Connecting communities
VIVENSA ACADEMY

Ignition Fund

Guidelines for applicants

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If you require this document in any alternative accessible formats, please contact us at academy@vivensafoundation.org.uk. We will do our very best to assist you.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW

As outlined in our 2025-2030 strategic framework, we're committed to applying our resources to inspire and enable academic researchers (from across the disciplinary range), health and social care professionals and people working in organisations that support older people and healthy ageing to apply their knowledge and skills to:

- improve the quality of life, functional capacity and well-being for older people in the UK, or
- create the context for change in the future to prevent, delay or reduce future health and social care requirements in the UK.

Accordingly, we do **not** fund work that primarily benefits people outside the UK or organisations based outside the UK. In addition, we try to prioritise areas which are underfunded or are not associated with significant, dedicated national or international charities – so we do **not** accept applications with a specific focus on cancer.

The framework also recognised that funding alone was not sufficient. Specifically, it sought to explore and deliver ways of bringing the research and third sector and communities closer together to foster collaboration and create positive systemic change. One of the key initiatives to support this endeavour was the creation of the Vivensa Academy which aims to:

- Support and celebrate success, achievement and ambition through capacity development opportunities and funding.
- Create a supportive place to find new collaborators, mentors and advisors.
- Facilitate better understanding and foster relationships between academic and clinical researchers, health and social care professionals and community organisations working to help us all age well.
- Sustain existing and nascent networks for the longer term.

1.2 THE OPPORTUNITY

The available fund for financial year 2026/27 is £100k. UK members of the Vivensa Academy can apply for up to £5k for a clearly defined activity or series of activities which:

- are linked to the aims of the Vivensa Academy and/or one or more of our key priorities for research, as set out in our strategic framework;
- actively involve or are directly connected to other members of the Vivensa Academy. Applications involving Academy members are strongly encouraged and will be prioritised.

AND

- considers relevant aspects of our key principles which are:
    - involvement, engagement and creating real impact;

- capacity building and career/professional development;
- equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

The funds can be combined with other sources of funding and examples of ways in which the fund could be used can be found in Section 2.2.

If you are successful in receiving an Ignition Fund award, then we will ask that you contribute to the development of the Vivensa Academy by providing a short article or other resource which will be helpful to other Academy members. NB Awards must commence within one year of the grant offer date.

2. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

2.1 WHO CAN APPLY?

To be eligible to apply, you must meet the following criteria:

- You must be a member of the Vivensa Academy.

AND

- You must be based at a UK university or other eligible research organisation. The Foundation has no specific geographical link and will consider applications from anywhere within the UK.

OR

- Represent a UK based Community Organisation which focusses on healthy ageing.

Only one application for an Ignition Fund award can be made per financial year[1], regardless of the outcome of that application.

If you are an existing or recent award holder, please speak to your grants officer prior to starting an application.

Our Funding FAQs and Eligibility Q&A offer broad guidance on who may apply. However, please refer to these scheme guidelines for detailed information about eligibility criteria specific to this award.

[1] April to March each year

2.2 WHAT THE IGNITION FUND CAN BE USED FOR

If you are an existing or recent award holder, please speak to your grants officer prior to starting an application.

Applicants are asked to define the proposed activity / activities and briefly outline the costs with appropriate justification.

Please be aware that the panel will base their assessment solely on the information you provide within your application. They will not seek further details or refer to any prior knowledge of your work or activities that were not included in your application. It is essential that your application is self-contained: clearly highlight your key messages, explain the proposed activity, its significance and your intended outcomes. Avoid jargon and unexplained acronyms so your application is accessible to all.

Activities that actively involve or are connected with other members of the Vivensa Academy are strongly encouraged and will be prioritised.

The award is intended to be flexible, and some examples of how the funds could be used include, but are not limited to, the following:

Clinical and Academic Researchers:

- Developing initiatives that connect researchers and community organisations, such as pre-funding relationship development.
- Carrying out patient, care partner and/or public involvement and engagement (PPIE)-related activities in advance of developing a research funding application (i.e. to test a research question has validity in the community, gain feedback from relevant partners etc.).
- Funds to foster industry collaborations, such as meetings or short-term placements.
- Bringing a range of partners together through initiatives such as the development of communities of practice or place-based hubs to drive evidence-based good practice and/or policy change.
- Establishing local networks to develop leaders in ageing research through capacity building.
- A short secondment of a researcher to a community organisation or company to work on a question with them/learn more about the sector/share skills and knowledge etc.
- Developing hubs to promote community cohesiveness to tackle an issue such as health inequalities in coastal, rural or other under-served communities.
- Facilitating visits to other laboratories or institutions to learn new techniques or to host visiting researchers from other institutions.
- Developing new skills and knowledge to support career advancement through courses, workshops and conferences.
- Developing transferable skills such as writing, presentations, social media, leadership or management skills.

If you are applying for funds for a secondment or similar activity that requires accommodation costs, please consult your host institution travel policy prior to applying.

Community Organisations:

- Developing initiatives that connect community organisations and researchers.
- Meeting with your local authority, the public sector or researchers to explain more about the work of your organisation;
- Partner engagement to demonstrate your impact or share best practice;
- Focus groups with your beneficiaries to co-produce the services you offer;
- Meetings to bring together other local organisations to collectively address a problem affecting healthy ageing.
- Developing new skills and knowledge to support career advancement through courses, workshops and conferences.
- Developing transferable skills such as writing, presentations, social media, leadership or management skills.

Once awarded, the grant will be paid to:

- Researchers - retrospectively upon receipt of an invoice and accompanying financial statement detailing how the funds were spent;
- Community organisations - in full in advance at the start of the award.

If your activity includes you working with other individuals or organisations please obtain support letters at the time of application.

2.3 WHAT THE IGNITION FUND CANNOT BE USED FOR

The Ignition Fund cannot be used for the following activities:

- Research costs – This fund cannot be used to request costs or seed funding for research projects.
- Open Access Fees - This fund will not cover the cost of Open Access fees. If you are a current or previous grant holder and need help with Open Access fees for publications directly related to your award, please contact grants@vivensafoundation.org.uk as we have an alternative arrangement for meeting this expenditure.
- Masters or PhD studies - The fund cannot be used to fund or subsidise the costs of Masters or PhD degrees/projects/studentships.
- Conference costs - Requests for conference costs will only be considered where you are Chairing or Co-Chairing part of the conference or are wishing to organise a conference. If you are a current or previous grant holder and need help with presenting work directly related to your award, please contact grants@vivensafoundation.org.uk as we have an alternative arrangement for meeting this expenditure.

3. APPLICATION PROCESS AND TIMELINE

The application process will consist of the submission of an application form and review by the Foundation's Staff Team.

Applications are open year-round and can be submitted at any time; however, completed and submitted applications will be considered by the assessment panel on the following dates:

Deadline	**Panel assessment**
5pm 12 June 2026	Week commencing 29 June 2026
5pm 18 September 2026	Week commencing 5 October 2026
5pm 27 November 2026	Week commencing 14 December 2026
5pm 19 March 2027	Week commencing 12 April 2027

We aim to advise you of the outcome within three weeks of the assessment panel meeting.

4. ONLINE APPLICATION AND ASSESSMENT

4.1 OVERVIEW

Applications are open year-round and can be submitted at any time; however, do note the deadline dates listed above for when applications are downloaded for assessment.

BEFORE STARTING AN APPLICATION FORM

Please ensure that you have read these guidelines in full, have checked the eligibility criteria for the award, read our general eligibility Q&A and our Funding FAQs on our website.

If you are not currently a member of the Vivensa Academy, you can apply to join on our website.

If you are an existing or recent award holder, please speak to your grants officer prior to starting an application.

THE APPLICATION FORM

The application form needs to be submitted via our online Grants Management Portal. You can download a PDF template of the application form from our website. Please note, however, that this PDF version is only provided for planning purposes.

Detailed information on navigating and using the Grants Management Portal is provided in our "how to" guide.

4.2 ASSESSMENT PROCESS AND CRITERIA

Once submitted, the Foundation will review the application to confirm that it meets the following criteria:

- Eligibility for the award.
- Satisfactory completion of the application form, including any required uploaded documents.
- That the work proposed is not duplicative when checked against other awards previously / currently funded.

Please be aware that the panel will base their assessment solely on the information you provide within your application. They will not seek further details or refer to any prior knowledge of your work or activities that were not included in your application. It is essential that your application is self-contained: clearly highlight your key messages, explain the proposed activity, its significance and your intended outcomes. Avoid jargon and unexplained acronyms so your application is accessible to all.

Applications will then be further reviewed by an assessment panel according to the following criteria:

- The description of the proposed activity – the application provides enough detail describing the activity and who will be involved/impacted (e.g. which groups/organisations are involved? Where will the activity take place? Why is this activity important right now? etc.).
- The credibility of the plan to assess the outcome of the proposed activity – has enough detail been provided including supporting documents? (e.g. what data will be collected/analysed/shared? According to what timeline? etc.).
- How the proposed activity will support the aims of the Academy.
- Where relevant, there is a clear and compelling consideration of:
  - Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI)
  - Patient, carer and/or public involvement and engagement (PPIE)
  - Capacity building – how will the activity help your career development plans or those of others?
- The details of the costs provided – the budget requested is necessary and sufficient for the activities proposed (e.g. have the requested costs been adequately justified? etc.).

PARTIAL RANDOMISATION APPROACH

Should the number of fundable applications exceed the funding available, then a partial randomisation (lottery) system will be implemented for all eligible applications.

This will be the first Vivensa Foundation funding call that will use this approach to decide awards. We have chosen to trial this method in an attempt to reduce bureaucracy: formal peer review or panel interviews are not appropriate for this type of award.

All eligible applications will be scored as per the above criteria. If the sum of the fundable applications is within the overall budget they will all be funded. If the number of fundable applications exceeds the budget then they will be entered into the lottery. Partial randomisation aims to remove bias and to reduce administrative burden in the selection process, while maintaining the core mechanism for the necessary quality control: panel review. We will be adopting Wellcome's randomisation (lottery) process which uses a Python script to decide which applications to fund. For transparency in this process, the code used for the randomisation has been shared by Wellcome here.

We recognise that this is a very different approach to awarding funding, and would welcome applicants' feedback to inform future assessment processes.

FEEDBACK ON APPLICATIONS

We will not be providing individual feedback, but will provide information on how the funds were distributed after each round.

We aim to inform applicants of the outcome within three weeks of the assessment panel meeting. However, please note this timeline may vary depending on the number of applications received and workload at the time of submission.

4.2 CHECKLIST

Make sure you have completed all the relevant tasks on this list before submitting your application:

- ☐ Have you read these guidelines fully and checked the eligibility criteria for the award?
- ☐ Are you a member of the Academy with a profile on the member directory?
- ☐ Have you provided detailed and relevant answers to all mandatory questions in the application form?
- ☐ Have you uploaded any supporting documents alongside the application form?

5. SUPPORT AND FURTHER INFORMATION

5.1 SUPPORT FROM THE FOUNDATION

- For guidance on navigating and using the Grants Management Portal, please see our "how to" guide.
- You can download the PDF template application form from our website if you wish to review it before making your application via the portal.
- Visit our website for information on how to join the Vivensa Academy.
- Read our
    - 2025-30 Strategic Framework, which highlights our funding principles and research priorities.
    - Policy on use of generative AI in the grant application process.
    - Funder Action Plan for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.
    - Report Part of the Glue – How research funders can support more equitable partnerships between community organisations and academic researchers.
    - Feedback post we publish a news post on our website after each funding round.

5.2 EXTERNAL GUIDANCE

- For information regarding patient, care partner and public involvement and engagement (PPIE) in research, please do visit the National Institute for Health and Care Research website for various PPIE resources. You may also wish to look at the UK Standards for Public Involvement, a framework for what good public involvement in research looks like. For guidance tailored specifically to lab-based research, please refer to this practical guide to PPIE in lab-based research.
- For more information on including underserved groups in research, you might be interested in a website hosted by the NIHR, which provides guidance for ensuring health research is inclusive. NHS England has also created a good practice guide for engaging with under-represented groups in health research.
- The Royal Society has a section of its website dedicated to research culture, which may be of interest.

5.3 CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any queries related to the Academy, please contact academy@vivensafoundation.org.uk.

For any queries regarding the application process and awards, including if you need any alternative accessible formats, please contact academy@vivensafoundation.org.uk. We will do our very best to assist you.