

Competitive Medical Research Fund (CMRF) Policies

Effective June 2015

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 intended for new investigators and are to be used to support preliminary studies that will enable new investigators 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, as well as 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).**

General Eligibility Requirements

CMRF awards are intended to provide funds for relatively junior, independent scientists from the University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences 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. **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.
- In general, applicants may not have previously received external research support (*e.g.*, support for supplies, salaries for technical personnel, or equipment) exceeding \$100K direct costs total for the award. 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). Please note that PI salary support is not counted towards this \$100K total.
- 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 “\$100K” 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 – either as Principal Investigator or as a co-PI on a CMRF collaborative grant – are not eligible for additional 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 but 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

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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 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 funded under a K award. 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 must explicitly address differences between the two research projects in item #2, page 2 (Summary Page), of the CMRF application.

If the applicant is applying for CMRF funding at the completion of a K08 (or similar) award, or holds a different K award (*e.g.*, K18, K25, *etc.*), he or she should direct questions concerning eligibility to Dr. Brickner.

Application

Applicants should carefully read the Grant Application Instructions. CMRF application instructions are available through the OORHS website at <http://oorhs.pitt.edu/cmrf>.

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. 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 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, only one application per Principal Investigator will be accepted. An individual may, however, serve as a consultant on more than one application. Please contact Ms. Crawford for specific information regarding an investigator’s eligibility to serve in any other capacity on more than one application in a given cycle.

Biosketches (2015 NIH format), including “Other Support” information, are required for the 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 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 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).

IACUC, IBC, IRB, hESCRO, and CORID Approvals

Applicants are not required to 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. 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 PI 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.

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 (July 1, contingent on approvals of relevant regulatory protocols). Failure to supply approved protocols to OORHS will result in delay of funding.

Approved protocols may not be submitted with application materials. Inclusion of such supplemental materials would provide unfair advantage to applicants whose protocols include additional experimental or other descriptive information.

Funding Levels and Award Periods

\$25,000 may be requested for expenditure over a period not to exceed 24 months. This amount may be increased to a maximum of \$40,000 if the Principal Investigator can make a compelling case that the proposed goals cannot be achieved with the standard \$25,000 award.

Frequency and Timing of Solicitations

Annual solicitations will be issued in September each year, 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 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 these Policies and the CMRF Grant Application Instructions, will be returned without review or appeal. In addition, there will be no opportunity for applicants to provide supplementary materials after the stated 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. A written critique of each application is prepared by two reviewers and a reader 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, 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. Reviewers also evaluate applications for grantsmanship and completeness.

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 is a required component of the application, and demonstration of this commitment will be one of the criteria used in evaluating the application.