

RFA Concept Proposal: CIRM New Faculty Awards

The use of stem cells in regenerative medicine is a new area of research that requires a cadre of well-trained scientists and clinicians to develop treatments and cures. Current levels of federal funding pose difficulties especially for investigators in the early stages of their careers. New investigators find that undertaking innovative projects is challenging because of tremendous pressures to obtain results, publish scientific papers, and acquire grants quickly. This is particularly true for embryonic stem cell research where restrictions and uncertainty in federal funding discourage scientists from starting new projects in this exciting but risky field. Physician-scientists, who are critical to the development of translational projects face these challenges as well as significant constraints on their time available for research due to clinical service.

To address the need for a new generation of stem cell scientists, CIRM proposes the "New Faculty Awards", in accordance with the Scientific Personnel Development Initiatives of the Scientific Strategic Plan. These awards will fund promising Ph.D. and physician-scientists in the critical early years of their careers as independent investigators. CIRM intends to provide salary and research support for up to five years to help create a stable environment for building innovative and robust stem cell programs. Physician-scientists who successfully complete their research programs may be eligible for CIRM funds to help repay medical school loans. Because effective stem cell-derived therapies may arise from unexpected sources, the New Faculty Awards will support a broad range of research using the full spectrum of stem cell types and experimental approaches. Particular consideration will be given to research applications that cannot be funded by current federal mechanisms.

CIRM New Faculty Awards will be offered to investigators who are within six years of beginning their first independent position at the time of application. Successful applicants must hold full-time, faculty-level positions and be employed by an academic or not-for-profit research institution in California at the time of approval for funding by the ICOC. Academic institutions with an accredited medical school may submit up to four applications in support of two new Ph.D. and two new physician-scientist faculty members. Applicant institutions without a medical school may submit up to two applications in support of either new Ph.D. or new physician-scientist faculty. We propose to fund 15 5-year awards to Ph.D. faculty (project costs of up to \$300,000 per year) and 10 to physician-scientist faculty (project costs of up to \$400,000 per year) at a total cost of \$85 million for this round of the program. There will be a repeat call for applications in 2-3 years.

Provisional Timetable

RFA Release
Review of Applications
ICOC Approval for Funding

Summer 2007
Fall 2007
Winter 2007-08