

BioNTech Australia mRNA Innovator Program

Guidelines

BioNTech Australia is inviting applications to the **2026 BioNTech mRNA Innovator Program**, a collaborative research program to support the Australian and New Zealand mRNA ecosystem. The application process will be organised by the **Australasian RNA Biology and Biotechnology (A-RNA) Association**.

One project will be selected per year.

Researchers working on the selected project will receive **AUD 50,000**, of which up to AUD 25,000 will be provided as a credit for research-grade mRNA produced at the BioNTech Australia R&D production facility, plus AUD 25,000 in cash being paid into a research account for lab experiments directly related to the same mRNA research project.

The selected project needs to be initiated within 12 months of the award by contacting BioNTech Australia to discuss the research-grade mRNA production needs. Total project duration can extend beyond the 12-month period. As specific outcome, collaborators will be expected to present their project results to BioNTech and may be invited to present at the next annual A-RNA conference (at the discretion of the A-RNA association).

Eligibility criteria:

- Researchers must be based in **Australia or New Zealand** (as defined by being employed at a minimum of 0.5 FTE by an Australian or New Zealand university, research institute or start-up company).
- All career stages are eligible. Early and mid-career researchers are particularly encouraged to apply.
- Projects must be **preclinical**. Clinical-stage research is not eligible.
- Research projects need to utilise, or plan to utilise within the next 12 months, **mRNA** for the development of a new mRNA-based vaccine or therapeutic. Oligonucleotide-based applications (such as ASOs, aptamers or siRNAs) are ineligible.
- While projects at all stages are invited to apply, preference will be given to projects with high translational potential (such as, viable commercialization pathway, unmet global health need, technology readiness, availability of translational models) and projects which are at a more advanced (TRL3+) stage.
- Projects seeking to develop vaccines against **COVID-19** or **influenza**, or to develop **personalised mRNA therapies for cancer are ineligible** for funding.

Application process:

A summary of no more than 1 page addressing following criteria:

- 1) Hypothesis / Project Aim
- 2) Background / Preliminary Data
- 3) Research Plan
- 4) Brief statement of Impact

Please submit a 1-page CV of the lead PI along with the application. An application template is provided.

Applications to be submitted to: cameron.bracken@unisa.edu.au (on behalf of the A-RNA executive)

Applications Due: **Friday, July 31st, 11.59 pm**. Announcement of Award anticipated no later than mid-October.

Selection process:

Project funding will be based upon scientific merit. A-RNA executive members will review all eligible applications using a pre-defined selection rubric (see Scoring below) and recommend a short-list to BioNTech. BioNTech will assess the short-listed applications for facility fit, alignment with the BioNTech IP and Strategy frameworks, and adherence to compliance and legal requirements.

Scoring:

Proposals will be scored according to the following criteria:

Scientific Merit – Strength of hypothesis, methodology and preliminary data

Feasibility - Practicality of executing the proposed research within award timeline and budget

Translational Potential – Likelihood of progression to a viable mRNA medicine