



EDUC8 Awards: Umbrella for CIRM Bridges and COMPASS Funding Opportunities

Concept Plan: For ICOC Approval December 11, 2025

OVERVIEW			
Objective	Prepare undergraduate through master’s level students for career-entry opportunities in regenerative medicine by identifying and supporting untapped talent and producing well-trained, adaptable, and committed professionals for the regenerative medicine workforce.		
Scope	EDUC8 enables training programs that provide relevant coursework, instill key competencies, and support paid, hands-on internships to produce technically skilled individuals who can deliver on CIRM’s mission. An EDUC8 Award may be structured to support a COMPASS Path, a Bridges Path, or both (Dual Path). All paths include patient engagement, community outreach, and strategic mentoring practices for efficient transition of trainees to careers in the life sciences. Innovative recruitment and retention strategies will broaden the participation and perspectives of Californians in the regenerative medicine workforce.		
Recurrence	One funding cycle in 2026; one funding cycle in 2027		
AWARD DETAILS			
Program Path	COMPASS Path	BRIDGES Path	Dual Paths
Max Award Amount	\$3,237,000 total costs	\$4,588,500 total costs	\$6,918,000 total costs
Max Award Duration	5 years		
ELIGIBILITY			
Applicant Organization	All Applicant Organizations		
	Must be a California public university or college, or private, non-profit academic institution that offers regenerative medicine-relevant biology or STEM certificates and/or degrees		
	COMPASS Path Applicants		Bridges and Dual Path Applicants
	Must have an accredited Bachelor’s degree program in above-mentioned disciplines		Must not have CIRM funded Major Facility nor Shared Research Laboratory under Proposition 71
Critical Roles	A Program Director who must commit at least 5% effort. Dual Path Programs must also have a Co-Director who commits at least 5% effort		
Required Expertise	Mentorship Facilitator and Outreach Coordinator		
SCHEDULE AND DEADLINES			
Application Due Dates	Twice, once in 2026 and once in 2027		
GWG Review	Approximately 60 days after application due date		
Award Approval	Approximately 30 days after GWG Review		
Start Date	Will be specified in the Program Announcement		



Background

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.

Key to the achievement of CIRM’s mission is the creation of a skilled work force that can tackle the scientific challenges of today and deliver the innovative solutions of tomorrow. To this end, CIRM supports a portfolio of Education (EDUC) Awards that provide specialized coursework and laboratory research experiences for students and trainees of various levels around the state of California. EDUC Trainees are additionally instilled with a holistic understanding of patient advocacy and community outreach, tying their research to the therapies that will eventually impact the people of California.

In September of 2024, CIRM’s Governing Board, the Independent Citizens’ Oversight Committee (ICOC), approved a Strategic Allocation Framework (SAF) to guide and optimize the value of CIRM’s current and future investments. A major outcome of this exercise was defining an ambitious goal to bolster CIRM’s workforce development programs to address gaps and meet evolving demands in regenerative medicine. Specifically, a recommendation was endorsed to make strategic improvements to the Bridges (EDUC2) and COMPASS (EDUC5) programs by increasing training offerings, diversifying internship opportunities, & increasing integration with CIRM’s Research, Development and Infrastructure programs.

To this end, the EDUC8 Awards were developed as an umbrella mechanism to update and improve CIRM’s Bridges and COMPASS, thereby sustaining the value of existing programs while extending their capacity to meet the evolving needs and technical demands of the regenerative medicine field.

Objective

The objective of EDUC8 is to prepare undergraduate through master’s level students in California for careers in regenerative medicine by identifying and supporting untapped talent and producing well-trained, adaptable, and committed professionals for the regenerative medicine workforce.

Specifically, EDUC8 will enable the development and implementation of training programs that provide relevant coursework, instill key competencies, and support paid, hands-on internships to produce technically skilled individuals who can deliver on CIRM’s mission. EDUC8 Programs include patient engagement, community outreach, and strategic mentoring practices to promote efficient transition of trainees to careers in the life sciences. Innovative recruitment and retention strategies will broaden the participation and perspectives of Californians in the regenerative medicine workforce.

Scope

EDUC8 is an umbrella grant mechanism that provides support for new versions of CIRM’s Bridges (formerly EDUC2) and COMPASS (formerly EDUC5) programs. EDUC8 Awards may be structured as a COMPASS program; a Bridges program; or a Dual Path program, depending on applicant eligibility and resources. Shared and unique elements of each are described below.

Adaptive Outreach and Recruitment Plan (AORP), for identifying and recruiting trainees appropriate for the specific goals of each program, depending on the trainee path supported (for specific details, refer to EDUC8 paths below). The AORP will be developed and executed by a dedicated Key Personnel and must include ongoing evaluation and adaptation to achieve defined goals.

Internships in stem cell biology, gene therapy, or related regenerative medicine fields. Internship host sites may include organizations or entities that play a role in therapy discovery, development, and patient access and which offer training in skills relevant to the evolving regenerative medicine landscape. To facilitate learning of hybrid skillsets, trainees may participate in internships that provide skills or knowledge that complement their primary coursework. **Internship durations and requirements depend on trainee path(s) supported, detailed below.**



Coursework in stem cell/regenerative medicine and additional relevant subjects that are integrated within a trainee’s certificate or degree curriculum. **Required coursework depends on the trainee path(s) supported and is detailed below.**

Patient/Healthcare engagement activities, which are designed to engage trainees with patients or patient advocates and provide insights into the challenges of developing new regenerative medicine therapies.

Community outreach and education opportunities for trainees to engage with community members and share scientific and medical innovations while gaining insight and awareness of those communities’ perspectives and concerns, particularly around healthcare access and representation. As part of this requirement, trainees must participate in a workshop or receive formal training in communicating science to lay audiences and members of the public.

Mentorship and professional development activities structured through a Mentorship Program, led by a dedicated Key Person who will identify and train a small team of individual(s), which may include external advisors. This team will serve as role models for students and bring perspectives representing the breadth of California communities that may not be present in the resident faculty of the academic institution.

Alumni tracking and engagement plan to enable annual assessment and reporting on post-graduate employment positions taken by program alumni, and to encourage their continued participation in Mentorship Programs.

Sharing knowledge, including approaches, outcomes, resources and events within and outside of the institution, and specifically with CIRM via platforms such as the CIRM Hub, to facilitate knowledge-sharing and collaboration across all CIRM workforce development programs.

EDUC8 Structure: Paths and Special Requirements

EDUC8 Programs can be structured to support two different types of training approaches (“paths”) that are tailored to serve two distinct trainee populations. Specific requirements for these paths are elaborated below, including institutional eligibility. Applicants should structure an EDUC8 Program that aligns best with their institution’s teaching and research infrastructure, faculty specialization, resource availability, and other assets of value.

Bridges Path

A Bridges path must be integrated into a regenerative medicine-focused biology or STEM degree or certificate program at an eligible institution (**see Eligibility, below**). Internships take place at partner or “host” sites and must be 6 to 12 months in duration. Internship research is expected to be a full-time activity for which the trainee is compensated with a stipend and appropriate academic credit (determined by the applicant institution).

Bridges Course Requirements

Bridges trainees must take required courses as well as specialized courses that are integrated within a degree program at their home institution. Courses can be offered at the home institution or through an external source as courses, workshops, or other equivalent training. For details on required coursework, refer to Required Activities section below.

Bridges Outreach and Recruitment (Trainee Selection)

Administrators must develop a clear strategy for identifying, recruiting, and selecting appropriate trainees. The plan should include defined goals and expected outcomes, which will be assessed on a regular basis to identify areas for improvement that can be incorporated. Eligible institutions for Bridges path may request support for **up to 10 trainees per year**.



COMPASS Path

A COMPASS path must be integrated within a Bachelor’s degree program at an eligible institution (**see Eligibility, below**). Trainees should be supported for two or more years while they complete required foundational coursework (described below) and participate in internships, which must be the equivalent of 2-3 months full-time work. Applicants intending to host internships at their home institutions must have participating faculty with federal- or CIRM-supported research projects in the above-mentioned disciplines. Applicants without such research infrastructure must partner with another organization to provide appropriate internship opportunities.

COMPASS Foundational Course Requirements

Trainees must complete foundational coursework in stem cell/regenerative medicine that is integrated within their degree curriculum. For details on required coursework, refer to Required Activities section below.

COMPASS Capstone Project Requirements

Trainees must develop a Capstone Project under the guidance of mentor(s), highlighting training outcomes including any co-authorship of publications as part of the research team.

COMPASS Outreach and Recruitment (Trainee Selection)

The AORP (described above) must employ strategies to identify and foster untapped talent within students who may not have prior experience in stem cell biology or life sciences and may otherwise go unrecognized. Each plan must specify innovative approaches to identify and select promising students in lieu of typical practices that have relied on highest SAT scores, grades, educational pedigree, etc. It is expected that EDUC8 leadership will evaluate activities and outcomes to iteratively improve recruitment, selection, and retention of trainees, in collaboration with insights from personnel directing trainee mentoring and professional development.

Eligible institutions for COMPASS path may request support for **up to 10 trainees per year**.

Dual Path

Institutions that are eligible for a Bridges program may opt to propose a “Dual Path” program that can support both Bridges and COMPASS trainees. If feasible, a Dual Path program might also include a flexible or accelerated path for trainees to transition from a COMPASS to a Bridges program. Dual Path proposals must maintain unique features of each path while leveraging resources and sharing activities between all EDUC8 students, regardless of path. These programs are required to have a Co-Director to ensure that the value of independent program features is retained. The Co-Director will have expertise and responsibility for managing either the COMPASS- or Bridges-specific requirements of the Dual Path Program, complementing those of the Director.

Eligible institutions for the Dual (Bridges + COMPASS) Path may **request support for up to 10 Bridges trainees, and up to 10 COMPASS trainees per year**.

Award Amount and Duration

EDUC8 Awards will be made in the form of a grant and will provide up to 5 years of support that includes direct project costs + 10% indirect costs on eligible expenses. The amount requested must be adequately justified and is subject to adjustments prior to the issuance of an award based on assessments by the Grants Working Group (GWG), the CIRM team, or by the Application Review Subcommittee of the ICOC.

Maximum cost categories are as follows:



AWARD COST CATEGORIES				
Program Path		COMPASS	Bridges	Dual Path
Max Award Amount (5 Years)		\$3,237,000	\$4,588,500	\$6,918,000
Direct Project Costs	Total (5 years)*	\$2,995,000	\$4,215,000	\$6,385,000
	Trainee Stipend	\$3,600/month	\$3,600/month	\$3,600/month
	Other Trainee Support**	\$17,100/year	\$21,900/year	Based on trainee path
	Trainee Travel	\$1,200/year	\$1,200/year	\$1,200/year
	Program Administration	\$180,000/year	\$200,000/year	\$215,000/year
Overhead (10% indirect costs, 5 years)		\$242,000	\$373,500	\$533,000

*Based on ten trainees per path per year; Dual Path based on 20 trainees (10 COMPASS, 10 Bridges)

**Other Trainee Support may include tuition, fees, health insurance, and research funds for the host lab

Program Activities

CIRM **will fund** the following activities under this opportunity:

REQUIRED ACTIVITIES	
✓	Development and delivery of appropriate, relevant coursework that includes multidisciplinary exposure and training in core competencies, as well as soft skills and public communication
✓	A formal mentorship and professional development program to guide and support EDUC8 trainees; must include formal training of mentors and dissemination of best practices
✓	Hands on, paid trainee internships at appropriate facilities and host sites, including, for example, regenerative medicine laboratories, Alpha Clinics, CDMOs, CMOs, core facilities, biotech/pharma companies, medical institutes, etc.
✓	Patient/Healthcare engagement and community outreach activities
✓	Participation of trainees in a CIRM-sponsored conference
✓	<p>Bridges Trainees: Specialized courses integrated within a certificate, bachelor's, or master's degree program in a regenerative medicine-related science, and the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An advanced stem cell culture techniques course or equivalent • A Data Sharing and Science Course/Workshop, • Principles of translational research, drug development and/or regulatory affairs • Communicating Science to the Public • Research Ethics
✓	<p>COMPASS Trainees: Foundational coursework in stem cell/regenerative medicine, integrated within a bachelor's program that includes an introduction to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAIR principles of data sharing (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) • Good research habits (planning, documentation, time management) • Principles of translational research • Specialized options of value, for example computational biology, bioengineering, data science or analysis, statistics, etc. • Communicating Science to the Public • Research Ethics
✓	Advising and career/professional development
✓	Adaptive Outreach and Recruitment



✓	Alumni tracking and engagement
✓	Sharing of knowledge and resources generated through Award

ALLOWABLE ACTIVITIES	
✓	Developing/implementing a general education course or workshop about regenerative medicine that includes discussion of how the influence of genetic, environmental and/or other external factors may impact research and therapy development or accessibility for California populations
✓	Assembling advisory panels to provide relevant community perspectives on prospective trainee outreach, recruitment, and appointment
✓	Partnering with CIRM INFR facilities for tours, workshops, courses, certifications, community engagement, etc.
✓	Hosting K-12 students, families, or community members for tours and/or scientific/regenerative medicine themed educational events

CIRM **will not fund** the following activities under this opportunity:

UNALLOWABLE ACTIVITIES	
✗	Costs incurred on or before the date of ICOC approval
✗	Activities already budgeted or paid for under a prior, existing or pending CIRM award, or which are already supported by another funder

Provisional timetable

The EDUC8 funding opportunity will be offered annually for two cycles. The timeline of each funding cycle is as follows:

PROVISIONAL TIMETABLE	
Applications Open	Once in 2026 and once in 2027
Applications Due	Approximately 30 days after applications open
Grants Working Group (GWG) Review	Approximately 60 days after applications due
Application Review Subcommittee (ARS) Award Approval	Approximately 30 days after Grants Working Group Review
Award Start	Will be specified in the Program Announcement

Eligibility

All the following requirements must be fully satisfied for an application to be accepted and considered for funding by CIRM. Requirements marked with a * incorporate by reference the requirements and definitions described in **CIRM Funding Opportunities: Common Requirements and Definitions**, which may be amended from time to time by CIRM.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS	
1	Programs must be led by a qualified Program Director (PD) who commits at least 5% effort.



2	Dual Paths programs (which support both Bridges and COMPASS paths simultaneously) must have a Co-Director who commits at least 5% effort.
3	The applicant team must include personnel dedicated to mentorship and trainee recruitment.
4	An application must include all Required Activities for the type of trainee supported.
5	<p>Applicant organizations must meet the following requirements based on trainee type:</p> <p>To support Bridges trainees, applicant institutions must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a California public university, college, or private, non-profit academic institution accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) and which did not receive a CIRM funded Major Facility or Shared Research Laboratory Award under Proposition 71. • Have either 1) a bachelor’s or master’s degree program in cell and molecular biology, biotechnology, biomedical sciences or an equivalent discipline, or 2) a certificate or associate degree program in biotechnology or biomedical technology or equivalent <p>To support COMPASS trainees, applicant institutions must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a California public university, college, or private, non-profit academic institution • Have an accredited bachelor’s degree program in biology, bioengineering, biomedical sciences, or other STEM disciplines relevant to regenerative medicine
6	The applicant institution must not have an active or pending EDUC8 Award.
7	The application must be complete and accurate.
8	The applicant must be in good standing*.
9	An applicant organization may only submit a single EDUC8 application per funding cycle under this opportunity.
10	Internship host sites must be located in California and may include biotech/pharma companies, R1 institutions with regenerative medicine research and infrastructure, clinical trial sites, manufacturing centers, CDMOs, and other organizations or entities that play a role in therapy discovery, development, and patient access. Host sites must also have suitable mentors to support trainees during internship.
11	The applicant must be ready to initiate work on the funded project within the time frame to be specified in the Program Announcement.