CIRM
CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR REGENERATIVE MEDICINE

Memorandum

To: Members of the ICOC
From: Gil Sambrano, Vice President, Portfolio Development and Review
Re: Nominations for Appointment of Scientific Members to the Grants Working Group
Date: June 25, 2026

Executive Summary

The Grants Working Group (GWG) is responsible for conducting scientific and merit reviews to provide recommendations to the board regarding the funding of applications. To serve as a scoring panel member on the GWG, an individual must first be appointed to GWG by the board. The CIRM team regularly assesses whether the pool of GWG reviewers has adequate expertise to review the breadth of applications received for current funding opportunities. This quarter, the CIRM asks that the board appoints five new GWG members and reappoint two GWG members to ensure adequate expertise for the current funding opportunities.

I. Background

The purpose of the Grants Working Group (GWG) is to provide recommendations to the ICOC regarding the merit and funding of grant and loan applications. The GWG evaluates the merit of applications across all five of CIRM's funding pillars in Discovery, Preclinical, Clinical, Education and Infrastructure. The scope of proposals we receive is very broad ranging from fundamental biology projects to advanced clinical trials across numerous disease areas and fields of study that use stem cell-based approaches, gene therapy and regenerative medicine.

To cover this breadth of expertise, CIRM maintains a large pool of Board-appointed GWG members (currently 265 members) with expertise in many areas including education, fundamental biology, translational research, medicine, product manufacturing, drug development, regulatory affairs, and clinical trials. The pool of Board-appointed GWG members allows us to compose and tailor each review panel to the needs of a specific set of applications.

Appointments to the GWG follow a set of requirements prescribed in Prop 71 and Prop 14 including specific durations (terms) of service. The pool of GWG members is in

constant flux due to variable terms of service, changes in members' availability, and also changing expertise needs as scientific fields evolve. As such, we regularly bring for your consideration nominations for the appointment and/or re-appointment of GWG members to maintain a consistently active and relevant pool of experts on hand.

This quarter, we propose to appoint five new GWG members. We also have two GWG members whose appointment term is expiring and propose to reappoint. We have provided a brief bio of each member that provides a summary of their research interests, scientific training, and salient accomplishments.

II. New Appointments

CIRM is seeking the appointment of the individual listed below so that they may join the pool of members drawn upon to serve as panelists on GWG reviews. This appointment will strengthen the GWG's expertise across several areas as briefly summarized in the following description.

Dr. Naik is a research scientist with expertise in immune cell biology and tissue repair whose research seeks to understand the fibrotic and inflammatory barriers that limit regeneration. CIRM anticipates that her expertise would strengthen the GWG's ability to evaluate applications submitted to the upcoming DISC4 funding opportunity focused on immune–tissue interactions and future Discovery program submissions, particularly those employing advanced functional genomics and imaging approaches.

Dr. Scott-Hewitt is a research scientist with expertise in neuroimmune mechanisms underlying aging and neurodegeneration. Her research seeks to elucidate how intercellular interactions and immune system changes influence cognition and neuropathology. CIRM anticipates that her expertise would strengthen the GWG's ability to evaluate applications submitted to the upcoming DISC4 funding opportunity focused on immune–tissue interactions, particularly those addressing neuroimmune mechanisms in Alzheimer's disease and other neurodegenerative disorders, and future submissions to Discovery programs.

Dr. Shalek is a research scientist with expertise in systems immunology and single-cell genomics. His laboratory develops experimental and computational platforms to understand and engineer immune responses within tissues. CIRM anticipates that his expertise would strengthen the GWG's ability to evaluate applications submitted to the upcoming DISC4 funding opportunity focused on immune–tissue interactions, particularly those involving systems-level approaches and integration of complex multi-omic datasets, and future submissions to Discovery programs.

Dr. Sener serves is a research scientist with expertise in novel CNS cancer therapeutics and improving access to specialized CNS cancer care. As CIRM continues to receive

PDEV and CLIN2 applications in CNS cancers, Dr Sener's expertise adds needed depth to CIRM's GWG in the clinical CNS oncology area.

Dr. Thiel is an expert in pluripotent stem cell (PSC) cell therapy product development, including iPSC reprogramming, gene editing, and GMP manufacturing. PSC derived cell therapies are a growing area within CIRM's PDEV portfolio, and Dr. Thiel's expertise in iPSC manufacturing, process development, and clinical-stage CMC would strengthen the GWG's ability to evaluate these applications.

Shruti Naik, PhD

Associate Professor in the Departments of Immunology and Immunotherapy, Dermatology, and Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

Expertise Relevance to CIRM GWG: Dr. Naik's expertise in immune cells and repair will be invaluable in reviewing Discovery program applications.

Prior Service in CIRM Reviews: N/A

Dr. Shruti Naik, Ph.D., is an international leader in immunology and regenerative medicine, is a tenured Associate Professor in the Departments of Immunology and Immunotherapy, Dermatology, and Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. She is the Director of the Colton Center for Autoimmunity at Mount Sinai. Her research leverages cutting-edge genomics and imaging technologies to explore immune cell communication with tissues, with a focus on developing therapies that limit inflammatory tissue damage and erase disease memory in inflammatory and autoimmune diseases. Naik's pioneering work has uncovered key insights into the microbiota's influence on immunity, the epigenetic memory of stem cells, and novel mechanisms of tissue repair and inflammation. Publishing in top tier journals like *Cell*, *Science*, and *Nature,* Naik's work has been cited 1000's of times and she has delivered over 150 international lectures. She serves on the Society for Investigative Dermatology Board of Directors, and on the scientific advisory Board of Keystone Symposium, Cell Press Journal Immunity, and Science Translational Medicine.

Beyond her scientific contributions, Naik is a dedicated advocate for science and diversity, sharing her insights through appearances on NBC, NPR, Wired, and other platforms. She is also an executive producer of the film *The Endless Frontier* and a co-founder of the social advocacy non-profit NY-CURES. Her numerous accolades include the Regeneron Award for Creative Innovation, L'Oréal For Women in Science Award, Damon Runyon Dale F. Frey Award for Breakthrough Scientist, Blavatnik Award for Young Scientists, Takeda International Innovators in Science Award, Pew-Stewart Scholar, NIH Director's

Innovator Award DP2, Packard Fellowship, Burrows Welcome PATH Award, Leo Foundation North American Scholar and the NYSCF Robertson Stem Cell Investigator designation.

Nicole Scott-Hewitt, PhD

Assistant Professor of Cell Biology, Duke University School of Medicine

Expertise Relevance to CIRM GWG: Dr. Scott-Hewitt's expertise in neuroimmune mechanisms in aging and neurodegeneration will be invaluable in reviewing Discovery program applications.

Prior Service in CIRM Reviews: Dr. Scott-Hewitt has participated as a specialist for Discovery program reviews.

As an Assistant Professor in the Department of Cell Biology at Duke University, my research program seeks to define how interactions between the nervous and immune systems regulate molecular, cellular, and organismal health in both normal physiology and disease. My laboratory is focused on three central goals: (1) determining how nervous and immune system–derived molecules and cells influence brain development and function; (2) understanding how neuroimmune interactions contribute to disease vulnerability and aging; and (3) establishing the role of biomolecular condensates, often referred to as membrane-less organelles, in cognition and neuropathology. By integrating molecular and cellular biology, advanced imaging, animal models, and human iPSCbased systems, we aim to uncover fundamental principles of neuroimmune communication and identify new therapeutic opportunities for neurological disease.

My scientific training and research program have focused on defining the cellular and molecular mechanisms that regulate brain function in health and disease. During my Ph.D. training in Genetics at the University of Rochester with Mark Noble, I identified mechanisms by which lipid dyshomeostasis disrupts lysosomal function and promotes neurodegeneration in lysosomal storage disorders. I subsequently demonstrated that heterozygosity for the lysosomal enzyme galactocerebrosidase (GALC) impairs microglial myelin debris clearance and remyelination following injury. As a postdoctoral fellow in the laboratory of Beth Stevens at Boston Children's Hospital, I discovered that neurons developmentally regulate the exposure of the phagocytic "eat-me" signal phosphatidylserine to direct microglial-mediated synapse elimination. More recently, I found that the secreted immune protein C1q undergoes RNA-dependent liquid–liquid phase separation and functions within neuronal biomolecular condensates to regulate protein homeostasis and cognition, revealing an unexpected role for immune molecules in neuronal biology. Building on this foundation, my laboratory now investigates how

interactions among neurons, glia, immune molecules, and condensate-based cellular compartments coordinate brain function and become disrupted during aging and disease. We are studying how condensate-mediated neuroimmune signaling influences neuronal proteostasis, RNA metabolism, synaptic function, and cognition. By defining how aberrant condensate dynamics contribute to proteotoxic stress, neurodegeneration, and age-related cognitive decline, our goal is to discover fundamental mechanisms governing brain health and identify new therapeutic opportunities.

Ugur Sener, MD

Associate Professor of Neurology at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota

Expertise Relevance to CIRM GWG: Dr. Sener's expertise in CNS cancer care will be invaluable in reviewing Clinical program applications.

Prior Service in CIRM Reviews: Dr. Sener has participated as a specialist for Clinical program reviews.

Dr. Sener is an Associate Professor of Neurology at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. He completed medical school at University of Oklahoma, College of Medicine. His neurology residency was at Mayo Clinic in Florida. Dr. Sener completed his neuro-oncology fellowship at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York. His first faculty position was at West Virginia University. He joined the neuro-oncology division at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota in 2021. He was selected as a member of the first cohort for the Clinical Trialist Training Program. He developed the Neuro-Oncology Anywhere clinical trial portfolio with the goal of improving access to specialized CNS cancer care. He has served as the program director of the Mayo Clinic Neuro-Oncology fellowship since July 2024 and in this capacity has developed and implemented the Neuro-Oncology Core Curriculum for fellow and allied health education. He has served as the chair of the Neuro-Oncology division at Mayo Clinic since April 2025.

Alex K. Shalek, PhD

Director, Institute for Medical Engineering & Science and Health Innovation Hub, MIT and J. W. Kieckhefer Professor, Institute for Medical Engineering & Science, Department of Chemistry, and Koch Institute, MIT

Expertise Relevance to CIRM GWG: Dr. Shalek's expertise in systems immunology, single cell-genomics and data integration will be invaluable in reviewing Discovery program applications.

Prior Service in CIRM Reviews: N/A

Alex K. Shalek, PhD, is the Director of the Institute for Medical Engineering & Science (IMES) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the J. W. Kieckhefer

Professor in IMES and the Department of Chemistry at MIT, and an Extramural Member of MIT's Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research. He is also an Institute Member of the Broad Institute, a Member of the Ragon Institute, an Assistant in Immunology at Mass General Brigham (MGB), and an Instructor in Health Sciences & Technology at Harvard Medical School (HMS). He received his bachelor's degree *summa cum laude* from Columbia University and his Ph.D. from Harvard University in chemical physics under the guidance of Hongkun Park and performed postdoctoral training under Hongkun Park and Aviv Regev (Broad/MIT). His lab's research is directed towards the development and application of new approaches to elucidate cellular and molecular features that inform tissue-level function and dysfunction across the spectrum of human health and disease. He and his work have received numerous honors including a NIH New Innovator Award, a Beckman Young Investigator Award, a Searle Scholar Award, a Pew-Stewart Scholar Award, the Avant-Garde (DP1 Pioneer) Award from the National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA), and an Alfred P. Sloan Research Fellowship in Chemistry, as well as the 2019-2020 Harold E. Edgerton Faculty Achievement Award at MIT and the 2020 HMS Young Mentor Award.

Austin Thiel, PhD

Vice President, Research Program Lead at Sana Biotechnology

Expertise Relevance to CIRM GWG: Dr. Thiel's expertise in PSC cell therapy product development will be invaluable in reviewing Pre-Clinical, Clinical and RAPID program applications.

Prior Service in CIRM Reviews: Dr. Thiel has participated as a specialist for Pre-clinical program reviews.

Austin Thiel is currently at Sana Biotechnology, where he is Vice President and Program Lead for Sana's hypoimmune stem cell derived islet program for type 1 diabetes, SC451.

Austin has more than 14 years of industry experience in the field of regenerative medicine and pluripotent stem cells (PSCs). Prior to joining Sana, Austin was Vice President and Head of Regenerative Medicine at ElevateBio, where he and his team focused on developing iPSC platform technologies and iPSC-derived therapies. He led the development of a novel and proprietary iPSC reprogramming method, the production of clinical grade iPSCs and the optimization of iPSC gene editing with ElevateBio's LifeEdit gene editing platform.

Previously, Austin was Director of Cell Therapy Development at Vertex Pharmaceuticals and Semma Therapeutics (acquired by Vertex), where he led a team focused on developing a PSC-derived pancreatic islet product to treat type 1 diabetes. The PSC-derived islet manufacturing process developed by Austin and his team was used to

produce drug product for the VX-880 first-in-human clinical studies, which have demonstrated proof of concept for PSC-derived islet replacement therapy with immune-suppression.

Austin started his career at Advanced Cell Technology, focused on optimizing PSC differentiation to several different cell types. His work contributed to an acquisition by Astellas Pharmaceuticals and the subsequent establishment of Astellas Institute for Regenerative Medicine. Prior to moving to industry, Austin received his PhD in Cell & Molecular Biology from the University of Pennsylvania, where he was focused on the role of epigenetics in acute leukemias.

III. Re-Appointments

CIRM is seeking the reappointment of the individuals listed in the table below. Their updated biographies follow.

Proposed Reappointments to GWG

Last	First	Term	Years	Expertise
Baker	Andrew	3	6	Gene & Cell Therapy for Cardiovascular Disease
Cutler	Corey	3	6	Hematology-Oncology; Cancer Immunology; Stem Cell Transplantation

Andrew Baker, PhD
Andrew H. Baker is a British Heart Foundation Chair of Translational Cardiovascular Sciences and the Gustav Born Chair of Vascular Biology at the University of Edinburgh.

Andrew is a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Academy of Medical Sciences, UK. He has been awarded two ERC Advanced Grants (VascmiR (2013) and PolymiRize (2024)) and has coordinated Marie Curie ITN and IAPP training networks in gene therapy viral technology across Europe.

He has published over 300 original papers and review articles and is a member of the editorial board for several leading journals. He has been awarded over £60m in research funding in career to date and has supervised over 35 PhD students as primary supervisor. He has directed the BHF Centre for Vascular Regeneration and the University of Edinburgh Research Excellence Award 3 (2019-2024) and is currently co-Director of the MRC/BHF Centre for Advanced Cardiac Therapies (2025-2031; £25m). He was Head of the Centre for Cardiovascular Sciences, University of Edinburgh between 2017-2025 and holds a Professorial post at Maastricht University, the Netherlands and a Visiting Professor at the University of Glasgow. He has been a BHF

Chair since 2011. He was recently awarded the Sir James Black Prize from the Royal Society of Edinburgh (2025).

The mission of the Baker lab is “Producing impact-driven, open research that drives cardiovascular innovation from discovery to advanced therapies.”. The Baker lab is interested in the mechanisms that control vascular damage and how to influence repair and regeneration of the vascular system using innovative therapies, including gene- and RNA-based approaches. Focusing on acute and chronic injury to the vessel wall, his lab is defining the protein-coding and non-coding RNA pathways and networks that influence cell (dys)function in health and disease. In turn, his lab is developing interventions to influence beneficially injury, repair and regeneration. His lab has developed an innovative gene therapy approach to prevent pathological vascular remodelling associated with coronary artery bypass graft failure and is being pursuing at the clinical interface. His research also has deep experience in the design novel viral vectors for cardiovascular gene therapy, focusing both on capsid biology and transcriptional control. The lab is also generating endothelial cells and associated extracellular vesicles and RNA therapeutics from human embryonic stem cells for regeneration in ischaemic conditions and developing an understanding in mechanisms that control endothelial cell commitment and specification.

Corey Cutler, MD, MPH, FRCP(C), FASTCT

Dr. Corey Cutler is a Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School, and an Institute Physician in the Division of Transplantation and Cellular Therapy, Department of Medical Oncology at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Boston, MA. He is the Director of the Stem Cell Transplantation Program at Dana-Farber. He is also an affiliate faculty Member of the Harvard Stem Cell Institute, Cambridge, MA. Dr. Cutler graduated from McGill University’s Faculty of Medicine, completed a residency in Internal Medicine at the McGill University Health Science Center, and completed fellowship training in hematology, medical oncology, and stem cell transplantation at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. Dr. Cutler earned an MPH degree at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Dr. Cutler is a Past-President of the American Society for Blood and Marrow Transplantation (2024-2025) and was the Co-Chair of the Clinical Trials Working Group of the NIH Consensus Conference on Chronic GVHD. He previously was the Co-Chair of the CIBMTR GVHD Working Committee, and a member of the Clinical Trials Advisory Committee of the CIBMTR. Dr. Cutler is an Associate Editor for the journal, “Transplantation and Cellular Therapy” and serves on the editorial boards of several other journals. He has been a contributing author on more than 300 peer-reviewed publications and 25 reviews and book chapters. His research focuses on the development of novel methods of acute and chronic graft-vs.-host disease prophylaxis and therapy, and decision theory in stem cell transplantation.

IV. Summary of Requested Action

CIRM requests ICOC approval of the proposed new appointment and reappointments to the GWG.