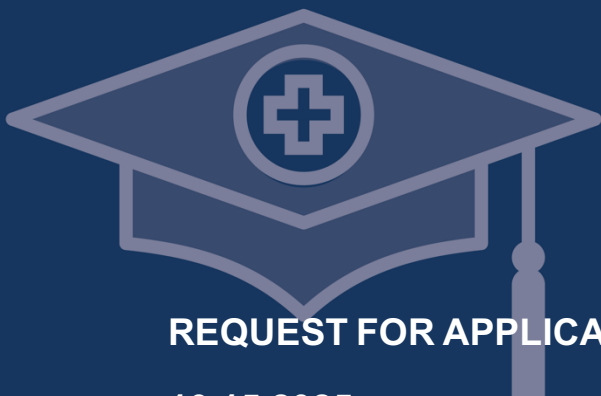


Funding Opportunity to Manage the 2026 SPARK Annual Meeting

EDUC 1.5



REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

10.15.2025

Funding Opportunity to Manage the 2026 SPARK Annual Meeting

EDUC 1.5

Objective

The mission of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) is to accelerate world class science to deliver transformative regenerative medicine treatments in an equitable manner to a diverse California and world.

The objective of this request for applications (RFA) is to solicit a highly qualified applicant to develop and manage the 2026 annual meeting in support of the CIRM SPARK program.

Award Information

What is the SPARK Program?

The SPARK program provides hands-on summer training opportunities in stem cell and gene therapy related research at leading stem cell institutes to California high school students. The SPARK meeting is a one to one-and-a-half-day program that features the scientific accomplishments of these students in the form of posters and presentations.

What activities will CIRM support?

This RFA will support the development and conduct of the 2026 CIRM SPARK meeting through CIRM's Conference Grant Program. Under this mechanism, the Awardee will retain the primary responsibility for planning, directing, and executing the proposed event; however, the CIRM team will work with the Awardee to review and approve design and implementation of the event during the planning phase to make sure it is responsive to specific CIRM needs. The meeting conducted under this RFA will showcase the scientific accomplishments of the student participants, create networking opportunities, and feature presentations from scientists, program alumni or other relevant participants.

More information about this CIRM Program can be found on the CIRM website at <https://www.cirm.ca.gov/our-impact/training-tomorrows-scientists>.

CIRM resources will support the following required core activities under this opportunity:

Direct meeting logistics:

- Participation in regular conference planning calls with CIRM
- Venue and site selection
- Arranging hotel blocks, including lodging and complimentary registration for up to 10 CIRM team members
- Food and beverage planning within the CIRM per diem requirements
- Development of meeting agenda
- Floor plan and site map preparation
- Speak and panelist coordination, including identification of speakers, collecting presentation materials, and confirming topics and logistics
- Schedule meetings and develop contracts/service agreements with core planning team, vendors, and service providers

Pre-conference logistics:

- Website management including website design, online registration, attendee abstract submission during online registration
- Preparation of digital or printed attendee directory/abstract booklet
- Floor plan and site map preparation including diagrams for break out rooms, speaker ready rooms, food and beverage spaces, event spaces, and poster room environments
- Poster session management, including rental of portable poster boards, set-up, and return
- Coordination of food and beverage services and ensuring compliance with the California State reimbursement requirements
- Coordination of travel, parking and housing as needed for attendees and guests
- Discussing and arranging appropriate signage/map for posters and other conference related events
- Printing of Certificates of Completion for trainees from CIRM Template
- Solicitation and management of outside sponsorship (optional, but encouraged)

Meeting day requirements:

- Venue set-up
- Onsite conference registration and management
- Work with hotel/venue contact onsite to coordinate food and beverage and event/meeting logistics
- Manage all AV requirements as needed during the conferences
- Management of all speaker sessions and/or workshops throughout the conference
- Conference break-down
- Security management

Post Meeting requirements:

- Timely reporting to CIRM on meeting results
- Provide photos from event to CIRM Staff

Meeting Information

For purposes of this RFA, CIRM anticipates the SPARK meeting will be a 1-1.5-day event that includes a networking reception and possible short activity the preceding evening, held at a suitable venue in California in August 2026 on date(s) approved by CIRM. The Conference must be planned to accommodate the following:

- Up to 275 attendees.
- 130 room nights (15 of which are for speakers and 10 of which are for CIRM staff and paid for by this grant).
- Budget sufficient for 1 breakfast, 2 lunches, 3 refreshment breaks; and 1 dinner/reception of 130 people (all paid by this grant at CIRM per diem rates¹) If the event plan ends up calling for fewer meals, the budget should reflect appropriate reductions.
- The SPARK meeting award provides up to \$118,000 for all eligible costs and may not exceed this amount.

Solicitation of outside sponsorship is highly encouraged but not required. CIRM will approve any prospective sponsors to ensure that they are appropriate.

Eligibility

What types of applicants are eligible to apply?

(1) The applicant team and/ or applicant organization must satisfy the following requirements:

- Applicant organization has at least five years of experience in hosting scientific/educational events
- Program Director and one additional staff each have at least five years of experience organizing scientific/educational events
- A track record including events that have required working with individuals and institutions not connected to the applicant organization
- Demonstrated ability to understand and exploit the role of scientific conferences in learning the scientific progress for young scientists

¹ The maximum per-person expenditures for meals and light refreshments may not exceed the amounts defined in [CIRM's Business Meeting Expenditure](#) policy, which are currently: Breakfast \$34.00; Lunch \$54.00; Dinner \$94.00; Light refreshments \$22.00. **Please Review CIRM's policy prior to submitting an application for updates**, to ensure that the most current allowances can be considered.

The maximum per-person expenditures listed above include the cost of the food and beverages, labor, sales tax, delivery charges, and other service fees. Download CIRM's [Business Meeting Expenditure Policy](#) document (p.14) for full details.

(2) The conference must be held in California by an eligible applicant and have a qualified Program Director (PD)

The conference must be conducted at a location in California. California-based and non-California-based organizations (for-profit and non-profit) may use CIRM funds for eligible conference costs incurred in California. Foreign institutions are not eligible to apply for conference grant support.

Non-profit organization 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) and California Revenue and Taxation Code section 23701d.

(3) The application must be accurate and complete.

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

Schedule, Deadlines, and Budget

Applications Due	2:00 pm (PDT/PST) on December 2, 2025
Presidential Review and Approval	Approximately 60 days post submission
Budget	Up to \$118,000 for all eligible costs
Proposed Conference Date Window	August 2026
Meeting Length	Up to 1.5 days

Application Review Information

What is the process for evaluating an application?

Pre-submission Consultation

In accordance our mission, CIRM is committed to funding scientific conferences that focus on regenerative medicine research and educational programs to train future scientists. Prospective applicants are encouraged, but not required, to contact CIRM with questions to discuss their proposal, including its eligibility, before applying for a Conference Grant.

Eligibility Review

CIRM will assess whether the application meets the eligibility parameters required under this program. If CIRM determines, in its sole discretion, that an application does not meet the eligibility parameters of the program, CIRM will notify the applicant of its decision and cease all further action on the application.

Application Review

CIRM's governing board, the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee (ICOC), has delegated to the President of CIRM authority to review and make funding decisions for CIRM-initiated conferences.

The following criteria will be considered in the review of applications and funding decisions:

1. Experience and Track Record

Do the applicant organization and Program Director have the appropriate experience to manage and perform the proposed activities? Does the applicant organization have a proven commitment to educational conferences in science, medicine, biotechnology, and/or science education fields?

2. Resources

Does the applicant organization have the necessary resources to adequately manage the meeting and carry out all the required core activities in a timely fashion? Has the applicant organization appointed an appropriate team that will collaborate effectively with CIRM to understand needs, implement tasks, and manage the process?

3. Overall Value

Does the proposal offer a good value to CIRM by providing quality event management services for a reasonable price that is commensurate with use of California public funds? Are proposed costs appropriately justified?

4. Alignment with CIRM's Mission

Are the proposed activities and budget designed to specifically promote and support the CIRM SPARK program and CIRM's mission throughout the conference?

5. Engagement and Outreach

Has the applicant organization outlined a plan to conduct outreach and recruit qualified persons for the conference that will ensure a broad spectrum of perspectives?

Confidentiality

CIRM's confidentiality and conflict screening rules apply to everyone who will have access to applications or who will attend any review conference 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 non-public records may be disclosed to government agencies under confidentiality

agreements.)

Application Components and Submission

How does one apply?

Applications must be completed and submitted online using the CIRM Grants Management Portal at <https://grants.cirm.ca.gov>. Any prospective 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 a given review cycle and may not submit additional applications during the review period.

Applications are due by 2:00pm (Pacific Time) on Tuesday December 2, 2025.

What components does an application include?

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 project, describe how the proposal addresses the objective of the funding opportunity, provide a detailed plan of proposed activities, and provide a budget for the meeting.

The application for CIRM Conference Grants consists of an Application Information and Proposal Form (Web-based document) and can be found at <https://www.cirm.ca.gov/researchers/funding-opportunities>

The application for CIRM Conference Grant includes the following sections:

1. **Key Personnel:** List of main personnel who will contribute to the execution of the project and a description of their role.
2. **Budget:** Summary of costs by category requested from CIRM.

All allowable costs for research and conference grants are detailed in the CIRM [Grants Administration Policy for Discovery, Translation and Education Projects](#).

Allowable Costs for CIRM-Initiated Conference Grants

- Conference facility and equipment rental (including easels, poster display boards, tables/chairs and associated taxes and service fees)
- Transportation, parking, lodging and per diem or subsistence allowances for the organizers and speakers and other costs
- Hotel room charges and fees (overnight accommodations for CIRM staff and speakers)

- Honoraria for invited speakers
- AV equipment rental and planning costs (e.g., audio/visual and internet connectivity) (and associated taxes and service fees)
- Meeting planning and management costs that include up to 10% justified salary support for the Program Director for time spent conducting conference-specific activities; reasonable salary support for administrative staff time conducting conference-specific activities; and meeting planner costs
- Production, publicity and supply costs (website development, program printing or electronic media, name tags, etc.) needed for conduct of the conference (only if received for use during the budget period)
- Meals (food and non-alcoholic beverages) served to attendees during the conference
- Awards for students in the form of tangible gifts (no cash-based gifts including gift cards are allowed)
- Other items as described in the [CIRM Grants Administration Policy](#)

These costs are allowable whether incurred by the applicant or by contracted vendors providing the above services needed to conduct the conference.

Non-allowable Costs for CIRM-Initiated Conference Grants

Non-allowable costs include purchase of equipment; visas; passports; entertainment; alcoholic beverages; personal telephone calls; laundry charges; dues; cash awards; alterations or renovations. The [CIRM Grants Administration Policy](#) also indicates unallowable costs. Indirect Costs are not allowable on this award.

3. **Conference Coordination and Logistics Plan:** A description of your ability to work with CIRM to coordinate and plan the Annual SPARK Conference and showcase the SPARK program. Please include a proposed agenda that showcases the SPARK program including the night-before networking reception, likely sessions highlighting the interns' research, SPARK alumni, career development, patient advocacy, general scientific research, and social media/video efforts or other segments you envision at this time.
4. **Experience and Track Record:** A description of the experience of the PD and the applicant institution in the organization and conduct of scientific and educational conferences, including the track record of managing similarly sized conferences in science, medicine, biotechnology, and/or science education fields.
5. **Available Resources:** A description of the resources you have to ensure that the meeting is adequately managed and that all required core activities are carried out in a timely fashion. A description of how an appropriate team will be appointed that can collaborate effectively with CIRM to understand needs, implement tasks, and manage the conference planning and execution process.
6. **Overall Value:** A summary of how this proposal offers a good value to CIRM by providing quality events management services for a reasonable price that is commensurate with use of California public funds, and by appropriately justifying proposed costs.

7. **Engagement and Outreach Plan** A description of how your organization will seek to include a broad spectrum of perspectives in the development and implementation of an Annual SPARK Conference.

Because CIRM is prohibited from taking race, ethnicity, national origin, and gender into account in making grant decisions, applicants should refrain from describing the race, ethnicity, national origin, or gender of applicant organization personnel. However, applicants may describe other characteristics of diversity such as individuals 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.

8. **Supporting Documentation:** Available quotes from service providers, a sample agenda and any other relevant documentation as a single PDF file with table of contents.

Award Administration

Issuance of Award

A CIRM Conference Award is issued via a Notice of Award, which is the formal contract that defines the terms and conditions of an award and documents the commitment of funds from CIRM. The Awardee will be subject to CIRM's Grants Administration Policy for Discovery, Translation, and Education Projects, including the insurance requirements specified therein.

Pandemic or other contingency: If CIRM determines that any of the parameters outlined in the Notice of Award must be changed to accommodate unexpected circumstances, CIRM will work with grantee to determine what re-budgeting is necessary and allowable to enable the meeting to go forward.

Reporting

Awardees will be required to provide written progress and financial reports to CIRM upon completion of the conference. Awardees should include the final conference agenda or program.

Resources

For general information about CIRM's EDUC Programs or the Annual Trainee Network Conference:
Email: education@cirm.ca.gov .

For questions about application review:
Email: review@cirm.ca.gov.

For questions related to budgets or allowable project costs, please consult the Grants Management FAQ on CIRM's website under "For Researchers > Grants > Managing your Grant." For more information on budgets or allowable costs that are not addressed in the above resources, send email correspondence to grantsmanagement@cirm.ca.gov.

Terms used here are defined in CIRM Funding Opportunities: [Common Requirements and Definitions](#).

Appendix

CIRM Regulations

Grant or Loan awards made through this RFA will be subject to all applicable CIRM regulations. These regulations can be found on CIRM's website at <http://www.cirm.ca.gov/reg/default.asp>.