Policy on environmental sustainability in research – frequently asked questions

Requirements for Cancer Research UK funding applicants

Which research fields/disciplines are covered by the policy?

LEAF, My Green Lab and approved institutional certifications are most applicable to biological, biomedical and chemical sciences, and research groups in these disciplines should comply with this policy.

Researchers solely performing research activities within any other discipline are not required to hold a laboratory sustainability certification, though we encourage them to work towards relevant certifications (such as Green DiSC[1]).

Examples of research disciplines that are exempt include but are not limited to: data/computational science, social sciences, epidemiology, policy research, physics, engineering, and mathematics.

Is clinical research included in the policy?

Applicants to our Clinical Research Funding Scheme will only need to hold laboratory certification if applying for the Experimental Medicine module. This module typically involves translational research that sustainability certifications are well-suited to.

Do I need certification if I'm not a Lead or Joint Lead Applicant?

Only Lead and Joint Lead Applicants need to hold the certification. Other members of the research team are excluded.

I'm based outside the UK - does this apply to me?

If you're applying as a Lead or Joint Lead Applicant from a non-UK based institution, you will still need to hold a laboratory sustainability certification (like LEAF or My

Green Lab) as these are held by labs internationally. They are also available for a reduced cost in low and middle-income countries.

If you're applying to a Cancer Grand Challenge, please get in touch with us at policies@cancer.org.uk.

I'm making an outline/preliminary submission – does this apply to me?

Only Lead and Joint Lead Applicants making a full/final submission will need to hold the certification.

Which roles/positions should hold the certification?

The policy requirement for funding applicants is principally expected to apply to group leaders or those managing facilities. There may be some exceptions to this, but the decision to work towards a sustainability certification lies mainly with those managing research groups.

Our policy requirement applies only for Lead or Joint Lead Applicants who have been in their role for more than 18 months at the closing of a funding call, to give sufficient time to acquire the certification.

My certification is held by my department (or similar) – what should I do?

Even if their department formally holds a sustainability certification, Lead and Joint Lead Applicants will still need to evidence that they or their group have contributed to departmental certifications when they apply for our response-mode funding. For example, LEAF offers the option of including the names of research groups involved in the work towards achieving a departmental certification. These groups could then be displayed on a publicly available webpage and linked to in the funding application.

What happens if I don't have the right certification when I apply?

Our grants management team will get in touch with you if you haven't yet provided evidence of holding the right certification. You'll be asked to provide an explanation for why you don't hold the certification in order to progress your application.

When was the policy shared with the research sector?

Following feedback on the expected time needed for a research group to acquire laboratory sustainability certification at the Silver level, Cancer Research UK published and communicated its policy in April 2024[2,3] to ensure a period of over 20 months before the requirements come into effect in 2026.

We simultaneously contacted grant holders and institutional grants offices to share the changes. We have since discussed the policy at different sector meetings, shared it via an open survey in late 2024 to early 2025, and also provided a further reminder in December 2024 to UK institutions.

Why do you require lab sustainability certifications?

These certifications can deliver the combined benefits of limiting the environmental impact of research whilst improving its efficiency and robustness, as well as leading to cost savings. These can collectively ensure the long-term sustainability of cancer research.

Requirements for Cancer Research UK-funded Host Institutions

Who do these requirements apply to?

Any organisation in the UK that currently hosts or wishes to host Cancer Research UK funded researchers will need to be a 'signatory' to the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of R&I Practice. This requirement is expected of higher education institutions such as universities and research institutes, but not of healthcare providers (such as NHS Trusts).

How can I confirm my organisation is a signatory to the Concordat?

A list of current signatories is available online[4] and updated regularly.

What should I do if my organisation is not listed as a signatory?

We recommend you speak with your institution's sustainability office (or research services if you do not have a sustainability office) to check on progress towards signing the Concordat.

Links

1   https://www.software.ac.uk/GreenDiSC
2   https://www.researchprofessional.com/0/rr/news/uk/charities-and-societies/2024/4/Health-research-funders-bring-in-new-sustainability-rules.html
3   https://news.cancerresearchuk.org/2024/04/25/more-environmentally-sustainable-cancer-research/
4   https://wellcome.org/who-we-are/positions-and-statements/environmental-sustainability-concordat