

# Funding Opportunity For Summer Program To Accelerate Regenerative Medicine Knowledge (SPARK)

EDUC 3



REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS  
06.24.21



# Funding Opportunity For Summer Program To Accelerate Regenerative Medicine Knowledge (SPARK)

EDUC 3

## Objective

The mission of California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) is to accelerate stem cell treatments to patients with unmet medical needs.

The objectives of the SPARK Training Program are to:

- Inspire, educate and motivate high school students to become involved in CIRM's mission of accelerating stem cell treatments to patients with unmet medical needs
- Provide summer training opportunities and broaden participation in stem cell, gene therapy and related research to high school students who represent the diversity of California's population and who might not otherwise have opportunities to take part in summer research internships due to socioeconomic constraints

## Award Information

### How is the SPARK Training Program structured?

Each SPARK program will be led by a qualified Program Director based at the awardee institution who will be responsible for the management and coordination of all activities supported by the program as well as the recruitment of diverse and qualified students. Research internships, which are a central component of these programs, will take place at host laboratories at the awardee's institution that are non-profit research universities or institutes, or at a partnering institution with a stem cell, gene therapy or regenerative medicine focus.



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### **What is the award amount and duration?**

The CIRM Governing Board has allocated \$5.1 million to support up to 10 awards for a duration of five years. Each award will provide direct project costs of up to \$463,000. Non-profit organizations may request up to 10% indirect costs on eligible expenses. CIRM will not fund facilities costs. The maximum total award amount per program over five years is \$509,000.

### **How will funds be awarded?**

Awards will be made in the form of a grant. CIRM will disburse funds pursuant to a Notice of Award. CIRM will only disburse trainee internship funds upon submission of a signed Intern Appointment Form for an eligible trainee.

### **What activities will CIRM fund?**

#### **1. Trainee Funds**

The award will provide up to the following amounts per trainee:

- a. Trainee Stipends — \$Up to 4,500 for a full-time research internship of up to 8 weeks duration.
- b. Travel funds – up to \$750. These funds must be used to cover travel costs for travel to attend the CIRM sponsored poster day held at the end of each summer. Excess funds may be used to cover other program-related travel for the trainee.

#### **2. Program Administration Funds**

Up to \$4,000 per year per trainee may be requested for administrative support salaries; activities focused on patient engagement, community outreach or other activities that enhance the educational value of the program; and mentor stipend or supplies budget for the host lab, if appropriate. Adequate justification for all Program Administration expenses must be provided.

## Eligibility

### **What types of projects are eligible for funding?**

**(1) To be eligible, the proposed program must include the following components:**

- a. **Internships at host laboratories**, in which trainees participate in hands-on, regenerative medicine-related research involving stem cells, gene therapy and/or other critical research relevant to understanding or treating a human condition or disease, culminating in a poster presentation at a CIRM-hosted event.
- b. **Auxiliary Educational Activities** that prepare students for internship research and augment the internship experience.



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- c. **Patient (or Patient Advocate) and Healthcare Engagement Activities** designed to engage trainees with patients/patient advocates. As one component of these activities, programs might include participation in blood donation, bone marrow registry or similar awareness campaign.
- d. **Community Outreach and Education Activities** in which trainees participate in educating diverse California communities about stem cells, gene therapy and regenerative medicine, and gain awareness of socio-economic issues and disparities around health care and access. For example, trainees can utilize social media accounts to share videos or pictures of their internship activities and research.
- e. **An Alumni Tracking Plan** to enable annual assessment and reporting on college acceptance, choice of major, and post-graduate employment positions taken by program alumni.
- f. **A Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan** that addresses:
  - How the Research Training Program will promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the development and implementation of the program;
  - How the grantee institution will conduct outreach and recruit qualified persons for training who are representative of the diverse California population; and
  - What the applicant institution has done previously to support DEI.

**(2) Must be ready to initiate work on the funded project within 60 days of approval**

Given the urgency of CIRM's mission, all approved awardees must initiate work on the funded project within 60 days of approval and authorization for funding by the Application Review Subcommittee of the Independent Citizens' Oversight Committee.

**(3) Application must be accurate and complete**

All required components of the application must be completed and may not contain false or inaccurate information.

**(4) Applicant must be in "good standing"**

In order to be eligible to apply for CIRM funding, an applicant must certify that it is in good standing, as follows:

- a. If in existence for less than five years:
  - (i) The applicant's Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, and Program Director must not have been convicted of, or currently under investigation for, crimes involving fraud/misappropriation; and
  - (ii) The applicant must have accounting systems in place that are capable of tracking CIRM funds.
- b. The Program Director or key personnel must not be currently under investigation for research misconduct by the applicant institution or a funding agency, and must not be currently debarred by HHS Office of Research Integrity.



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**Who can apply?**

Applicant institutions must be California public universities or colleges, or private, non-profit academic institutions in California that are accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) or other California-based organizations with a documented track record of successfully delivering laboratory based research training to high school students. Applicant institutions must have an existing high school summer internship program that the SPARK program would supplement. Non-profit means either: (1) a governmental entity of the State of California; or (2) a legal entity that is tax exempt under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3) and California Revenue and Taxation Code section 23701d.

Each eligible applicant institution may submit only a single application. The applicant institution may choose to collaborate with one or more additional institutions in order to provide broader program access to candidate trainees/interns. Collaborating institutions must be California based organizations with appropriate personnel and research facilities to accommodate high school summer interns. Partnering institutions may not separately submit an application.

**Who can serve as the Program Director (PD)?**

The PD is the individual who directs the planning and execution of the summer research internship program including primary responsibility for all programmatic and administrative aspects of the program and adherence to budgetary, policy, and reporting requirements. The PD must be an employee with relevant experience at the applicant institution or be accountable for the conduct of the proposed project to the applicant organization through a formal contract.

**Schedule and Deadlines**

<b>Applications Due</b>	September 21, 2021, 2:00pm Pacific Time
<b>Grants Working Group (GWG) Review</b>	Approximately 60 days post submission
<b>ICOC Review and Approval</b>	Approximately 90 days post submission
<b>Award Start</b>	Within 60 days of award approval (i.e., approximately 130 days post submission)

## Application Review Information

### **What is the process for evaluating an application?**



#### **Eligibility Review**

CIRM will assess whether the applicant and proposed program meets eligibility requirements under this RFA. If CIRM determines, in its sole discretion, that an applicant or proposed program does not meet the eligibility requirements, CIRM will notify the applicant of its decision, and the application will not be reviewed.

#### **Scientific Review**

The scientific and educational merit of each application will be assessed by the CIRM Grants Working Group (GWG), which is composed of fifteen subject matter experts from outside California, seven patient advocate and nurse members of the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee (ICOC), and the Chair of the ICOC. The list of scientific members who may participate in the GWG review can be found at [http://www.cirm.ca.gov/WorkingGroup\\_GrantsReview](http://www.cirm.ca.gov/WorkingGroup_GrantsReview). The composition of the ICOC can be viewed at <http://www.cirm.ca.gov/GoverningBoard>.

The fifteen participating scientists on the GWG will evaluate the applications and score them according to scientific and technical merit, applying the review criteria described below. The GWG scientific members will score each application and the full GWG will make funding recommendations to the ICOC's Application Review Subcommittee.

The ICOC's Application Review Subcommittee will make final funding decisions giving consideration to the GWG recommendations and any CIRM team recommendations.

#### **Confidentiality**

CIRM's confidentiality and conflict screening rules apply to everyone who will have access to applications or who will attend any review meeting in which confidential information is discussed, including but not limited to CIRM team members, reviewers and members of the ICOC. (Per Gov. Code §6254.5(e) non-public records may be disclosed to government agencies under confidentiality agreements.)

### **How will the educational and technical merit of an application be evaluated?**

Scientific members of the GWG will evaluate and score applications based on the following key criteria:

#### **1. Does the proposed program hold the necessary significance and potential for impact?**

Is the proposed training program likely to have a meaningful, positive impact on trainees' awareness of stem cell science and regenerative medicine? Is the program likely to foster a commitment among trainees to the CIRM Mission of accelerating the delivery of stem cell-based therapies to patients? Is the program likely to impact trainees representing the broad diversity of California's population, including, for

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example, students from underserved and socio-economically disadvantaged communities?

## **2. Is the training program well planned and designed?**

Is the training program appropriately planned and designed to provide all trainees a quality, first-hand experience in stem/progenitor cells, gene therapy and/or other critical laboratory research relevant to understanding or treating a human condition? Are there robust plans in place to support all required core training activities? Does the program provide suitable mentorship for all SPARK trainees? Has an adequate plan been established for annual tracking of trainee outcomes, including college acceptance, choice of major, and post-graduate employment positions taken by program alumni? Does the program propose a well-considered diversity, equity and inclusion plan?

## **3. Is the proposed program practical and achievable?**

Does the program have access to all the necessary resources, including personnel and key partnerships, to implement and carry out the proposed training program? Is the program director appropriately qualified to manage and lead the training program? Does the institutional commitment and track record support achievement of program objectives? Are appropriate mechanisms established for the recruitment of qualified students with diverse backgrounds?

## **4. Has the track record and outcomes of a prior training program demonstrated success?**

Does the program have outcomes reported for prior CIRM-funded or other similar training or educational programs that demonstrate success in recruiting qualified students of diverse cultural and socio-economically challenged backgrounds? Does quantitation of program outcomes demonstrate success (for example, previously enrolled trainees have gained admission into a college in a science related field)?

## **Application Components and Submission**

### **How does one apply?**

Applications must be completed online using the CIRM Grants Management Portal at <https://grants.cirm.ca.gov>. Any prospective Program Director (PD) must create a login in the system to access application materials and apply. Applications are available in the system only to the PD. A PD may submit only a single application in response to this RFA.

Applications are due by 2:00 PM (Pacific Time) on September 21, 2021.



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### **What is required to prepare a complete application?**

The Grants Management Portal provides instructions for completing all the necessary components and submitting a final application. The application is designed to collect information necessary to appropriately evaluate the proposal and for CIRM to rapidly initiate an award if approved for funding. Applicants are required to indicate key personnel involved in the program, describe how the program will address the RFA objectives, and provide a detailed plan of proposed activities. Letters confirming support and commitment of the applicant institution and any partnering organizations should be included.

The main body of the proposal contains the following sections:

- 1. Program Summary:** description of the proposed program of training including the numbers of trainees, the nature and scope of courses and ancillary educational activities, and the range of research opportunities available to trainees in the program.
- 2. Trainee Selection and Placement:** description of how trainees (including trainees with diverse cultural and socio-economically challenged backgrounds) will be recruited and selected for the program and how trainees will be placed in internships.
- 3. Auxiliary Educational Activities:** description of short course/workshop on preparing the trainees for their research activities prior to their project start date as well as how trainee progress and accomplishment will be assessed throughout the summer program.
- 4. Patient and Healthcare Engagement Activities:** description of planned activities, nature of trainee involvement and potential to enhance trainees' understanding of the challenges of being a patient.
- 5. Community Outreach and Education Activities:** description of planned activities focused on sharing experiences and/or educating diverse California communities about stem cells, gene therapy and regenerative medicine, and to gain awareness of socio-economic issues and disparities around health care and access.
- 6. Alumni Tracking Plan:** description of plans to annually collect and report outcome of program alumni including college acceptance, choice of major, any degrees achieved, and post-graduate employment positions.
- 7. Program Leadership and Administration:** description of plans for the educational and administrative leadership and program oversight; description of the qualifications for the Program Director.
- 8. Prior Program Track Record and Outcomes:** description of prior Creativity or SPARK Awards (if applicable) or other similar program including success in recruiting qualified students of diverse cultural and socio-economically challenged backgrounds and quantitation of program outcomes (success rate of previously enrolled trainees that have gained admission into a college in a science related field). Applicants with previous SPARK awards should describe whether any specific challenges in delivering the program were encountered and if so, what new measures are proposed to mitigate them.
- 9. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan:**
  - How the training program will promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the development and implementation of the program;
  - How the applicant team will conduct outreach and recruit qualified persons for training who are representative of the diverse California population, including,



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for example, trainees who: (a) grew up in low-income families or come from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities; (b) are the first in their family to attend college; or (c) have overcome educational, economic, physical (e.g., disability), or other barriers to opportunities; and

- What the applicant team has done previously to support DEI, including:
  - (a) how the applicant team has demonstrated awareness of inequities and challenges faced by traditionally underrepresented communities;
  - (b) the applicant team's demonstrated commitment to tangibly promote a culture where diversity, equity, and inclusion are valued; and
  - (c) the applicant team's track record of supporting activities that reduce barriers in research for traditionally underrepresented communities, including in prior CIRM-funded training programs, if applicable.

Because CIRM is prohibited from taking race, ethnicity, national origin and gender into account in making grant decisions, applicants should refrain from focusing exclusively on race, ethnicity, national origin, or gender in describing their team personnel. However, it is allowable and expected that presentation of trainee outcomes data and trainee outreach plans will necessarily refer to race, ethnicity, national origin, and gender.

**10. Internship-host Institutions: (if applicable):** list of any partnering institutions with which agreements or arrangements for trainee placement have been established or planned.

#### **Who are Key Personnel?**

In the application, we ask you to identify by name pertinent Key Personnel and their specific roles in the program. Key Personnel include the Program Director and any key administrative personnel. Do not include internship-host mentors, advisory committee members, or internship host coordinators in this section.

#### **What should one know before preparing the budget?**

All budgetary requests must be indicated on the online application form. Limits for each budget category are indicated above (Award Information: [Award Information: What Activities Will CIRM Fund?](#)) and must be observed. Budget justification for "Program Administration Funds" should provide sufficient detail to allow evaluation of the appropriateness of the costs in relation to the activities proposed. Budget justification for "Trainee Funds" is not required; however, the number of trainee positions should be justified in the "Program Summary" section of the proposal.

#### **How much can an applicant claim for indirect costs?**

Indirect costs will be limited to 10% of the total direct costs (Trainee Funds and Program Administration Funds).

Applicant institutions are not allowed to incur additional Indirect Costs on any subcontract costs proposed for the project.



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## Award Administration

### Issuance of Award

A CIRM SPARK Award is issued via a Grant, which is the formal contract that defines the terms and conditions of an award and documents the commitment of funds from CIRM.

### Reporting

Grantees will be required to provide annual written progress and financial reports to CIRM. SPARK Programs also will be required to submit Intern Appointment Forms describing the planned laboratory placement, mentor, and research activities/project for each trainee prior to start of the internship. CIRM will only disburse trainee internship funds upon submission of a signed Intern Appointment Form for an eligible trainee.

### Fund Carry-forward and No-Cost Extensions

CIRM allows carry-forward of any obligated trainee funds from one grant year to the next. All unobligated trainee funds at the end of each trainee internship must be returned to CIRM and cannot be used to fund additional internships, additional program administration funding or for any other purpose unless specifically approved in advance by CIRM for exceptional circumstances. CIRM will allow carry-forward of unobligated program administration funds from one grant year to the next, in order to allow use of those funds in a way that best serves the trainees.

No-cost extensions (NCEs) are only permitted under exceptional circumstances, where an extension would facilitate the completion of a trainee's normal internship term; such an extension would require specific approval by CIRM.

## Contacts

For information about this RFA:

Kelly A. Shepard, Ph.D.

Associate Director, Discovery, Translation and Education

California Institute for Regenerative Medicine

Email: [kshepard@cirm.ca.gov](mailto:kshepard@cirm.ca.gov)

For information about the application and review process:

Gilberto R. Sambrano, Ph.D.

VP of Portfolio Development and Review

California Institute for Regenerative Medicine

Email: [gsambrano@cirm.ca.gov](mailto:gsambrano@cirm.ca.gov)