

Competitive Medical Research Fund (CMRF) Policies

Effective August 2018

The UPMC Health System established the Competitive Medical Research Fund (CMRF) in 1985 to provide modest research support for projects across the broad range of biomedical sciences. These funds are used to support new investigators as they conduct preliminary studies to develop the hypotheses, preliminary data, and methods that support submission of highly competitive applications to extramural funding sources.

The following pages include important information specific to the CMRF application process, including general policy guidelines regarding applicant eligibility, regulatory committee approvals, funding levels, the application process, and the review timeline. **Investigators should carefully review these policies and 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; Telephone: 412-648-2233).**

Key Personnel Definitions

Principal Investigator (PI) - The individual who conceives the project and has the authority and responsibility for directing the proposed research, should the project receive a CMRF award.

Co-Investigator/Collaborator - An individual involved with the PI in the scientific development or execution of the project. A Co-Investigator typically devotes a specified percentage of time to the project and is considered senior/key personnel. The designation of a Co-Investigator, if applicable, does not affect the PI's roles and responsibilities. Co-Investigator and Collaborator are synonyms, for the purpose of this solicitation.

Consultant - An individual who provides professional advice or services but is not part of the scientific development or execution of a project.

General Eligibility Requirements

CMRF awards provide funds for relatively junior, independent scientists from the University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences (see first bullet point, below, regarding investigators from other schools) to develop hypotheses, preliminary data, and methods necessary to successfully compete for extramural funding.

Applicants for CMRF support must fulfill the following **eligibility requirements**:

- Applicants must hold academic ranks of at least Assistant Professor or Research Assistant Professor. Applications from Associate Professors will be considered if the applicant can demonstrate that he or she has only recently begun independent research activities. Full professors, post-doctoral researchers, instructors, and clinical fellows are ineligible for CMRF funding. **Applicants whose primary appointments are not in the Schools of the Health Sciences may apply if the proposed project has clear health/biomedical relevance, as such relevance will be an important criterion in evaluating applications.**
- An applicant's current and previous external research support (*e.g.*, support for supplies, salaries for technical personnel, or equipment) must not exceed a total of \$180K direct costs, with no more than \$60K direct costs per award, per year. Principal Investigator salary support and fringe benefits, as well as postdoctoral awards, are not counted toward

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this total. If an applicant feels that there are extraordinary circumstances that would warrant deviation from this policy, he or she should contact Dr. Anthony Brickner in OORHS (agb10@pitt.edu).

- Applicants need not be U.S. citizens to be eligible for CMRF funding. If an investigator is an Assistant Professor who previously had an appointment at a rank no higher than Assistant Professor (or equivalent) at a foreign institution, an exception may be made to the “\$180K rule.” 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. Questions about eligibility should be directed to Dr. Brickner.
- Previous recipients of CMRF funding as a Principal Investigator are not eligible as Principal Investigator on another CMRF award.
- Multiple Principal Investigator applications are ineligible for CMRF funding.

CMRF Eligibility and NIH K Awards

Investigators who have received NIH career development awards (*e.g.*, K01, K08, K23, and K99/R00) or similar awards from private foundations that primarily provide salary support with limited funds for supplies, technical personnel, and equipment may be eligible to apply for a CMRF award. Note that support for such items as supplies, equipment, and technical personnel is an allowable cost for K01, K08, K23, and K99/R00 awards. In addition, under PHS guidelines “the mentor [of K01, K08, K23, and K99/R00 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 awards, must have commitment of funds for research from their mentors, they are not eligible to apply to the CMRF program for funds to support studies funded under K awards. 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 project. 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 must explicitly address differences between the two research projects in item #2, page 2 (Eligibility Clarification Page) of the CMRF application. Applicants should direct questions concerning eligibility to Dr. Brickner.

Application

Applicants should carefully read the Grant Application Instructions. These are available through the OORHS website at <http://oorhs.pitt.edu/research-funding/competitive-medical-research-fund-grant-application>.

CMRF awards 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 or any other named faculty rank 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. 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 CMRF project under the career development award as long as the proposed CMRF project is consistent with the career development award. Please contact Dr. Brickner for verification of the eligibility to subsume effort related to this announcement.

General Policies and Guidelines

Applicant and Key Personnel Guidelines

In any given application cycle, an applicant may be the Principal Investigator on only one application. A CMRF applicant (Principal Investigator) may serve as Co-Investigator/Collaborator on no more than one additional CMRF application in a given cycle. If not an applicant in the round, an individual may serve as a Co-Investigator/Collaborator on no more than two CMRF applications in a given cycle. Please contact Dr. Brickner for specific information regarding an investigator's eligibility to serve in any other capacity on more than one application in a given cycle.

Biosketches (2017 NIH format), including "Other Support" information (which must include annual direct costs and duration of the award), are required for the Principal Investigator and each Co-Investigator/Collaborator listed in Key Personnel. In addition, applicants who work within the laboratory of a more senior investigator must include a biosketch and Other Support information for this person, even if he or she is not listed as a Co-Investigator on the CMRF project. During the review process, OORHS may request funding information from additional individuals, including, but not limited to, consultants 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).

IACUC, IBC, IRB, hESCRO, and CORID Approvals

Applicants may not submit copies of approved Institutional Review Board (IRB), Institutional Animal Care & Use Committee (IACUC), Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC), human Stem Cell Research Oversight Committee (hSCRO), or Committee for Oversight of Research and Clinical Training Involving Decedents (CORID) applications with their CMRF applications. Inclusion of such supplemental materials would provide unfair advantage for applicants whose protocols include additional experimental or other descriptive information. Please note, however, that OORHS must have copies of approval letters from all applicable regulatory offices at the University of Pittsburgh before funds can be released. The IACUC, IBC, IRB, hSCRO 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 Principal Investigator on the protocol; the use of IACUC, IBC, IRB, hESCRO and/or CORID 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.

Funding Levels and Award Periods

The standard CMRF award is up to \$25,000, to be expended over a period of up to 24 months. However a maximum of \$40,000 may be requested if the Principal Investigator makes a compelling case that the proposed goals cannot be achieved with the standard \$25,000 award. Justification for an award of over \$25,000 will be reviewed carefully as part of the merit evaluation of the application.

If the costs of the proposed project would exceed the CMRF award, the source of funds that will enable the completion of the project must be specified.

Frequency and Timing of Solicitations

Annual solicitations will be issued each September, with an early January deadline for submission of applications and a July 1 award date (pending approval of relevant regulatory protocols).

Pre-review Process

The staff of OORHS will perform preliminary evaluation of all submitted applications to ensure adherence to CMRF policies and instructions. Applications deemed incomplete, or those not following the directions outlined in these Policies and the CMRF Grant Application Instructions, will be withdrawn from consideration without review or appeal. In addition, there will be no opportunity for applicants to provide supplementary materials after the submission deadline.

Procedure for Review

The CMRF Review Committee reviews all eligible applications. This committee is composed of scientists from within the University of Pittsburgh, UPMC, and local Veterans Administration medical science communities. At least two reviewers with relevant expertise will provide written critiques for each application, and the committee as a whole will discuss each application during the review process. If additional expertise is needed for a given application, 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 applications are scientific merit, health or biomedical relevance, need for funding, and the potential for subsequent peer-reviewed major grant support. Reviewers also evaluate applications for grantsmanship and completeness.

Independence of the junior faculty member is also 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 project 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 is a required component of the application, and demonstration of this commitment will be one of the criteria used in evaluating the application.