

Quick Guide on the Discovery (DISC4) Program Pre-Submission Selection Process

Updated DISC4 Pre-Submission Selection Process

	Previous Process	New (current) Process
Overall Application Process	<p>Prospective applicants first complete a pre-submission form, where the project concept is evaluated for program fit. Applicant teams with top-ranked pre-submissions are invited to submit a full application.</p> <p>Invited applications undergo a complete review by Grants Working Group (GWG) members leading to funding recommendations for board approval.</p>	Unchanged
Pre-Submission Selection	CIRM staff assess pre-submissions for program fit according to criteria defined in the Program Announcement (PA).	GWG members conduct an initial screening to identify pre-submissions that best align with the selection criteria defined in the PA. A composite score is determined based on GWG selection and ranking.
Invitations to Apply and Funding	Approximately 24 teams will be invited to submit full applications. Approximately 6 teams will be funded.	Unchanged

1. What is the new application selection process?

The CIRM Team will use program-specific guiding principles applied across the entire application lifecycle. These guiding principles translate the high-level impact goals under the Strategic Allocation Framework (SAF) into specific program objectives and are built into the application lifecycle from volume

control, through scientific review, and CIRM Team recommendations to the Application Review Subcommittee (ARS). For DISC4, these principles focus on the multidisciplinary and innovation of research proposals as well as organizational priorities.

For DISC4, CIRM will continue to employ a pre-submission step to collect information from teams about proposed projects and determine which should be invited to submit full applications. If the number of pre-submissions exceeds the volume that can reasonably be discussed by the Grants Working Group (GWG) panel, the GWG will conduct an initial screening to identify those projects that are best aligned with the DISC4 program objectives based on the criteria listed below. The GWG discussion and recommendations stage of review remains unchanged.

2. Why is a selection process needed?

The demand for CIRM DISC4 funding significantly exceeds available support. While each proposal is given careful consideration, excessive volume can overwhelm this established process and compromise rigor of the evaluation. Unlike the National Institutes of Health (NIH), CIRM is limited to 15 scientific grants working group members per review. Therefore, applying a volume control selection process step to prioritize proposals that are most aligned with CIRM goals and program priorities provides a mechanism to manage the number of applications entering the system while maintaining the rigor of the process.

3. How does selection differ from eligibility?

To be “eligible” an application must meet the specific eligibility criteria described in the Program Announcement (PA). These are strict requirements that determine whether CIRM can or cannot accept an application under the funding opportunity. An ineligible application cannot be considered for CIRM funding.

When the number of proposals received exceeds the number that can be fully reviewed, pre-submissions undergo a selection process by members of the Grants Working Group based on the selection criteria (see below) to identify proposals that are invited to submit a full application.

4. What are the GWG criteria for selection?

Criteria for GWG selection of DISC4 pre-submissions:

- Impact of the proposed project in advancing understanding of a human disease, generating data/resources, or potential to advance novel therapeutic or biomarker targets.
- Innovation relative to the current state of research such as applying novel frameworks to study of disease, cutting across silos, employing unique synergy of technologies, or utilizing innovative approaches.

- Responsiveness to DISC4 program objective, area of focus, and scope.

5. How many opportunities do I have to advance my pre-submission?

For pre-submissions that do not result in an invitation to apply, or full applications that are not funded, investigators may apply for a future cycle by completing a new pre-submission. Due to annual changes in focus area, all teams must complete a new pre-submission form even if they were invited to submit a full application in a prior cycle and received reviewer comments.

6. Who determines whether my pre-submission will lead to an invitation to apply?

The Grants Working Group (GWG) will assess pre-submissions and provide a weighted composite score based on selection and ranking by GWG members. A composite score cut-off will be established at the closest numerical break to the target number of applications. Pre-submissions scoring above the cut-off will be invited to submit a full application. The CIRM President and CEO, upon recommendation from CIRM scientific staff, may invite a limited number of additional pre-submissions not selected by the GWG if there is a compelling programmatic justification.

7. How is a composite score calculated?

Pre-submissions are each given a composite score that combines two measurements from the GWG reviewers, selection and rank. The fraction of reviewers that selected the application from their assigned pool measures the breadth of interest in the proposal, whereas the rank given by reviewers to their selected proposal measures the intensity of their interest. The two measurements are weighted 60% and 40%, respectively, to prioritize the breadth of interest over the intensity of interest. Therefore, the formula to calculate the composite score becomes the following:

$60\% \times \text{Selection points} + 40\% \times \text{Rank points}$. The composite numerical score will range from 0 to 1, where a 1 is a perfect score.

8. What can an investigator do to maximize the chance of proceeding to GWG discussion?

- Carefully consider whether the proposal is aligned with the goals and review criteria of the [DISC4 Program Announcement](#)
- Contact the CIRM Discovery team (discovery@circm.ca.gov) to request a consultation for guidance and advice on developing a competitive pre-submission.
- Ensure that your pre-submission is complete and the project will meet all eligibility criteria.

The full details of these new processes are in the [Board Memo](#). Other resources available include an [Executive Summary](#), [CIRM's Board Presentation Deck](#), and the [YouTube Recording of the Application Selection Process Changes Presentation](#).

For questions regarding the review process, contact the CIRM Review office at review@circm.ca.gov.