



BAILLET LATOUR BIOMEDICAL AWARD

Supporting Research Careers in Belgium

2022 Topic: "Infection and Immunity"

Guide for Applicants

April 2021

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1. Philosophy of the Baillet Latour Fund

Since its establishment over 40 years ago, the Fund has rewarded and supported biomedical research. To this end, it has incepted several prestigious Prizes, among which the International Health Prize or the Clinical Prize later replaced by the Grant for Medical Research.

In order to amplify its impact in the biomedical field and to meet the actual challenges in R&D, the Fund has decided to redirect its support towards the development in Belgium of an ecosystem of high-level researchers to help accelerating the development of innovative research projects.

With the Baillet Latour Biomedical Award, the Baillet Latour Fund wishes to offer major support to basic, clinical or translational biomedical research in Belgium.

The Fund also wishes to strengthen the status and visibility of promising young researchers in Belgium and to support their development towards eminent independent research leaders in their field.

It additionally seeks to facilitate their grant applications to Belgian and European funding sources for their innovative research and intends to contribute to retaining promising new talents and to attract foreign ones.

2. Purpose of the call

The Baillet Latour Biomedical Award will be awarded to independent investigators of any nationality in the early phase of their career to conduct basic, clinical, or translational biomedical research in Belgium and to consolidate their independent research team or program.

3. Description of the Award

➤ Funding:

The Award amounts to **1.000.000 € over 5 years to support a research project** in one of the five biomedical domains selected by the Baillet Latour Fund (see page 5). The topic of the 2022 Award is "Infection and Immunity".

➤ Support breakdown:

A first instalment of 400.000 € will be credited to the Host Institution at the start of the funding period. A second instalment of 200.000 € will be credited at the beginning of year 3. The third and fourth instalment of 200.000 € each, to be made available at the beginning of years 4 and 5, will be subject to the positive evaluation of a mid-term report and a site visit.

➤ Eligible expenses:

Eligible expenses encompass personnel costs (excluding the salary of the PI), running costs and equipment. No overheads are allowed.

4. Schedule of the call

- Opening of the call: April 19th, 2021
- **Deadline of the call: June 30th, 2021**
- First Jury meeting: January 2022 (to be confirmed)
- Second Jury meeting: February 2022 (to be confirmed)
- Award ceremony: April 2022
- Start of the Award: July 1st, 2022

5. Application process

Applications must be submitted electronically in English using the online application system available on www.blba.be no later than **June 30th, 2021** (this is a strict deadline).

A « save and continue » module allows the applicants to quit the system and to come back working on their application at a later stage. Once the applicants quit the system, an automatic e-mail is sent to their e-mail address with a link to return to their application form.

The submitted application file consists of:

- The administrative part
- The research proposal
- The supporting documentation (PhD certificate, Host Institution support letter, any documentation needed on eligibility or other issues)

All applications will be checked to ensure that all eligibility criteria are met before being processed to the evaluation stage.

6. Eligibility Criteria

- Principal Investigator

The **Principal Investigator (PI) may be of any nationality but must hold a PhD degree that has been awarded no more than 12 years prior to the deadline of the call** (i.e. June 30th, 2009).

This 12-year period can be extended by the duration of certain properly documented **career breaks that have occurred after the PhD has been awarded**. The following career breaks supported by official statements will be considered for the extension of the eligibility period:

- For maternity, the documented period of effective maternity leave (up to a maximum of 18 months) for each child born after the PhD award.
- For paternity, the documented period of paternity leave for each child born after the PhD award.
- For national service, the documented period of occupation after the PhD award.
- For long-term illness, the documented amount of leave actually taken by the Principal Investigator for each incident that occurred after the PhD award. Long-term illness is considered as a period of ≥ 90 days for the PI or a close family member (child, spouse, parent or sibling).

In case the PI has obtained several PhD degrees, the effective elapsed time to be taken into consideration for the eligibility period will be that of the first PhD.

The PI is also required to have a full-time position and a secured salary for at least five years beyond the beginning of the BLBA, this is at least until June 30th, 2027.

➤ Host Institution

The Research must be conducted in a public research Institution in Belgium, referred to as a Host Institution (HI). This can be the HI where the PI applicant already works, or another HI located in Belgium. **The recognized HIs are the universities, the university hospitals and the following research institutes:**

- Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp
- LABIRIS
- Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB)
- Flemish Institute for Technological research (VITO)
- de Duve Institute
- Bordet Institute
- GIGA Institute
- Sciensano
- Belgian Nuclear Research Center (SCK CEN)

➤ Biomedical research field

The research to be supported by the "Baillet Latour Biomedical Awards" (BLBA) must pertain to the topic of the year of the Award. The following five topics will rotate on an annual basis:

- **2022: Infection and Immunity**
- 2023: Neurosciences
- 2024: Cancer
- 2025: Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Systems
- 2026: Metabolism and Gastrointestinal System

The 2022 topic is "Infection and Immunity". However, applications pertaining to aspects of "Infection and Immunity" that may also fit within the topic of any of the four other calls have to be submitted during those calls. For example, research projects focusing on cancer immunotherapy, immunological aspects of multiple sclerosis or bronchial asthma, should be submitted when the topics are "Cancer", "Neurosciences", or "Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Systems", respectively.

7. Selection process

The selection process follows the highest international standards in terms of fairness, transparency, impartiality, consistency, and independence in order to identify the best research project irrespective of gender, age, beliefs, or nationality.

It is based on a two-step evaluation procedure performed by international experts.

Scientific excellence is the sole evaluation criteria.

➤ First stage

Each eligible application will be evaluated by several remote reviewers. These remote reviewers are non-Belgian high-level experts in the field of the call working outside Belgium.

Applicants have the opportunity to identify up to 3 experts worldwide they do not wish to see acting as evaluator of their application.

Each expert will sign a non-disclosure agreement and a non-conflict of interest form. Their evaluation will be anonymised.

The remote reviewers will evaluate the applications using the following evaluation criteria's breakdown:

- 40% Principal Investigator (CV and publications, leadership in the field, scientific achievements, and independence)
- 40% Research Project (clarity of the project, preliminary results, soundness of the hypothesis, appropriateness of the approach, methodology, feasibility, originality and focus of the project)
- 20% Impact of the research

The applications will be evaluated using the following scores scale ranging from 0 to 5:

- **0** = The proposal **fails to address the criterion**.
- **1** = **Poor**. The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
- **2** = **Fair**. The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
- **3** = **Good**. The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
- **4** = **Very Good**. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
- **5** = **Excellent**. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

➤ Second Stage

At this stage, the application files are composed of the submitted eligible application and their associated remote reviews.

Each application file will be evaluated by an independent Jury composed of 5 non-Belgian (1 Chair and 4 members) top experts in the field of the call working outside Belgium. The composition of the Jury will be disclosed at the announcement of the laureate.

Each jury member will sign a non-disclosure agreement and a non-conflict of interest form.

The Jury will work in two phases.

The first Jury meeting will be held online.

During that meeting, each application file will be introduced by a rapporteur and a co-rapporteur and will then be discussed by all members.

The Jury members will evaluate the applications using the same evaluation criteria breakdown and the scoring scale as the above-mentioned ones used by remote reviewers.

The objective of that meeting will be to identify a shortlist of candidates to be invited for an interview and a presentation of their research project in Brussels.

Applicants not reaching the interview stage will receive an evaluation summary report. No redress procedure is foreseen.

The second Jury meeting will be held in Brussels.

Applicants reaching the interview stage will be invited to the second Jury meeting that will be held in February 2022 (date tbc). The applicant will be invited to present the research project (a 30 min presentation followed by Q&A).

At the end of the presentations, the Jury members will make a final discussion round to identify a laureate.

All interviewed applicants will receive a consolidated evaluation summary report. No redress procedure is foreseen.

The President of the Scientific Committee of the Baillet Latour Fund will attend the Jury meetings as Observer. The role of the Observer is to ensure the respect of the procedure and the philosophy of the Award. He will not participate in the evaluation procedure and will have no vote in the decision made by the Jury.

➤ Final decision

The Award will be granted by the Board of Directors of the Baillet Latour Fund on basis of the recommendation of the Jury.

➤ Scientific Committee

The selection process is designed and monitored by the Scientific Committee of the Baillet Latour Fund composed of high-level researchers active in the Belgian universities and is implemented by the F.R.S.-FNRS acting in a capacity of neutral administrative operator.

Please note that contact with any of the Scientific Committee members with a view to influence directly or indirectly the evaluation process is strictly forbidden and may lead to the disqualification of the application.

8. Research integrity

Research integrity is considered of utmost importance. All experts involved in the evaluation process (remote referees, Jury members, mid-term evaluators) will be notified and asked to pay specific attention to scientific misconduct such as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or misrepresentation of data. The on-site visit

performed by the Scientific Committee representatives at the mid-term evaluation level will also be an opportunity to check on it.

Funded researchers are expected to strictly comply to all institutional rules and regulations that apply in terms of research integrity.

In case of integrity breach suspicion or allegation, the Scientific Committee will take the appropriate measures.

9. Open science

The scientific outputs stemming from research supported by the Baillet Latour Biomedical Award should be valorised in order to maximise societal benefits.

To this end the Baillet Latour Scientific Committee supports the publication in Open Access, with a preference for the deposit requirement of publications resulting from the funded project (Green Open access).

The facilitation of the free access to these research outputs not only aims at the benefit of the scientific community but is also meant to increase both national and international visibility of the researchers.

10. Ethics

Research projects may require prior consideration of ethical problems that might arise or that are inherent to the submitted research project. The possible ethical problems may relate to the use and storage of private data, the handling of substances that may cause environmental or biodiversity damage and the research on animals or human beings (non-exhaustive list).

Applicants to the Baillet Latour Biomedical Award who are concerned by ethical issues will be required to submit an ethical clearance provided by their local ethics committee. This process is aimed at ensuring that all the research and innovation activities under this Award comply with ethics principles and relevant national and international legislation.

11. Feedback to Applicants

Applicants will receive max. 5 feedbacks during the evaluation of their application:

- Acknowledgment of the submission of their application
- Information on the outcome of the administrative eligibility check
- Information on the outcome of step 1 of the evaluation (identification of the shortlisted candidates who will be invited to an interview)
- Information on the outcome of step 2 of the evaluation (identification of the laureate)
- Evaluation summary reports of their application

No redress procedure is foreseen.

12. Contact

For any information pertaining to the Call, please send a message to prix@frs-fnrs.be.