



EDUC3 Awards: Funding Opportunity for Summer Programs to Accelerate Regenerative Medicine Knowledge (SPARK)

Concept Plan: For ICOC Approval December 11, 2025

| OVERVIEW | |
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| Objective | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To inspire, educate, and motivate high school students to become involved in CIRM's mission to accelerate world-class science and deliver transformative regenerative medicine treatments in an equitable manner to a diverse California and world To provide summer training opportunities and broaden participation in stem cell, gene therapy, and related research to high school students, including those who might not otherwise have opportunities for summer research internships due to social, geographic, or other constraints |
| Scope | SPARK Awards support mentored, hands-on summer internships for high school students in regenerative medicine related science. Each program is led by a qualified program director who is responsible for coordinating all activities supported by the program, including recruitment and selection of qualified trainees and tracking program alumni. Additional activities include educational enhancements, patient engagement, community outreach, and participation in a culminating summer conference. To broaden internship possibilities, an applicant institution may collaborate with other organizations to provide broader program access to candidate trainees/interns. |
| Recurrence | This is a one-time funding opportunity |
| AWARD DETAILS | |
| Max Award Amount | \$704,000 |
| Max Award Duration | 5 years |
| ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS | |
| Applicant Organization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be a California public university or college, or private, non-profit academic institution accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC); or a California Organization with a documented track record of successfully delivering laboratory-based research training to high school students Must have, or have had within the last two years at the time of application, a high school summer internship program |
| Collaborating Institutions | Must have sites in California with appropriate personnel and facilities to accommodate high school summer interns |
| Program Director | Must have experience administering educational programs for high school students |



| SCHEDULE AND DEADLINES | |
|------------------------|---|
| Application Due Date | Once in 2026 |
| GWG Review | Approximately 90 days after application due date |
| Award Approval | Approximately 60 days after GWG Review |
| Start Date | Will be specified in the Request for Applications |

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. 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. One key 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.

To this end, the EDUC3 Awards were renewed, thereby sustaining the value of existing programs while extending the scope of internship projects, updating award amounts, and encouraging collaboration with CIRM Infrastructure and R&D programs.

Objective

The objective of the Summer Program to Accelerate Regenerative Medicine Knowledge (SPARK) is to provide summer training opportunities and broaden participation in stem cell, gene therapy, and related research to high school students, including those who might not otherwise have opportunities for summer research internships due to social, geographic, or other constraints. Through summer lab internships, community outreach, and patient engagement, CIRM hopes to inspire, educate, and motivate high school students to become involved in CIRM’s mission to accelerate world-class science and deliver transformative regenerative medicine treatments in an equitable manner to a diverse California and world.

Scope

Each SPARK program must include the following components:

- **Trainee recruitment and selection plan**, to raise awareness and provide opportunities for qualified persons across California, including those who might not otherwise have opportunities for summer research internships due to social, geographic, or other constraints.
- **Summer internships**, in which trainees participate in hands-on, regenerative medicine-related research that is relevant to human disease. Internships can be supported for up to 12 weeks and must take place in appropriate host laboratories at the applicant institution or at a collaborating organization.
- **Patient/Healthcare engagement activities**, designed to engage trainees with patients and patient advocates and provide insights into the challenges of developing new cell therapies and drugs.
- **Community outreach and education**, in which trainees participate in educating diverse California communities about stem cells, gene therapy and regenerative medicine, and gain awareness of issues around health care and access.
- **Auxiliary educational activities**, such as workshop or a short course, that prepare the trainees for their research activities prior to their internship project start date.



- **Alumni tracking plan**, to enable annual assessment and reporting on college acceptance and other post-SPARK outcomes.
- **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.

Award Amount and Duration

EDUC3 Awards will be made in the form of a grant and will provide up to 5 years of support that includes direct project costs of up to \$640,000 + 10% indirect costs on eligible expenses. Direct project costs include trainee stipends, travel funds, and administration. The maximum total award amount per program over five years is \$704,000. Each award can support up to 12 trainees per year. The amount requested must be adequately justified. The requested amount 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.

Program activities

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

| REQUIRED ACTIVITIES | |
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| ✓ | Trainee recruitment and selection |
| ✓ | Summer 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 or development activities relevant to understanding or treating a human condition or disease |
| ✓ | Auxiliary educational activities |
| ✓ | Patient/Healthcare engagement activities |
| ✓ | Community outreach/education activities |
| ✓ | Alumni tracking and engagement |
| ✓ | Sharing of knowledge and resources generated through Award |

| ALLOWABLE ACTIVITIES | |
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| ✓ | Collaborating with CIRM INFR sites for tours, workshops, courses, certifications, community engagement, etc. |
| ✓ | Collaborating with other organizations to provide workshops or activities of value that complement the SPARK program |
| ✓ | Activities to counsel or support SPARK students for college application |

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

| UNALLOWABLE ACTIVITIES | |
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| ✗ | 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

This EDUC3 funding opportunity will occur one time.

| PROVISIONAL TIMETABLE | |
|--|---|
| Applications Open | Once in 2026 |
| Applications Due | Approximately 60 days after applications open |
| Grants Working Group (GWG) Review | Approximately 90 days after applications due |
| Application Review Subcommittee (ARS) Award Approval | Approximately 60 days after Grants Working Group Review |
| Award Start | Will be specified in the Request for Applications |

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 |
| 2 | The applicant institution must have an existing high school summer internship program, or have had an internship program within the past two years at the time of application. |
| 3 | The applicant institution must be a California public university or college, or private, non-profit academic institution in California that is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC); or a California-based Organization* with a documented track record of successfully delivering laboratory-based research training to high school students. |
| 4 | The applicant institution must have established partnerships with trainee internship host sites and mentors (internally or through a collaborating institution). |
| 5 | Collaborating institutions must have a California site or location with appropriate personnel and facilities to accommodate high school students. |
| 4 | The application must be complete and accurate. |
| 5 | The applicant must be in good standing*. |
| 6 | An applicant institution may submit only one application under this opportunity. |
| 7 | The applicant must be ready to initiate work on the funded project within the time frame specified in the Request for Applications. |