REQUEST FOR BRIDGE FUNDING
Schools of the Health Sciences
(Revised, October 2011)

In light of the reduced funding rates at the NIH, it can be anticipated that many of our highly successful faculty members will have temporary difficulty in renewing grants for ongoing, successful research projects. In order to mitigate the damage caused by the failure to obtain renewal funding at the first or second attempt, Dr. Arthur Levine, Senior Vice Chancellor for the Health Sciences and Dean, School of Medicine, intends to provide bridge funding to the extent possible. The requests for funding will likely exceed the funds available, and a committee has been established to review the requests and to make prioritized recommendations for funding to Dr. Levine. This process will be managed by the Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI) under the direction of Dr. Michelle Broido, Associate Vice Chancellor for Biomedical Research and Co-director of the CTSI. The criteria on which funding decisions will be made include likelihood that the research will garner external funding within one year (or one funding cycle, whichever is shorter), clear demonstration of need, investigator track record, scientific merit, and funds available.

For any given application to this program, if a decision is made to award bridge funding, that award will be co-funded, in equal part, by Dr. Levine and the department/institute/center that has primary fiscal responsibility for the applicant's faculty position. Further, the department/institute/center must guarantee that there are funds available to support the investigator at full-time effort for the period of time that would ensue if the application for external funds upon which the bridge funding request is based is awarded. Support at full-time effort is meant to include salary, fringe benefits, laboratory/research expenses, and overhead costs. For example, if a Bridge Funding award is made based on a meritorious review of an initial submission of a competitive continuation and the "-A1" submission is subsequently funded, if the "-A1" grant is for four years, the department/institute/center ("entity") must guarantee the investigator's full-time position for those four years. This guarantee should be based on the entity's budget during the current fiscal year and reasonable projections of the entity's budget in future fiscal years.

An applicant for Health Sciences Bridge Funding must have submitted a grant application for the proposed research to an external funding source. This grant application must be for a project of significant magnitude, not for a small pilot project. The annual direct costs requested in this grant application to an external funding source must be at least $100,000; thus, for example, an unfunded NIH R21 application could serve as the basis for a Bridge Funding request, but an NIH R03 application would not be eligible. SBIR and STTR applications are not eligible for Bridge Funding. The application must have been subject to peer review, and written evaluation must have been received by the principal investigator. ***Please note that in evaluating requests for Bridge Funding, the review committee will not recommend support for applications that do not have a high likelihood of being funded upon resubmission and with such funding accruing within no more than a one year period. In particular, it is very unusual for an application that was not scored by the external review committee to receive a fundable score at the***

next submission. A Bridge Funding request based on such an application must provide clear and convincing information as to why the revision of the application will likely be viewed very positively by the external reviewers.

The Bridge Funding Policy recognizes the new NIH policy that any given application may only be submitted twice (the original submission and one revised submission) in the following ways:

- In general, a request for bridge funding that is based on an original application that did well during the review process, that was not funded, and for which there are clear paths for revision that should meet reviewers' concerns will receive the most favorable consideration by the Bridge Funding Review Committee.
- If the request for bridge funding is based on an –A1 application that has undergone initial review and received a meritorious score, but it has not yet been reviewed by Council or if insufficient time has elapsed since Council review for funding decisions to be made, bridge funding may be requested to cover such time until an award can reasonably be expected to be made. In particular, if the applicant has had communication with the relevant NIH program officer and that officer has indicated that there is a high probability that the application will be funded, the applicant should communicate this in his or her bridge funding application, providing documentation of such discussions, if available.
- If the request for bridge funding is based on an – A1 application that did relatively well under peer review but that was not, or is unlikely to be, funded, a bridge funding request will be considered if the primary concerns in the summary statement of the –A1 application were on the significance of the problem being studied with only minor concerns about the approach AND if the applicant ***provides the bridge funding committee with a subsequently written new application or draft of a new application that benefits from the previous review but that contains fundamental changes in scope, direction, and content, as required by the NIH policy (Item 11, below)****.*

For applications submitted to agencies other than the NIH, it is incumbent on the applicant to discuss the resubmission policy of the agency to which it was submitted in the bridge funding application section 9, plans for resubmission.

The three scenarios under which a Health Sciences faculty member may request bridge funding are:

- ***Scenario One:*** A tenured or tenure track investigator was funded for a defined period of time, and towards the end of that period, he/she submitted a competitive renewal application to continue or extend the research performed under the previous award. The renewal application, while receiving highly favorable reviews, was not funded. [Note: If an investigator chooses not to submit a competitive renewal but, instead, chooses to submit a new application for research that is closely related to that conducted under prior funding and it is this "new" unfunded application that is the basis for the request for Bridge Funding under Scenario One, such an application may fit into this scenario. However, in the section of the Bridge Funding application in which the applicant must describe the need for funding and the consequences if Bridge Funding were not provided, ***the applicant must state explicitly that he/she will not be submitting a competitive renewal and must also state why he/she has instead chosen to submit a new application for the related project.*** Again, this new, related application must have received highly favorable reviews.] The eligibility of non-tenure track investigators will be determined on a case by case basis during the review of a Bridge Funding application. Factors contributing to this determination will be the track record of productivity (both funding and publications) of the applicant and the level of enthusiasm for the proposed research expressed by the applicant's department chair (or institute director).

- ***Scenario Two:*** During the period in which a tenure track junior investigator was supported by his/her start-up package, he/she was unsuccessful in obtaining external funding. However, during this period, a grant application was submitted for external, peer-reviewed support that did receive highly favorable reviews but was not funded. The investigator's start-up package is, or will soon be, exhausted, and the applicant has no other significant source of support. (To be explicit, the investigator must not have been awarded a nationally competitive research grant from an agency such as the NIH or the NSF or a significant award from a private foundation. Typically, an award that includes more than $35,000 for research supplies is considered "significant.") As noted in the Instructions, the need for Bridge Funding must be clearly demonstrated; in part, this can be accomplished by a letter from the department chair that states the level of start-up funding that remains available to the applicant. Only under extraordinary circumstance will a non-tenure track junior investigator be considered eligible for Bridge Funding. Such eligibility will require an explicit statement from his/her departmental chair (institute/center director) that garnering significant independent funding will likely lead to a transfer to the tenure track and that that there are funds available to support the investigator at full-time effort for the period of time that would ensue if the application for external funds upon which the Bridge Funding request is based is awarded.

- ***Scenario Three:*** An established tenured or tenure track investigator seeking to make a *significant* change in the direction of his/her research submitted a new application to support this new area, and the application, while receiving favorable reviews, was not funded. ***It will be incumbent upon the applicant to convince the review committee that this is, indeed, a new research direction, not simply a natural extension of ongoing activities, and that this new direction will represent a major focus in the laboratory***. It will also be incumbent upon the investigator to convince the review committee that there is demonstrable urgency in beginning this new project. The eligibility of non-tenure track investigators will be determined on a case by case basis during the review of a Bridge Funding application. Factors contributing to this determination will be the track record of productivity (both funding and publications) of the applicant and the level of enthusiasm for the proposed research expressed by the applicant's department chair (or institute director).

If you, as a faculty member and as a principal investigator, wish to request Bridge Funding, then it is imperative that you provide all of the information requested on the subsequent pages. The information requested is necessary to establish a compelling case for a favorable response to your request.

There are three annual receipt dates for requests for Bridge Funding:

- September 1
- January 5
- May 1

(If these dates fall on a weekend, the due date will move to the Monday immediately following that weekend.) The internal review committee will make its recommendations to Dr. Levine within one month of receipt of the applications.

For any given Bridge Funding receipt date, an investigator may submit only one request for Bridge Funding, and this request must be specific to a single project. An investigator who has been awarded Bridge Funding in any previous award cycle may submit a request for Bridge Funding for another project, however, even if scientifically meritorious, this request will receive lower priority for funding than other meritorious requests. Only one request for Bridge Funding may be made for any given application that has been subjected to external peer review. If, subsequent to an unsuccessful request for Bridge Funding, a revised application is externally reviewed and review comments provided to the applicant, a second request for Bridge Funding may be made, as based on the revised application and, if an NIH application, on the criteria listed above. Note, however, that such a second request will only be given serious consideration if the external review is significantly more laudatory than was the first review.

Requests for Bridge Funding are to be submitted electronically, <u>in pdf format</u>, to Ms. Christine Akers, cakers@pitt.edu, by 4:00 pm on the receipt dates identified above. No exceptions will be made to these receipt dates.

INSTRUCTIONS

The following format should be used for a request for Health Sciences Bridge Funding; the items should appear in the order listed below; and each successive item should begin on a new page. Please note: applications that exceed the stated page limits or that are not in 11 or 12 point Arial, Times New Roman, Helvetica, Palatino Linotype, or Georgia font will not be considered.

1. First page/cover page should include
   - Date
   - Full name of applicant with terminal degree(s) (*e.g.*, MD, PhD, MD PhD)
   - Academic rank and tenure status
   - School, Department, and, if applicable, Division
   - Campus mailing address
   - Location and net square feet of laboratory/research space available for the investigator's overall research program. This should include dry/computer space and clinical research space, as appropriate.
   - A table of contents identifying the page numbers for the start of sections 2 –11.

2. The second page should be a statement, on the appropriate official letterhead, from the department chair (or center/institute director, if the applicant's primary source of support is through a center or institute) that affirms that the chair is aware of the applicant's submission to the Bridge Funding program and that he/she is aware that the department (institute/center) will be asked to co-fund any Bridge Funding award that may be made. This statement must also guarantee that there are funds available to support the investigator at full-time effort for the period of time that would ensue if the application for external funds upon which the bridge funding request is based is awarded. See above for additional information required when the applicant is not in the tenure track.

3. Applicant's biographical sketch using the four-page NIH format (see page I-71 of the SF424 Application Guide, updated July 25, 2011, http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/index.htm; if a further update to the SF 424 Application Guide is extant at the time of application submission, the biographical sketch should conform to the "Instructions for a Biographical Sketch" in the updated Guide) with the following modifications.
   - The personal statement should be appropriate for the application that is the basis of the bridge funding request.
   - The "selected peer-reviewed publications" must include ALL publications that have been published in the past three years; all publications in press should also be included. Do not include publications that are submitted or that are in preparation.
   - In the research support section, list all research projects (grants) that were COMPLETED in the past three years for which external support was

provided. Briefly indicate the overall goals of the projects and the applicant's role (*e.g.*, PI, Co-Investigator, or Consultant) in the research project.

4. Applicant's ACTIVE and PENDING support information, using SF424 (R&R) Application Guidelines, updated July 2011 (see http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/index.htm#inst, Part III; if applicable, instructions in subsequent revisions should be used).
   - Be sure to include all requests for Bridge Funding in the pending support, whether those requests are to internal or external funding sources.
   - For a new investigator, a letter from the department chair (or relevant institute or center director) must be included that provides information as to what funding remains available to the applicant from his/her start-up package. This may be part of the statement made in Item 2, above, of the application.

5. The summary statement/review of the application that was not funded and for which Bridge Funding is being requested. ***If the renewal application has been submitted more than once, copies of all relevant reviews must be included; the most recent review should be presented first, and the beginning page of each review should be separately identified in the table of contents.*** Failure to provide this information will result in administrative withdrawal of the Bridge Funding application. This must be a full copy, not simply a summary of the critique. The date the application was submitted, the priority score (or equivalent), and, if applicable, the percentile must be clearly indicated.

6. A three-page (maximum) response to the summary statement that clearly indicates how the concerns raised by the reviewers will be addressed in a subsequent grant application. If Bridge Funding is necessary to address some of the concerns raised (*e.g.*, to generate additional data), this should be explicitly stated.

7. A two-page (maximum) statement that clearly articulates the consequences if Bridge Funding were not obtained. ***The applicant must clearly demonstrate the need for Bridge Funding.*** For example, if the project is a clinical study, is there an established cohort of patients who would not be followed, thus effectively ending the study? Would the position of a graduate student, postdoctoral, research, or clinical fellow be terminated mid-way through his/her training? If this request for Bridge Funding is to support a new research direction for the applicant, this page should also provide the information necessary for the review committee to assess whether or not this new direction will represent a major area of research in the applicant's laboratory. ***Note, a delay in the start of a new project does not establish need unless it can be demonstrated that there is true urgency in beginning that project.***

Please note that the following criteria will be assessed by the reviewers when evaluating applications. Information provided in items (5) and (6) of the application material should help the reviewers assess these issues:

- The likelihood of external funding within one year;
- The likelihood that a hiatus in funding will result in the termination of the project and the significance to the general field of research associated with continuing the project
- The severity of the disruption to the investigator's laboratory or research group if bridge funding is not provided; and
- The severity of the consequences to the principal investigator's career if Bridge Funding is not provided.

8. A detailed, justified budget for the Bridge Funding that is being requested must be provided. If the request includes indirect/overhead funds, there must be an explicit statement as to the need for these funds. Use the PHS 398 "detailed budget for initial period" form from the June 2009 revision, found at http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/fp4.doc. Later revisions to this form are also acceptable. On a separate sheet of paper, prioritize the items for which you are requesting support; you may indicate the consequences that would pertain if you were not to receive support for a given item. Equipment will not be supported through this mechanism. ***Salary support for the principal investigator will not be supported through this mechanism.*** Requests for supplies should be limited to those supplies that are absolutely necessary for the short-term continuation of the proposed research. Please note that Dr. Levine's priority is to provide support for personnel whose careers would be adversely affected if they were unable to continue as part of the applicant's research group (*e.g.*, a graduate student who would be unable to complete his or her doctoral thesis project).

9. Plans for resubmission, including the date the application is due to the funding agency, anticipated date by which review results should be known, and anticipated date by which the agency will decide whether or not the application will be funded.

10. A copy (PDF format) of the full application that was submitted and reviewed and that serves as the basis for the request for Bridge Funding must also be provided with the request for Bridge Funding.

11. If applicable, a PDF of draft specific aims and other information available on a new application.