partnership coordinators on the progress of publications arising from these awards.

Should a project cease for any reason, including project end, unspent funds will be returned to the partnership.

Appendix 1 Application forms

Oxford McGill ZNZ Partnership in the Neurosciences Application for Workshop/Pilot Project Funding

Title of the proposal	

Oxford Applicant Details

	Name, Position, Department	E-mail and phone number
Principal Investigator		
Co-PI (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		

McGill Applicant Details

	Name, Position, Department	E-mail and phone number
Principal Investigator		
Co-PI (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		

ZNZ Applicant Details

	Name, Position, Department	E-mail and phone number
Principal Investigator		
Co-PI (if applicable)		

Co-applicant (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		

Funding Requested

Cost to each Institution	£	C$	SFr
Oxford			
McGill			
ZNZ			
Total cost of the activity			
Other financial contribution to the activity			
Amount requested in this application			

Please append the following information to this application form

1. A two-page description of the proposed activity and anticipated outcomes, including how it may lead to joint applications to external research funding organizations in future. **The added value of the joint effort must be demonstrated clearly.**
2. CVs: For Principal Investigators, full CVs including a list of publications in the last five years. For listed co-applicants, a shorter CV (a publication list is not required). No CVs are required for those listed as beneficiaries of the proposed activity.
3. A budget including a detailed justification of all costs requested. Please indicate which costs will be incurred by the each institution. Please calculate costs using the current exchange rate. The maximum amount that can be requested for a workshop is C$10,000 and for a pilot project C$32,000 (C$30,000 in the case of an Oxford - ZNZ project) or the equivalent in £GB/SFr.

Please email completed application form along with the attachments to nicholas.irving@ndcn.ox.ac.uk anne.mckinney@mcgill.ca and wknecht@neuroscience.uzh.ch by the deadline

Oxford McGill ZNZ Partnership in the Neurosciences Application for Larger Research Projects

Title of the proposal	

Oxford Applicant Details

	Name, Position, Department	E-mail and phone number
Principal Investigator		
Co-PI (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		

McGill Applicant Details

	Name, Position, Department	E-mail and phone number
Principal Investigator		
Co-PI (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		

ZNZ Applicant Details

	Name, Position, Department	E-mail and phone number
Principal Investigator		
Co-PI (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		

Co-applicant (if applicable)		
Co-applicant (if applicable)		

Project Summary

Scientific Rationale

Scientific Hypothesis Methods and Research Plan Milestones Expected Outcomes

Relevance to the Nervous System and its Disorders

Scientific Strengths of the Partner Groups

Added Value/Synergy Of The Partnership

Potential Beneficiaries and Impacts

Potential Translational Deliverables – If Appropriate

Opportunities for Training

Funding Requested

Cost to each Institution	£	C$	SFr
Oxford			
McGill			
ZNZ			
Total cost of the activity			
Other financial contribution to the activity			
Amount requested in this application			

Please append the following information to this application form

1. CVs: For Principal Investigators, full CVs including a list of publications in the last five years. For listed co-applicants, a shorter CV (a publication list is not required). No CVs are required for those listed as beneficiaries of the proposed activity.
2. A budget including a detailed justification of all costs requested. Please indicate which costs will be incurred by the each institution. Please calculate costs using the current exchange rate. The maximum amount that can be requested is C$100,000

Please email completed application form along with the attachments to nicholas.irving@ndcn.ox.ac.uk anne.mckinney@mcgill.ca and wknecht@neuroscience.uzh.ch by the deadline

Appendix 2 Assessment Criteria

Workshops/Pilot Projects

1. What is the standard and originality of the proposed activity, including the extent to which the proposed activity represents an additional gain on top of what could be achieved by each group on their own?
2. What is the track record of the applicants?
3. Priority will be given to researchers who have not previously received an award from the partnership.

Research Projects

1. Importance

- Is a joint approach appropriate?
- How original is the proposal? Has similar research already been conducted between the partners?
- Does the involvement of the partner institutions provide added value to the research?

2. Scientific Plans

- What is the specific scientific question to be addressed and why is it important?
- Are the approaches that are being proposed highly innovative? If so what is the potential level of risk.
- If successful, what is the potential of the research to offer game changing advances in the key areas, if applicable, of Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, sleep/chronobiology, Multiple Sclerosis, neuroplasticity and pain.
- What skills and expertise do the investigators have to deliver the proposed approaches?
- Are the aims and objectives realistic within the timeframe and with the resources proposed?
- What are the potential translational impacts from this research?

3. Environment and People

- Has the environment in which the joint research takes place been well described?
- Is the partnership between the applicants likely to benefit the research area?
- Will the researchers be able to provide appropriate supervision, mentoring and support for students and postdocs on the project?
- Does the project provide opportunities for the training and development of early career researchers, and in particular women?

4. Budget

- Are contributions available from other sources that will enhance the value for money of the proposal?
- Will the expected benefits justify the cost?

- In addition to funding applications that meet these criteria the Oxford McGill ZNZ Partnership in the Neurosciences will endeavour to promote collaborations with industry and philanthropy to further support research an application of new knowledge.