

Melanoma Research Alliance 2009 – 2010 Request for Proposals

Melanoma is a leading cause of new cancer diagnoses, and more effective options for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment are urgently needed. From a basic and clinical research perspective, melanoma occupies the crossroads of molecular biology and immunology. An externally visible tumor, it offers a unique opportunity to query lesions at the earliest stages of carcinogenesis for molecular events or signatures portending progression, invasion, and dissemination. As one of the most highly immunogenic human neoplasms, it provides an ideal context for understanding interactions between the human immune system and cancer. Despite emerging knowledge about the basic immunology and molecular biology of cancer, these new insights have yet to translate into significant clinical benefits for patients with melanoma.

The Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA) is a public charity formed under the auspices of the Milken Institute, with the initial generous founding support of Debra and Leon Black. Please visit www.melanomaresearchalliance.org for further information on MRA, its research agenda in the *State of Melanoma Research: A Call to Action*, and the research projects funded in the first two award cycles.

Objective: *Emphasis on Translational Science*

For the 2009-2010 funding cycle, the MRA is soliciting proposals that address the gap in translational science, i.e., turning scientific discoveries into tools and/or treatments for high risk individuals or melanoma patients. Proposals will be accepted in the following categories: (1) individual investigator awards, including young investigator, established investigator and pilot study awards; and (2) team science awards emphasizing collaborative, multidisciplinary research approaches. Successful proposals will offer the potential for translational developments that could lead to high impact, near-term clinical application in areas of melanoma prevention, diagnosis, staging, and treatment. Development and/or use of novel technologies that have the potential to further such advances in the areas of emphasis will be considered. Proposals for clinical investigations testing well defined and clearly articulated hypotheses are welcome and must be accompanied by a protocol.

MRA welcomes proposals in the following areas:

- **Prevention:** Areas of interest include environmental, epidemiological, and biological factors in melanoma carcinogenesis.
- **Diagnosis and Staging:** Emphasis includes identification of serological tumor markers, association of molecular tumor biomarkers with prognosis, and development of novel clinical methods for melanoma detection and imaging.
- **Treatment:** Projects emphasizing the translation of scientific findings to the treatment of patients with melanoma are solicited. Examples include but are not limited to studies of melanoma immunotherapy, therapeutic applications based on molecular mechanisms involved in melanoma formation and/or progression, and development of novel biomarkers of response to therapy.

For the 2009-2010 cycle, proposals in the following areas are of particular interest and will receive special consideration:

- **Identification of prognostic biomarkers for patients with Stage I – IIIA melanoma, including conventional molecular and protein-based analyses, as well as studies of epigenetic markers, miRNA markers, and microenvironmental factors.**
- **Studies of melanoma stem cells, including phenotypic and functional characterizations, and the development of specifically targeted therapies.**
- **Defining interactions between molecularly targeted and immunologically based melanoma therapies, including the development of rational combinatorial therapies.**

Key Criteria

- **Innovative and transforming research:** Novel approaches with clear capacity to revolutionize prevention, early diagnosis, staging, or treatment for patients with melanoma or for individuals at high risk for melanoma. Transformative ideas with strong scientific rationale are encouraged.
- **Scientific merit:** Outstanding and rigorous proposals as determined by peer review.
- **Potential for rapid progression to clinical testing:** Proposals that articulate a clear path to clinical applicability will be strongly favored.

Additional Key Criterion for Team Science Awards:

- **Collaborative and multidisciplinary emphasis:** Meaningful collaboration between two or more Principal Investigators (PIs) with complementary expertise that offers the possibility for synergistic advances. Research groups may be within the same institution, or inter-institutional.

Eligibility

PIs must hold a tenure-track faculty appointment at a major academic research institution within or outside the United States (Assistant Professor or above). Investigators need not be specifically trained in melanoma research; however, they should be working in an environment capable of conducting high quality, high impact melanoma research. Applications from individuals employed by government agencies will be considered if it can be demonstrated that funding is not available from the employer. Multiple applications will be accepted from a single institution, provided that each application has a different PI and represents a different hypothesis.

Types of Awards

Individual Investigator Awards: Only one proposal per PI will be accepted per cycle.

- *Young Investigator Awards:* Tenure-track investigators within 4 years of their first academic faculty rank appointment will be provided \$50,000/year for 2 years to accomplish innovative, early concept scientific projects.

- *Established Investigator Award:* Investigators with an established record of scientific productivity will receive up to \$125,000/year for 2 to 3 years to conduct projects supported by preliminary data.
- *Pilot Award:* Potentially transformative pilot studies from investigators who are past the initial 4 years of their first academic faculty rank appointment will be considered for an award of \$50,000/year for 2 years. Pilot proposals are not required to contain extensive preliminary data, but must articulate a clear hypothesis and translational goals.

Team Science Awards:

Multidisciplinary teams of two or more PIs will receive \$1-3 million total over 2 to 3 years, to support projects with the potential to lead to transforming advances in prevention, early detection, staging, and/or treatment of melanoma. All PIs in the team share authority for scientific leadership. The designated Contact PI is responsible for administrative leadership.

An investigator may serve as a PI on only one Team Science proposal per cycle. However, involvement of a Team Science PI in other team science applications in a supporting role, such as collaborator or co-investigator, is permitted.

Funding

For all proposals, the level and duration of funding may be adjusted by MRA as appropriate for the scope of the proposal and the funds available. Partial funding will also be considered to obtain proof-of-principle data in support of innovative ideas with transformative potential. MRA will not support indirect costs, overhead costs, or other institutional levies; however, fringe benefits for personnel salaries are allowable. To ensure good stewardship of awards, full-term funding will be contingent upon review of annual progress reports. MRA must be notified and approve any significant changes in research objectives, key personnel, or budget. Up to \$7 million total will be awarded this cycle.

Application Format and Due Dates

Applicants will utilize the Proposal Central on-line application tool <http://proposalcentral.altum.com/> and the document templates and requirements therein. Please carefully follow the instructions in Proposal Central. All applications must be formatted in Times New Roman 12 point font or Arial 11 point with ½ inch margins.

Individual Investigator Awards: Complete applications are due **December 1, 2009 by 5:00 p.m. EST.** A complete application includes the following components:

- Title page
- Applicant/PI information
- Organization/institution information
- Key personnel information
- Lay abstract and technical abstract (250 words maximum each) and key words. The lay abstract will become public if the proposal is selected for funding.

- Budget details and justification: MRA will not support indirect costs, overhead costs, or other institutional levies. Fringe benefits for personnel salaries are allowable.
- Organizational assurances
- Biosketches for PI and key personnel
- Current and pending support
- Mentor letter of support (for Young Investigators Only): Include a letter of support from an established scientific mentor at the same institution, who is familiar with the applicant and their work and will provide guidance for the project.
- Project Description: **5 pages maximum**, inclusive of the following: Background/specific aims, preliminary data, experimental design and methods, and rationale/fit with key criteria, including a description of the potential for clinical impact with milestones (if applicable).
- Scientific references for data cited (3 pages maximum)

Team Science Awards: Letter of Intent due **February 1, 2010 by 5:00 p.m. EST**

Applicants must submit a one-page letter of intent (LOI) prior to submission of a full proposal. **Please carefully follow the instructions in Proposal Central.** The LOI application consists of the following components:

- Title page (including total budget requested)
- Applicant/PI information: Team Science applications must identify one PI for administrative purposes. This is the Contact PI for the proposal.
- Organization/institution information: This is the Contact PI's institution.
- Key personnel information: Identify other PIs on the team. All PIs share authority for scientific leadership.
- Letter of intent: One page maximum that includes a description of the scientific aims, the nature of and rationale for the proposed collaboration, the specific role of each participant, and synergistic opportunities. **Letters exceeding the one-page limit will not be considered.**

Full length applications will be invited from meritorious LOIs. They must be prepared according to the guidelines for individual applications, and will be due on **May 3, 2010 by 5:00 p.m. EST.**

Review Mechanism

All proposals will be reviewed by the MRA Grant Review Committee (GRC), comprised of peers with diverse expertise in translational cancer research. Applications will be scored according to the Key Criteria listed above. An additional component of the review process will include input from a lay perspective. MRA will not provide reviewer critiques or evaluations to applicants. A listing of GRC membership and descriptions of the projects funded in 2007-2009 are provided on our website, www.melanomaresearchalliance.org.

Award Administration

Upon acceptance of the award, the PI and his/her employing institution will be required to sign an Award Letter indicating acceptance of the MRA's award Terms and Conditions. MRA requires certification through Proposal Central of compliance with Human Subjects and Animal Care Assurance requirements as applicable. **Full term funding will be contingent upon review of annual progress reports.**

For multi-institutional projects, the PIs must verify, in advance, that funds can be transferred from the institution of the Contact PI to the institutions of the collaborating PIs. This requirement can be easily met by attaching a letter stating a commitment to comply with this requirement from the Contact PI's business or sponsored programs office.

MRA Scientific Retreat

PIs will be invited to attend the annual MRA Scientific Retreat and will be asked at least once during the award period to present research findings made under their awards.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: When are the proposals due?

A: The Individual Investigator proposals are due on December 1, 2009. Letters of Intent for Team Science submissions are due on February 1, 2010. Full Team Science proposals, if invited, are due on May 3, 2010. All proposals are due by 5:00 p.m. EST on the due date.

Q: Is an academic faculty appointment a hard and fast rule?

A: It is preferred, but evidence of independent investigator status and an environment conducive and supportive of translational research is required.

Q: How are proposals submitted?

A: All proposals should be submitted via Proposal Central, <http://proposalcentral.altum.com>

Additional Information: Email questions to applications@melanomaresearchalliance.org