

2023 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
DERMATOLOGY FELLOWS AWARD
FEBRUARY 2, 2023

The Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA) is pleased to announce a call for applications to our Dermatology Fellowship Award. Launched in 2019, this program has awarded 36 dermatology fellowships to investigators at sixteen institutions across the US. The aim of this training program is to drive greater interest and focus on melanoma in dermatologic clinical practice and research related to the prevention, detection, diagnosis, and staging of melanoma, by investing in post-docs and medical residents focused on dermatology.

Interested applicants should refer to this RFP for complete instructions on eligibility, key criteria, and instructions on how to apply for the MRA Dermatology Fellows Award. MRA is pleased to announce an increase in the award amount to \$50,000, over one year. MRA plans to award at least four new MRA Dermatology Fellow Awards during the 2023 cycle.

Email questions about this RFP, eligibility, or other issues about MRA or its awards to Dr. Rachel Fischer at rfischer@curemelanoma.org.

Applications due on April 12, 2023 at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time

Award Term: 1 Year (no option for renewal)

Award Amount: Up to \$50,000 total direct costs

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INTRODUCTION

About Melanoma: According to the National Cancer Institute, melanoma is the sixth most common cancer in the United States with 100,000 new cases anticipated this year. More effective options for assessing risk, prevention, and improving melanoma detection, as well as diagnostic criteria and specificity, are urgently needed. In particular, unlike common forms of melanoma, robust risk factors for acral lentiginous melanoma (ALM), as well as other rare melanoma subtypes, are lacking. ([Lopes et al. JAMA Dermatol. 2020](#)).

While research and treatment have advanced significantly in recent years, leading to the availability of immunotherapies and molecularly targeted therapies for patients with melanoma, there remains a significant need for developing new treatment approaches, understanding treatment resistance and optimizing the effectiveness of existing and emerging therapies. MRA is committed to advancing such efforts in treatment, which are supported under the MRA General RFP typically released in August (<https://www.curemelanoma.org/research/request-for-proposals/>).

The focus of this RFP, and the MRA dermatology programs, is to address the critical need to improve melanoma detection, diagnostic criteria and specificity, while also strengthening targeted prevention and risk reduction; and avoiding potential harms of overdiagnosis. While deaths due to melanoma have decreased due to new treatments, new cases of melanoma have increased. In addition, as treatment options advance for earlier intervention through neo-adjuvant and adjuvant approaches, detection of high-risk lesions at the earliest opportunity continues to offer the greatest hope. Finally, with the advancement of technology, such as artificial intelligence, new tools for detection are being developed. However, there is a question as to how well such advancements will serve people with skin of color.

About the MRA: Founded in 2007, MRA has become the largest non-profit funder of melanoma research world-wide. The mission of MRA is to **end suffering and death due to melanoma** by collaborating with all stakeholders to accelerate powerful research, advance cures for all patients, and prevent more melanomas. To date, the MRA has awarded \$143 million to support research projects worldwide, with 90% focused on developing new treatments, 5% on prevention, and 5% on improving diagnosis, detection and staging. Please visit www.curemelanoma.org for further information on MRA. To search for past MRA research awards by institution, investigator, keyword, or grant award mechanism – including past Dermatology Fellows Awards – please visit www.curemelanoma.org/grants.

About the MRA Dermatology Fellows Program: Recognizing the need to strengthen research into the prevention and detection of melanoma, as well as increase dermatology scientists' and physicians' overall engagement within the field of melanoma research, MRA launched the MRA Dermatology Fellows Award as a Pilot Program in 2019. In 2007, when MRA was formed, only two FDA-approved treatments existed for metastatic melanoma. Since then, 15 new treatment options have gained approval, improved health outcomes and added years of life for patients. At the same time, less focus has been placed on—and less progress made in—prevention and detection. Improved prevention, detection, diagnosis, and staging can have a profound impact on melanoma. Early detection contributes to improved overall survival and comprehensive and coordinated prevention programs – such as those carried out in Australia – have been proven to reduce melanoma incidence.

OBJECTIVE

MRA aims to strengthen the engagement of dermatology residents as well as Ph.D. and/or M.D. postdoctoral fellows in departments or divisions of dermatology with research (including epidemiological data gaps), practice changing demonstration projects, and/or immersive study aimed at improving melanoma prevention, detection, diagnosis, and/or staging. In pursuit of this goal, **MRA welcomes proposals with immediate real-world implications for public health, prevention, and/or clinical practice in the following areas:**

- **Prevention:**
 - Elucidation of environmental, epidemiological, biological, and/or behavioral factors that lead to increased risk of melanoma, especially ALM, and that can inform prevention and/or detection strategies in melanoma patients or in those at high risk of developing invasive melanoma;
 - Research, design, or implementation of interventions that educate and/or evolve clinical practice related to melanoma among dermatologists, primary care physicians, health systems, residents, medical students, and/or the public to maximize risk-reduction, behavioral change, awareness, and/or early detection.

- **Detection, Diagnosis, and Staging:**
 - Development, study, or evaluation of targeted screening methods in individuals at high-risk for melanoma and/or public education about risk factors for skin cancer;
 - Systems design/interventions that will improve melanoma diagnostic criteria and specificity among dermatologists, or that build a knowledge base that will help to further the goal of earlier detection;
 - Use of clinical samples, especially from patients with skin of color, to identify and/or validate diagnostic and prognostic biomarker accuracy studies;
 - Use and/or advancement of technologies, including non-invasive approaches, to improve melanoma diagnosis and/or risk stratification, reduce biopsy referral or improve dermatopathology call of whether a lesion is melanoma or not.

Proposed efforts may include, but are not limited to:

- Demonstration projects both within applicant's own health system or in community settings;
- Immersive study in areas that can advance melanoma practice;
- Augmentation of larger research efforts and/or clinical trials by applicant that could show value-add in improving prevention, risk identification, or detection efforts;
- Research appropriate to the scale of resources; or
- MRA also encourages the application of artificial intelligence (AI) across any of these areas, especially to reduce variable biopsy-referral and/or diagnostic standards.

Note that all applications for the Dermatology Fellows Award should be focused on melanoma prevention, detection, diagnosis, and/or staging.

REVIEW AND SELECTION CRITERIA

All proposals will undergo rigorous peer review by the MRA Dermatology Council (DC), comprised of experts in diverse areas of dermatology, translational, and clinical research. Applications will be scored according to MRA Review and Selection Criteria. To minimize any real or perceived conflicts of interest (COI), MRA asks Dermatology Council members to adhere to a rigorous set of COI guidelines. Further information about these guidelines are available upon request. Please contact Rachel Fischer at rfischer@curemelanoma.org if you have any questions. All awards are contingent upon ratification by the MRA Board of Directors.

The following criteria will be used to assess the merit of proposals for award:

- **Overall Scientific and Clinical Importance:** Original, innovative, and transformative research approaches with strong scientific rationale and clear capacity to enhance prevention, detection, diagnosis, and/or staging for patients with melanoma or for individuals at risk will be prioritized. Proposals that articulate a clear path to near-term clinical application, or that can impact practice in prevention and detection strategies will be favored.
- **Rigor and Feasibility:** MRA seeks outstanding and technically rigorous proposals as determined by peer review. Overall study design, methodology, and analyses must be feasible and appropriate to accomplish specific aims in the one-year timeframe of the award.
- **Investigator/Environment:** Applicant has appropriate training, expertise, and evidence of productivity (inclusive of publications, datasets, code, patents, etc), to carry out proposed research. Applicant's institution and department are sufficiently committed to the area of research proposed and to the applicant. Equipment and other institutional resources are sufficient to support the applicant. Selected Mentor is appropriate to advance applicant's career and project with evidence of a strong mentorship relationship.

Applications will be approximately weighted as follows: One-third Scientific and Clinical Importance, Rigor and Feasibility; one-third Investigator; and one-third the dermatology Environment/Mentor.

APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility requirements for new applicants:

- **MRA encourages applications from a diverse pool of investigators with respect to race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, and disability.** MRA recognizes that a diverse and inclusive workforce is critical for ensuring that the most creative minds have the opportunity to contribute to realizing our research goals and to ensuring more equitable health outcomes for all. Moreover, increased diversity leads to improved health care access for underserved populations and better health outcomes ([Cohen et al. Health Aff. 2002](#)). A study examining the racial composition of dermatology residents and faculty from 2012-2014 found that while 4.3% of residents are Black, the proportion of faculty who are Black decreases with academic rank. Only 1.3% of Full Professors are Black ([Qiu et al. J. Am. Acad. Dermatol. 2016](#)). Thus, there is clearly a need to increase the number of dermatologists from underrepresented communities in training and faculty positions.

- Applicants must have a doctoral degree (M.D., Ph.D., or D.O.) by the date of award activation and must conduct their proposed research/project in the host institution's Department/Division of Dermatology.
 - If applicant is from a field outside of dermatology, please email Rachel Fischer at rfischer@curemelanoma.org ahead of submitting your application to confirm your eligibility.
- It is preferred that mentors be a faculty member with an appointment in a U.S. department/division of Dermatology. However, MRA will consider mentors from other clinical fields involved in the treatment of melanoma (e.g. medical oncology, surgery, immunology, pathology, bioengineering).
 - If selecting a mentor from a field outside of dermatology, please email Rachel Fischer at rfischer@curemelanoma.org ahead of submitting your application to describe the reasoning.
- Applicants must hold a trainee position, such as postdoc, medical resident or fellow, at a not-for-profit, non-governmental U.S. research institution at the time of award activation. Proposals from applicants who hold or will hold an independent faculty position will not be considered.
- At institutions with policies that prohibit residents from being able to receive research grant funding, the mentor may serve as the primary investigator on the proposal.
 - In this case, please provide a letter from the Department Chair or Division Chief stating such a policy exists and email Rachel Fischer at rfischer@curemelanoma.org to ensure MRA is aware ahead of submitting your application.
- Applicants need not be specifically trained in melanoma research, but must have a demonstrated interest in prevention and/or early detection or improved diagnosis of melanoma.

APPLICATION FORMAT AND INSTRUCTIONS

All applications are due on April 12th, 2023 at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time. Proposals will not be considered after the deadline. Applicants must utilize the Proposal Central online application tool at <https://ProposalCentral.com> and the document templates and requirements therein. Please carefully follow the instructions in Proposal Central and below. Applications include the following steps and components:

1. **Title Page:** Enter the project title.
2. **Templates and Instructions:** Download RFP and templates.
3. **Enable Other Users to Access This Proposal:** Allow others (e.g., institutional administrators or collaborators) to view, edit, or submit your proposal. Electronic signatures are required to submit the application for submission. ***The Signing Official from the applicant's institution must be provided at least 'Edit' access on this screen to be able to sign.*** Please review the Signature Page to confirm the signature roles required and add as appropriate on this page.
4. **Applicant/PI:** Key information about the applicant. If the applicant is the Mentor due to institutional policies, please provide a letter from the Department Chair or Division Chief in the

Upload Attachments section stating such a policy exists and email Rachel Fischer at rfischer@curemelanoma.org to ensure MRA is aware.

5. **Organization/Institution:** Key information about the applicant's institution, including name and email address of the signing official who, in addition to the applicant, will be contacted if the award is selected for funding.
6. **Key Personnel:** List and provide contact information for key persons. A Mentor within a dept of dermatology from the same institution is preferred. **ORCID IDs are required for both the applicant and the Mentor.** If you do not have an ORCID ID, you can register for one at no cost at orcid.org/register. Mentors outside of dermatology will be considered; please explain in application and email Rachel Fischer at rfischer@curemelanoma.org prior to applying.
7. **Data and Renewable Reagent Sharing Plan:** In order to promote rapid research advancement, transparency, reproducibility, and collaboration, MRA encourages the open sharing of data and resources generated from its funded awards. Provide information for the types of data and renewable reagents (if applicable) that will be generated as part of the award and how they will be shared.

MRA has adopted the following **Data Sharing Policy**:

- MRA **requests** the posting of manuscripts based on or developed under an MRA Award to a pre-print server ahead of or at the time of journal submission.
- MRA **requests** the posting of research outputs (data, code, software) to public data repositories at the time such research outputs are generated.
- MRA **requests** that manuscripts based on or developed under an MRA Award be published in open-access journals.
- MRA **requests** that all research outputs based on or developed under an MRA Award (including publications, data, code, and software) be made available with no commercial modification rights (e.g. [CC BY-NC license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)).
- MRA **requires** that the final, accepted version of any publication based on or developed under an MRA Award be deposited in PubMed Central so that it is available 12 months after publication.
- MRA **requires** that any data, code, and/or software needed for the independent verification of published research results based on or developed under an MRA Award be curated and made freely and publicly available at the time of publication.

MRA will incur costs associated with policy compliance, provided these fees (e.g. article processing charges, data storage), are included in the original grant application budget.

8. **Abstracts and Keywords:** Provide a general audience abstract (non-technical) and a technical abstract (2,000 characters' maximum each) and keywords. Please note: the general audience abstract will become public if the award is selected for funding, therefore, it should not contain any proprietary information.
9. **Budget Period Detail:** Enter budget detail for the award period requested. Awards will not support indirect costs, overhead costs, or other similar institutional charges. Fringe benefits for

personnel salaries are allowable. The budget cap for the Dermatology Fellows Award is \$50,000 total direct costs, for one (1) year (do not exceed this amount).

10. **Budget Summary and Justification:** A summary of the budget detail will be shown in this step. In addition, provide sufficient detail for the evaluation of the major portions of the budget that are being requested. If more space is required than is provided in the Proposal Central forms (2,000 characters), applicants may upload the budget justification in document form in step #13.
11. **Current and Pending Research Support:** Please list all current and pending support for the Applicant. Any overlap of current or pending support with the MRA proposal must be described and explained. Current and pending support can be added to your Professional Profile on Proposal Central by clicking on the 'Professional Profile' tab and going to Step #6: Other Support.

To add your entries, please click on the "+" link and all entries previously saved in your Professional Profile will show. Please select the applicable support, and save.

12. **Organizational Assurances:** IRB and IACUC approvals, if applicable.
13. **Upload Attachments:** Upload the following:
 - a. **Biosketch for applicant and key personnel:** Please upload an NIH format Biosketch for applicant, Mentor and any additional Key Personnel. Biosketches for research support staff, students, postdocs and other training positions are not required (with the exception of the applicant Fellow). Key Personnel who do not have an NIH biosketch may use the template provided in Proposal Central.
 - b. **Project description:** Must be formatted in Arial 11-point or Times New Roman 12-point font with no less than ½ inch margins. The project description should be 3 pages maximum, inclusive of the following: Background and specific aims, preliminary data, experimental design and methods, figures (which may be embedded within the above sections), and rationale/fit with key criteria, including the potential for clinical impact.
 - c. **Literature references:** A list of up to 20 references supporting the project description is allowed, in addition to the 3-page project description.
 - d. **Mentor Letter of Support:** Include a letter of support from an established clinical or scientific Mentor at the same institution who holds a formal appointment in the Department of Dermatology, who is familiar with the applicant and his/her work and will provide guidance and support for the project. The Mentor's letter should confirm that the applicant has an interest in dermatology research and include a brief statement about the applicant, the Mentor's role, mentoring plan, the research environment, and sources of institutional support that the applicant will utilize in conducting the project. Mentors outside of dermatology (e.g. oncology, immunology) will be considered; please explain in application or mentor letter.
 - i. MRA recognizes that unconscious bias can manifest in such support letters and therefore strongly recommends considering these or similar guidelines when preparing such letters: <https://tinyurl.com/yapwnw3a>.

- e. **Application requirements checklist:** Please fill out to ensure all application materials are complete and the applicant is eligible to apply.
14. **PI Data Sheet:** Please provide your ORCID ID. If you do not have an ORCID ID, you can register for one here: <https://orcid.org/register>. MRA requests that applicants provide additional demographic information, but it is not required. Demographic information is not used in any way during the selection process and reviewers do not have access to this information. Having such information will help MRA grants staff understand its applicant and awardee pools and detect and address any inequities that may exist in the selection process.
15. **Validate:** Check for any missing required information.
16. **Signature Page(s):** *Before submitting the application*, an electronic signature is **required** from both the Applicant/PI and a Signing Official from the applicant's institution. Type your name in the text box and click the green 'Sign' button. A date and time stamp will appear next to the button indicating that the electronic signature was successful. To give the Signing Official access to sign this application, enter their information in Step 3: Enable other users to access this proposal and grant them at least "Edit" access.
17. **Submit:** Please note that no proposals will be able to be submitted past the deadline (April 12, 2023 at 11:59 PM EST). Technical support for the on-line application system is not available after 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time.

TIMELINE

Application deadline is April 12th, 2023 at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time. Proposals submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

February 2, 2023: Dermatology Fellows Award - Program Request-for-Proposals (RFP) issued

April 12, 2023 at 11:59 PM EST: Applications due

Late June 2023: Awardees notified

July 1, 2023: Projects start

AWARD ADMINISTRATION

AWARD LETTER

Upon acceptance of the award, the Fellow and their employing Institution will be required to sign an Award Letter indicating acceptance of the MRA's Award Terms and Conditions within 30 days, which can be found [here](#). MRA must be notified in advance and approve any significant changes in research objectives, key personnel (including transfer to another employee), or budget.

APPROVALS

MRA requires certification through Proposal Central of compliance with Human Subjects and Animal Care Assurance as applicable. In cases where ethical/regulatory approval is required to perform the work, such approvals will be required before initial payments are made. This includes local IRB approvals of clinical trials supported by MRA funding.

FUNDING

For all proposals, the level of funding may be adjusted by MRA as appropriate for the scope of the proposal and the funds available. **Awards will not support indirect costs, overhead costs, or other similar institutional charges**; however, fringe benefits for personnel salaries are allowable.

MRA SCIENTIFIC RETREAT

Fellows will be invited to attend the annual MRA Scientific Retreat. Fellows are expected to attend and may be asked to present research findings or project outcomes made under their awards at these meetings. MRA will cover reasonable travel costs related to participation in the Scientific Retreat directly and such costs should not be included in proposed budget. More information about MRA Scientific Retreats and dates for MRA's 2023 and 2024 Scientific Retreats can be found at: <https://www.curemelanoma.org/research/scientific-retreat/>.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: I do not hold the title of Fellow, but I do hold the title of my institution's entry level, postdoctoral appointment. Am I eligible to apply?

A: Post-terminal degree, training appointments that are not tenure-track/permanent positions may be eligible to apply for a Dermatology Fellows Award. Email Rachel Fischer at rfischer@curemelanoma.org to confirm your eligibility.

Q: I am an Assistant Professor or Clinical Instructor at an academic institution. Am I eligible to apply?

A: Generally, no, unless the Assistant Professor or Clinical Instructor title is equivalent to a Fellow position. Only those currently in trainee positions are eligible. Dermatology Fellow Award applicants who do not hold a Fellow, Resident, or Post-doc title must contact MRA to verify their eligibility prior to submitting a proposal. Email Rachel Fischer at rfischer@curemelanoma.org to confirm your eligibility.

Q: Do applicants need to be located in the United States?

A: Yes, applicants must be conducting their research project at a not-for-profit, non-governmental U.S. research institution.

Q: What is the role of the Mentor?

A: It is expected that Fellows have appropriate expertise and evidence of productivity to carry out the proposed research training project. However, a Mentor is required, and it is expected the applicant will work closely with the Mentor in execution of this training project.

Q: I would like to have a Mentor that is not at my institution. Is this allowed?

A: No. All Fellow applicants must have a designated Mentor at their institution to help to ensure that the Fellow has the resources they need to successfully carry out the work at their institution. An applicant may have additional mentors outside of their institution for other purposes, including providing scientific guidance for the project, but they will not be considered a Mentor for the award.

Q: Are Mentors of applicants allowed to be a PI of an existing MRA award or award application during the 2022-2023 cycle?

A: Yes, however, each research proposal must have a distinct hypothesis.

Q: Is there a minimum level of effort for the Mentor?

A: No. Mentors should not be listed as having any percent effort on the award.

Q: What should be covered in the Mentor Letter of Support?

A: Applicants should include a letter of support from an established scientific Mentor at the same institution, who is familiar with the applicant and his/her work and will provide guidance and support for the project. The Mentor's letter should confirm that the applicant has an interest in dermatology research and include a brief statement about the applicant, the Mentor's role, mentoring plan, the research environment, and sources of institutional support that the applicant will utilize in conducting the project. MRA recognizes that unconscious bias can manifest in such support letters and therefore strongly recommends considering these or similar guidelines when preparing such letters: <https://tinyurl.com/yapwnw3a>.

Q: Are Assistant Professors allowed to be Mentors?

A: Yes. Applicants are encouraged to select a Mentor with a strong track record in melanoma research and care.

Q: Can a faculty member serve as a Mentor for more than one applicant?

A: Yes, faculty may serve as a Mentor for more than one applicant.

Q: What is the expected level of percent effort for a Fellow?

A: There is no specific requirement around percent effort, but MRA encourages a minimum of 25% effort on the project. If 25% effort is prohibitive, please provide an accompanying letter to describe why a reduced effort is necessary.

Q: I will not receive my Ph.D. or M.D. until after the application deadline. May I apply?

A: Applicant Fellows must have received their advanced degree at the time of award activation (July 1, 2023).

Q: Will you consider applicants who are not trained in melanoma research?

A: Yes. Investigators need not be specifically trained in melanoma research, but must have a demonstrated interest in melanoma.