

Research Leadership Awards Program – Application Period Extension

Proposal:

Request ICOC approval to extend the period for receipt of applications for the CIRM Research Leadership Awards Program for an additional 18 months, to June 2013. No additional funds for the program are requested.

Program Overview:

The goal of the CIRM Research Leadership Awards is to facilitate the recruitment to California of the most productive and promising early-to-mid career scientists in stem cell biology and regenerative medicine. These awards provide investigators with substantial financial resources and investigative freedom to pursue significant, substantive, and transformative research programs. The awards are designed to provide an incentive for relocation to California and the financial resources to reestablish and accelerate an already flourishing research program.

The Leadership Awards provide six years of funding to support PI salary, lab operations, lab relocation, laboratory equipment, and appropriate indirect and facility costs. Total funds available for each award are up to \$5.5 million.

The application process for the Leadership award involves a single coordinated application prepared by the applicant institution and the candidate. Eligible institutions may submit only one application per year, and institutions that receive an award are not eligible to apply for additional awards. The Grants Working Group (GWG) evaluates applications in three areas: research vision and plans, PI accomplishments and potential, and institutional commitment and environment, as well as evaluating applications based on programmatic considerations. The GWG makes funding recommendations to the ICOC, which makes the final funding decision.

Program History:

The Research Leadership Awards program was approved by the ICOC in August 2009. The board committed \$44 million to fund 8 grants to be awarded over a period of two years. Application deadlines and review cycles have recurred every three months, with the last planned deadline currently scheduled for Nov. 30, 2011. To date, the ICOC has authorized two awards, one to Dr. Robert Wechsler-Reya, Sanford-Burnham Institute, and one to Dr. Peter Coffey, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Extension Rationale:

The recruitment of outstanding established researchers to academic institutions is a particularly challenging and lengthy process. Such individuals are scarce and frequently have numerous opportunities to relocate, gain desirable positions, and obtain generous research resources. Institutions often must compete with one another and with retention offers from the home institution in order to attract and recruit an outstanding candidate. Furthermore, successful recruitment of a leading researcher generally occurs only after a protracted negotiation.

Stem cell leaders from a number of California universities and research institutes have indicated that they are actively seeking to recruit scientists, and a number have candidates they are about to submit, who would be ideal candidates for CIRM Research Leadership Awards. Some of these recruitments will advance to a stage appropriate for award application only after the current term of the program ends (e.g. in Spring or Summer, 2012). By extending the application period, additional institutions will benefit from the Leadership Awards, and the key goal of the program, to bolster California stem cell science by recruiting emerging leaders in the field, will be more fully realized.