

# Competitive Medical Research Fund (CMRF) Policies

## Effective October 2009

The UPMC Health System established the Competitive Medical Research Fund (CMRF) in 1985 to provide modest research support across the broad range of biomedical sciences. Initially, these funds were intended for new investigators to support preliminary studies that would enable relatively junior scientists to develop the hypotheses, preliminary data, and methods that would enable submission of highly competitive applications to extramural funding sources. As federal funding became more competitive and it became more common that established research projects experienced funding lapses, the CMRF expanded its goals to provide bridge support for investigators whose grant applications received relatively high, but not fundable, scores. With the growth in interdisciplinary projects and the urgent need to accelerate the translation of basic science into clinical practice and with the relative paucity of opportunities for federal funding for developing projects of this nature, the CMRF expanded its goals to include support for projects that are specifically focused on translational studies.

The following pages include important information specific to each of the three CMRF application categories (New Investigator, Bridge Funding, and Collaborative Research), as well as general policy guidelines regarding regulatory committee approvals, funding levels, the application process, review timeline, and submission of applications. Investigators should carefully review these policies and should address any questions to Ms. Selena Crawford, CMRF Coordinator, Office of Research, Health Sciences (OORHS) prior to preparing and submitting applications (Email: [sac32@pitt.edu](mailto:sac32@pitt.edu); Telephone: 412-648-2233).

Please note that the CMRF program is intended primarily for investigators in the six schools of the Health Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh. Applications from University of Pittsburgh faculty members holding primary appointments in schools external to the Health Sciences will be considered only if the biomedical relevance is clear and compelling. Applicants need not be U.S. citizens to be eligible for CMRF funding.

### Application Categories

**Applicants should carefully read the Grant Application Instructions for details specific to the category of award for which they are applying.** CMRF application instructions are available through the OORHS website at <http://www.oorhs.pitt.edu/funding/CMRF.CFM>.

### New Investigator Applications

The New Investigator awards are intended to provide funds for relatively junior, independent scientists to develop the hypotheses, preliminary data, and methods that will enable submission of highly competitive applications to extramural funding sources. Faculty members at the level of assistant professor are eligible. In rare circumstances, applications from associate professors will be considered if the applicant can demonstrate that he or she has only recently begun independent research activities. Postdoctoral researchers are not eligible to apply for CMRF funding. To be eligible, the applicant may not have previously 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.

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Individuals who have received significant funds from an NIH Center award (*e.g.*, P01, P30, *etc.*) are not eligible under the “New Investigator” category. Typically, an award that includes more than \$25,000 for research supplies is considered “significant.” If an investigator is an Assistant Professor who had previously had an appointment at a rank no higher than assistant professor at a foreign institution, an exception may be made to the “no significant funding” policy. Specifically, if significant foreign awards were made that are not portable to the United States and for which there is limited ongoing activity on the part of the CMRF applicant, the applicant will be eligible for consideration as a new investigator. Please direct any questions regarding eligibility to the CMRF Coordinator in the Office of Research, Health Sciences.

Investigators who have received NIH career development or similar awards that cover salary and that provide only very modest support for research supplies may be eligible to apply for CMRF New Investigator awards. However, CMRF applicants who are K01, K08, or K23 award recipients should be aware that research development support for such items as supplies, equipment, and technical personnel, is an allowable cost for K01, K08, and K23 awards. In addition, under PHS guidelines “the mentor [of K01, K08, and K23 awardees] should have sufficient independent research support to cover the costs of the proposed research project in excess of the allowable costs of [the K] award.” Therefore, because K award recipients, as a condition of the award, must have a commitment of funds for research development from their mentors, they are not eligible to apply to the CMRF program for funds to support studies proposed in a K application. However, a K award recipient may submit a CMRF application proposing a research focus different from, albeit related to, that of his or her K award application. In this situation, it is imperative that the applicant clearly demonstrates that the research proposed in the CMRF application is different from research outlined in his or her K application. An investigator must submit the NIH abstract of his or her K application as an appendix and should explicitly address differences between the two research projects in item #2, page 2 (Summary Page), of his or her CMRF application.

If the applicant is applying for funding as a New Investigator at the completion of a K08 (or similar) award, or holds a different K award (*e.g.*, K18, 25, *etc.*), he or she should contact the CMRF Coordinator in the Office of Research, Health Sciences to discuss eligibility.

### **Bridge Funding Applications**

Bridge Funding is intended to support investigators who have had lapses in funding, otherwise outstanding track records, and whose research has a high likelihood of being funded again in the near future (*i.e.*, in less than one year). Specifically, to be eligible for Bridge Funding the following situation must apply: *An applicant 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 favorable reviews, was not funded.* Bridge Funding applications must be accompanied by the summary statement/critique from the unfunded extramural application made to a major funding agency within the past year (see: CMRF Bridge Funding Grant Application Instructions). The CMRF application must indicate the number of times the extramural application was submitted and it must include the review score for the extramural application. This information is necessary for the reviewers to be able to evaluate the likelihood of future funding. In addition, the CMRF application must include a detailed description of how the funding will be used, *i.e.*, which portions of the previously submitted application will be carried out using the funding, and clearly define how CMRF funding will enable submission of an application that will address the reviewers’ criticisms. Faculty

members at the levels of assistant professor, associate professor, and professor are eligible to apply for Bridge Funding support.

Please note that a given project may not be supported by bridge funding under both the University of Pittsburgh Health Sciences Bridge Funding program and the CMRF Bridge Funding program. If an investigator submits an application to both programs and Health Sciences Bridge Funding is awarded, the CMRF application will be administratively withdrawn. If an applicant to the Health Sciences Bridge Funding program has CMRF Bridge funding when the Health Sciences award is made, \$25,000 (the amount of the CMRF award) will be deducted from the recommended budget for the Health Sciences Bridge Funding award. If the Health Sciences bridge funding is awarded for a project other than the one submitted for consideration to the CMRF program, it is incumbent on the applicant to articulate very clearly the need for the CMRF support.

If the applicant is applying for Bridge Funding after an unsuccessful attempt to convert a K08 (or similar) award to an R01 (or similar) award, the applicant should contact the CMRF Coordinator in the Office of Research, Health Sciences to determine eligibility.

### **Collaborative Research Applications**

Collaborative Research applications are intended to fund interdisciplinary, translational research that represents a true collaboration between a clinical scientist and a basic research scientist. A true collaboration is one in which both the clinical scientist and the basic research scientist have significant, defined roles in the research project. It is incumbent upon the applicants to convince the reviewers that both team members will be actively involved in the project. Research teams for which the principal investigator and the co-principal investigator have significant other funding must include specific statements in the application to address why CMRF support is needed in order to perform the proposed research. Applicants must indicate how the proposed project is different from any existing projects. These statements should be made on page 2 (Summary Page) of the application form. Although the collaboration between the principal investigator and co-principal investigator need not be new, the research project proposed in the CMRF application must be novel and not previously funded. Preferential consideration will be given to those applications for which the applicants are not funded for closely related activities. Faculty members at the levels of assistant professor, associate professor, and professor are eligible to apply in the Collaborative Research category. However, the principal investigator and co-principal investigator must be independent of each other ; one may not be the direct research supervisor or mentor of the other. Senior Research Scientist staff members are also eligible to apply for CMRF Collaborative Research awards.

### **All Applications:**

Any monies awarded will support direct costs only; no indirect support will be provided. The monies awarded may not be used for salary support for the principal investigator, but investigator effort must be reflected on the budget page, and must be cost shared by the department or other entity that will support such effort. The CMRF Cost Sharing Agreement Page must be signed by the principal investigator's department chair or appropriate responsibility center director (*e.g.*, division chief or institute director) who can authorize cost sharing against an Entity-02 or -04 institutional account. This signature certifies acceptance of principal investigator cost shared effort. The appropriate institutional account number against which the effort will be charged must also be provided. If the project is funded, cost shared effort must be reflected on the SPAR document and

copies of the relevant SPAR must be provided to the CMRF administration upon request. Any applicant who is currently a recipient of a mentored career development award (*e.g.*, K12, K23, *etc.*) may subsume the effort devoted to his or her project under the career development award as long as this project proposed is consistent with the career development award. Please contact the CMRF Coordinator for verification of the eligibility to subsume effort related to this announcement.

## **General Policies and Guidelines**

### **Applicant and Key Personnel Guidelines**

In any given round, only one application per principal investigator will be accepted. If an application is submitted in the Collaborative Research category, neither the principal investigator nor the co-principal investigator (*i.e.*, the basic nor the physician scientist) may serve as a principal investigator on any other CMRF application. An individual may, however, serve as a consultant on more than one application. Please contact the CMRF Coordinator in the Office of Research, Health Sciences for specific information regarding an investigator's eligibility to serve in any other capacity on more than one application in a given round.

Applicants may not have more than one active CMRF award at any given time. Individuals who have been previously awarded CMRF funding may apply for a second award as long as the previous funding has ended. However, an investigator may receive funding under the New Investigator category only once. In addition, an investigator who previously received a CMRF Collaborative Award may not apply for a second Collaborative Award unless both the collaborative team and the research project are significantly different from those of the previously funded work.

Submission of "Other Support" information is required for the principal investigator, co-principal investigator, and any other co-investigators listed in Key Personnel. In addition, applicants who work within the laboratory of a more senior investigator must include "Other Support" information for this person, even if he/she is not listed as a co-investigator on the CMRF project. During the review process, OORHS and the review panel may request funding information from additional individuals, including, but not limited to consultants, research associates, research assistants, and mentors. Please note that the term "Mentor" is reserved for appropriate individuals cited in an applicant's career development award application (*e.g.*, K award).

### **Revised Extramural Applications**

In some instances a CMRF application is a revision of one that was submitted to an extramural funding agency (*e.g.*, NIH, NSF), but that was not funded. If the applicant chooses to make reference to such a submission, he or she is strongly encouraged to provide, as an appendix, a copy of the critique of that application along with an optional statement of no more than one page that addresses the reviewers' concerns (see CMRF Grant Application Instructions for New Investigators and for Collaborative Research). CMRF reviewers may disregard any reference to previous critiques of research described in a CMRF application if copies of the reviews are not submitted.

### **IACUC, IBC, and IRB Approvals**

Applicants are not required to submit copies of approved Institutional Review Board (IRB), Institutional Animal Care & Use Committee (IACUC), or Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) applications with CMRF applications.

Please note, however, that in order for a CMRF award to be made, OORHS must have copies of protocols and approval letters from all applicable regulatory offices at the University of Pittsburgh. For applications that propose research involving human subjects, copies of consent forms and approvals of the protocols by the IRB and other relevant committees must be submitted to OORHS before awards can be made. Likewise, for applications that propose research involving animals, copies of the IACUC approvals must be submitted to OORHS before awards can be made. For applications that propose research involving recombinant DNA (rDNA), copies of the IBC approvals must be submitted prior to award. Applications that propose to use tissue from dead humans must obtain approval from the Committee for Oversight of Research Involving the Dead (CORID) prior to the award of funds.

The IACUC, IBC, IRB, and/or CORID approvals must be specific for the CMRF grant application submitted and the principal investigator on the CMRF application must be the named PI on the protocol; the use of IACUC, IBC, and/or IRB approval for research projects other than those proposed in the grant application is not permitted and will result in a delay in awarding CMRF funds until the appropriate approvals are obtained and submitted to OORHS.

Because of the relatively short period between award notification and release of funds (approximately four weeks), applicants are strongly encouraged to prepare protocols for submission to all relevant regulatory committees well in advance of the CMRF award date (usually July 1). Failure to supply approved protocols to OORHS will result in delay of funding.

Approved IRB, IBC, or IACUC protocols should not be submitted with application materials. Inclusion of these supplemental materials may provide an unfair advantage to some applicants whose protocols include additional experimental or other descriptive information.

### **Funding Levels and Award Periods**

**New Investigator:** A maximum of \$25,000 can be requested for expenditure over a period not to exceed 24 months.

**Bridge Funding:** A maximum of \$25,000 can be requested for expenditure over a period not to exceed 12 months.

**Collaborative Research:** A maximum of \$25,000 can be requested for expenditure over a period not to exceed 24 months.

CMRF funds are provided to cover costs related to the conduct of the research project. Salary support for the principal investigator may not be requested and travel expenses are not allowed.

### **Frequency of Solicitations**

For those years in which insufficient funds are available for two solicitations, the annual solicitation will be issued in late fall/early winter, with a winter receipt date for applications and a July 1 award date. If sufficient monies are available, a second solicitation will be issued with a fall receipt date. Note that the Office of Research, Health Sciences reserves the right to limit the second solicitation to one or more of the application categories, as determined by the monies remaining available for expenditure and the composition of the grant portfolio awarded at the start of the fiscal year. It is anticipated that there will be only one solicitation for Fiscal Year 2009 funding.

## **Submission Process**

CMRF applications must be submitted electronically, in PDF format, by 11:59 pm, Friday, January 9, 2009. Absolutely no exceptions to this deadline will be made. Applications should consist of two files; one containing the full application including the abstract and the other file containing the abstract only. Failure to submit both necessary files may result in administrative withdrawal of the application without review. Applications should be sent to [cmrf@hs.pitt.edu](mailto:cmrf@hs.pitt.edu).

For more information, please contact:

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CMRF Coordinator  
Office of Research, Health Sciences  
Suite 401, Scaife Hall  
3550 Terrace Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15261  
[sac32@pitt.edu](mailto:sac32@pitt.edu)

## **Pre-review Process**

The staff of OORHS will do a preliminary evaluation of all submitted applications to ensure adherence to CMRF policies and instructions. Applications deemed incomplete or those not following directions outlined in *CMRF Grant Application Instructions* or not in accord with the CMRF policies will be returned without review or appeal. In addition, there will be no opportunity for applicants to provide supplementary materials after the stated deadline, with the exception of IRB, IACUC, and/or IBC approvals. **There will be absolutely no exceptions to this policy.**

## **Procedure for Review**

The CMRF Review Committee reviews all categories of applications. This committee is composed of scientists from within the University of Pittsburgh, UPMC, and local Veterans Administration medical science communities. A written critique of each application is prepared by at least two members of the review committee who have relevant expertise, and the committee as a whole discusses each application during the review process. If additional expertise is needed for a given application, additional reviews are solicited from *ad hoc* reviewers. The committee has responsibility for analyzing each application, for providing written critiques of each application, and for making recommendations for awards to OORHS and to the UPMC Board of Directors.

## **Review Criteria**

The most important review criteria for all application categories are scientific merit, health or biomedical relevance, need for funding, and the potential for subsequent peer-reviewed major grant support. Where applicable, the potential clinical impact of the studies will also be an important review criterion.

Reviewers also evaluate applications for grantsmanship and completeness. Should the reviewer(s) determine that an application and/or supporting materials are not sufficiently comprehensive to allow for adequate review, the application will not be favorably reviewed. In addition, reviewers

carefully consider grantsmanship and use it as a criterion for scoring; poor grantsmanship may, and often does, diminish reviewers' enthusiasm for an otherwise meritorious application.

In the New Investigator category, independence of the junior faculty member is a key review criterion. If the CMRF application is for research that is an extension of an ongoing project (for which either the applicant or someone else is the principal investigator), the applicant must indicate how the proposed project is different from the ongoing project. In addition, if the applicant works in the laboratory of a senior investigator, he or she must clearly indicate how funding will be used for an independent research program and not merely to fund the project or personnel of the senior investigator. It is incumbent upon the applicant to convince the reviewers that the research differs significantly from that of the senior investigator. A letter from the department chairperson demonstrating departmental commitment to the career development of the applicant must be included as an appendix to New Investigator applications, and demonstration of this commitment will be one of the criteria used in evaluating the application.

In the Bridge Funding category, the statement addressing how CMRF funding will enable the submission of an application that addresses the concerns of the previous review will be critically evaluated. It is incumbent upon the applicant to specify why bridging funds are needed and what detriment to the future success of the project would arise if CMRF funds were not awarded.

In the Collaborative Research category, key review criteria include whether or not the work proposed is a true collaboration between a clinical scientist and a basic scientist and the degree to which the proposed work represents immediate or future translation of a research project from the laboratory into clinical practice. Reviewers will carefully consider the roles of each collaborator in the proposed project. Collaborations in which both the clinical scientist and basic scientist do not play a significant role will not receive favorable evaluations.