



Oncode Institute

*Outsmarting cancer
Impacting lives*

Oncode Pediatric

Synergy Projects

Call 2026

Call for proposals: Onco Pediatric Synergy Projects 2026

Background & aim

We are pleased to launch the **Pediatric Synergy Call**, an initiative by Onco Institute in partnership with KiKa. The aim of this call is to mobilize the Onco research community to prepare research proposals that address key challenges in the treatment and diagnosis of childhood cancer, as defined together with experts in the field of pediatric oncology.

Through this initiative, Onco Institute aims to:

1. **Fund and support innovative ideas** that address challenges faced in pediatric oncology clinical practice.
2. **Enable Onco Investigators to contribute their unique expertise**, whether in biology, technologies, or model systems, to advance pediatric cancer research.
3. **Facilitate new research initiatives**; collaborations between researchers primarily focused on non-pediatric oncology and those specializing in pediatric oncology (basic, translational or clinical).

This call for proposals is the first of its kind within Onco Institute. It invites applications from Onco Investigators, specifically those whose primary expertise is not in pediatric oncology, to apply their knowledge and innovative approaches in pediatric cancer research.

Scope

Onco is seeking innovative, curiosity-driven research proposals in pediatric oncology, including the development of novel concepts, technologies, models, tools, and approaches that can advance the field. Proposals must be anchored in a clearly defined challenge or unmet need arising from pediatric oncology clinical practice and must explicitly link this clinical challenge to one of the three research topics listed below. Projects must be based on collaboration between different groups, demonstrating genuine scientific synergy and should enable outcomes that would not be feasible for a single group alone. While projects may build on insights from broader oncology research, including adult oncology, they must clearly demonstrate how the innovation is expected to ultimately lead to meaningful impact for childhood cancer. Projects should focus on one of the following research topics:

Research topics:

- Difficult to target drivers: uncovering new strategies to functionally disrupt hard-to-target molecular targets and open therapeutic avenues for children.
- Epigenetic deregulation: understanding, and routes towards correcting, the mechanism of epigenetic deregulation to enable more precise and less toxic therapeutic interventions for young patients.
- Immunotherapy: children's immune landscape differs significantly from adults. Understanding these differences and translation of new insights to develop tailored immunotherapeutic approaches in the pediatric setting.

While three broad research themes have been defined for this call, applicants should note that these serve as a starting point for further refinement. For instance, during the dedicated workshop (22 June 2026, see our website), participants will collectively explore these themes to identify and prioritise the most pressing scientific questions and unmet needs. The goal is to arrive at a focused, well-justified research question that forms the basis of a collaborative proposal.

Oncode Institute and the Princess Máxima Center can support researchers outside the pediatric field by helping them identify and connect with relevant collaborators, when needed.

Call outline

Project requirements

Project proposals submitted in this call need to meet the following requirements:

- Projects must represent a new research initiative in pediatric cancer research.
- Proposals should be scientifically ambitious and innovative. High-risk, high-gain ideas that have the potential to open new research directions in the pediatric oncology setting are explicitly encouraged.
- The project must be based on genuine scientific synergy, combining complementary expertise from different research groups, focusing on pediatric research
- The proposed research must address a clinical challenge linked to one of the research topics described in the Scope; projects may take fundamental or technology-driven approaches.
- Clear description of the project goal(s), potential outcomes, and, if successful, how these outcomes could be translated into clinical impact.

Eligibility criteria

- Project applications are submitted by an Oncode Investigator. Co-applicants can be Oncode and non-Oncode independent group leaders.
- The main applicant is not a group leader at the Princess Máxima Center.
- At least one co-applicant is expected to be affiliated with the Princess Máxima Center and to contribute relevant pediatric expertise to the project. In case none of the applicants have a position in a pediatric institution, a letter of support explaining the connection between the project partners and the clinic needs to be provided by an external advisor or partner with recognized expertise in pediatric oncology.
- Proposals must be submitted by 2-4 independent PIs, representing at least 2 research institutes. Within this call we specifically aim for new collaborations or research initiatives. The contribution of each applicant needs to be clearly described in the proposal.
- Eligible costs include salary (all costs that are part of the employment contract and of the wage costs (such as social costs and pension costs) may be included in the basis) and research expenses and services. Indirect staff costs for project supervision is non-eligible.
- Application needs to be signed for approval by 1) the applicants; 2) the financial controllers of each associated department.
- Co-applicants may have a position at a research institute outside of the Netherlands
- The call is only open for academic parties

Funding and duration

- Maximum total budget: €1.000.000 (we aim to fund max two projects)
- Project duration: max 3-4 years

- Anticipated starting date is January 1st 2027.

Review Process

Process and evaluation criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Aim and ambition:
 - Is the proposed research based on a well-defined and coherent scientific rationale?
 - Does the project have an innovative approach and a clear study design?
- Scope & impact childhood cancer:
 - Does the proposal meet all the project requirements as listed in the section 'Scope'?
 - Is the research well-aligned with one of the specified research areas and aimed at addressing challenges in the treatment of childhood cancer?
 - If the project is successful, will it provide a realistic route to achieving health impact in the future?
- Feasibility
 - Are the proposed time and budget in line with the project described?
 - Is the feasibility clearly described?

Each proposal will be reviewed by at least three international external reviewers (science) and two reviewers for impact. Based on these review reports, a review committee composed of Onco Investigator (not applying, no COI), and two members of the Scientific Board from KiKa (not applying, no COI), will advise Onco Institute's management board (MB) on the ranking of the proposals. The MB will make the final decision on project selection and funding.

Application and deadline

Submission deadline: **24 September 2026, 14h**. We expect to be able to communicate the outcome of the call before 31 December 2026.

Template

Applicants must use the templates provided for the following parts of the application:

A: Description Project (Word template)

Part I:

This section outlines the rationale, hypothesis, and approach of the project. It also explains the specific clinical challenge in pediatric cancer, how it relates to the pre-defined research topics, feasibility and the role of the project participants.

Part II:

This section should describe the project's phasing and provide a justification of the proposed budget. A detailed budget must be submitted separately using the provided Excel template. In addition, the proposal needs to include a Gantt chart outlining the project timeline.

Part III:

Each applicant provides a narrative CV, and key output(s).

B: Budget Project (xls template)

C: Letter of support, if applicable

In case none of the applicants have a position in a pediatric clinical institution, a letter of support explaining the connection between the project partners and the clinic needs to be provided by an external advisor or partner with recognized expertise in pediatric oncology.

Submit your complete proposal via research@oncodeinstitute.nl **before 24 September 2026, 14h.**