

## **2019-2020 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

August 12, 2019

The Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA) is pleased to announce a Request for Proposals (RFP) for pre-clinical, translational, and early clinical research with the potential to produce unusually high impact, near-term advancements in melanoma prevention, detection, diagnosis, staging, and treatment. This cycle, proposals will be accepted for Pilot Awards, Team Science Awards, Young Investigator Awards, and Special Opportunity Awards in Dermatology, Immunotherapy, and Radiation Oncology. MRA plans to support at least \$9 million in new funding in the 2019-2020 cycle.

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## INTRODUCTION

**About Melanoma:** According to the National Cancer Institute, melanoma is the fifth most common cancer in the United States and rates continue to increase. More effective options for patients and those at risk are urgently needed. While research and treatment have advanced significantly in recent years, leading to the availability of immunotherapies and molecularly targeted therapies for patients, there is a significant need for developing new treatment approaches, including treatment approaches for rare melanoma subtypes, optimizing the effectiveness of existing and emerging therapies, and better preventing, detecting, and diagnosing melanoma. From a basic and clinical research perspective, melanoma occupies the crossroads of molecular biology and immunology. Cutaneous melanomas can be analyzed at the earliest stages of carcinogenesis for molecular events or signatures predicting progression, invasion, and dissemination. As one of the most immunogenic human tumors, melanoma also provides an ideal context for understanding interactions between the human immune system and cancer. Recent therapeutic progress offers unprecedented means to explore melanoma in ways never before possible.

**About the MRA:** MRA is a public charity formed in 2007 under the auspices of the Milken Institute, with the generous founding support of Debra and Leon Black. 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 \$110 million to support 300 research projects in 18 countries. Please visit [www.curemelanoma.org](http://www.curemelanoma.org) for further information on MRA and the research initiatives funded in prior award cycles.

### **OBJECTIVE: *EMPHASIS ON TRANSLATIONAL SCIENCE***

MRA is soliciting proposals that address the gap in translational science (i.e., turning scientific discoveries into tools and/or treatments for high-risk individuals and patients with melanoma). Successful proposals have the potential of applying important basic and preclinical discoveries to the near-term development of clinical trials and studies impacting melanoma detection, prevention, diagnosis, staging, and/or treatment.

Proposals for clinical studies testing well-defined and clearly articulated hypotheses are welcome and should be accompanied by a brief protocol synopsis and timeline with milestones. IRB approval is not required at the time of application but is required before initial payments are made. **MRA welcomes proposals in the following areas:**

- **Prevention:** Elucidation of environmental, epidemiological, and biological factors in melanomagenesis that lead to improved strategies for melanoma prevention.
- **Detection, Diagnosis, and Staging:** Development of innovative detection and diagnostic methodologies; identification and validation of diagnostic and prognostic biomarkers.
- **Treatment:** Projects emphasizing the translation of scientific findings to new treatments for patients with melanoma. Examples include, but are not limited to, studies of melanoma immunotherapy, therapeutic applications based on molecular mechanisms involved in melanoma formation and/or progression, treatments that target the tumor microenvironment or microbiome, combination therapies, and development of novel biomarkers of response to therapy.

**Special Emphasis Areas:** For the 2019-2020 cycle, MRA seeks proposals in the following areas, which are focused on current unmet clinical needs in melanoma. These areas are of particular interest, will receive special consideration, and can include pre-clinical, translational, clinical, and/or correlative studies:

- Identifying strategies to overcome treatment resistance, difficult-to-treat melanoma subtypes such as acral, mucosal, or uveal melanoma, and/or non-BRAF-mutant melanomas such as NRAS or NF1-mutant;
- Informing logical and optimal combination therapies, therapeutic sequences, and/or treatment regimens in adjuvant and neoadjuvant approaches;
- Developing strategies to prevent and/or treat metastatic disease;
- Identifying markers of response, resistance, and/or risk of recurrence or death;
- Improving prevention and early detection strategies; and/or developing new diagnostic approaches, including artificial intelligence or machine-learning endeavors.

## REVIEW AND SELECTION CRITERIA

The following criteria will be used to assess the scientific merit, originality, translational nature of, and degree to which the proposal will lead to rapid clinical benefit.

- **Significance:** Original, innovative, and transformative research approaches with strong scientific rationale and clear capacity to enhance prevention, detection, diagnosis, staging, or treatment for patients with melanoma or for individuals at risk will be prioritized.
- **Approach:** MRA seeks outstanding and technically rigorous proposals as determined by peer review. Overall study design, methodology, and analyses must be appropriate to accomplish specific aims.
- **Clinical Relevance:** Proposals that articulate a clear path to near-term clinical application will be strongly favored.
- **Investigator:** Applicant has appropriate training, expertise, and evidence of productivity to carry out proposed research.
- **Environment:** Applicant's institution and department are sufficiently committed to area of research proposed and to the applicant. Equipment and other institutional resources are sufficient to support the applicant. In the case of Young Investigator applicants, selected Mentor is appropriate to advance applicant's career and project with evidence of a strong mentorship relationship.
- **Young Investigator applications will be evaluated using the above criteria; however, will be approximately weighted as follows: One-third Significance, Approach, and Clinical Relevance, one-third Investigator, and one-third Environment/Mentor.**

## APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

General eligibility requirements:

- MRA encourages applications from a diverse pool of investigators.
- **Principal Investigators (PIs) must hold a full-time faculty appointment at the level of Assistant Professor (or equivalent) or above at an academic or other non-profit research institution within or outside the United States.** Please note, however, that the ASTRO-MRA Young

Investigator Award and the Dermatology Foundation-MRA Mid-Career Investigator Award are limited to U.S. applicants only.

- PIs must be able to show clear evidence of an independent research program.
- If previously funded by MRA, applicant must be up-to-date on all reporting requirements.
- Fellows or those in other training or research support positions are not eligible to apply.
- Individuals employed by state or federal government agencies may participate in research proposals as non-funded collaborators, but may not apply for MRA funding.
- Investigators need not be specifically trained in melanoma research, however, they should be working in an environment capable of conducting high-quality, high-impact melanoma research.
- **An investigator may serve as PI on only one proposal submitted to MRA for any of the award mechanisms in this cycle. This includes any Special Opportunity Awards.**
- Mentors for Young Investigator Award applicants may serve as a PI on a separate proposal this cycle; however, that proposal must represent a distinct hypothesis from the Young Investigator's proposal.
- Multiple applications will be accepted from a single institution, provided that each application has a different PI and represents a distinct hypothesis.

If there are any questions about eligibility, please contact Tasheema Prince, MRA Scientific Program Manager, at [tprince@curemelanoma.org](mailto:tprince@curemelanoma.org) before submitting an application. Applications from PIs who do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be reviewed.

## TYPES OF AWARDS

### **TEAM SCIENCE AWARD**

***Letters of Intent due 5 p.m. Eastern Time, October 7, 2019***

***Estimated LOI decisions: November 18, 2019***

***Invited Full Proposals due 5 p.m. Eastern Time, January 10, 2020***

**Description:** Team Science Awards are designed to foster a collaborative research process and promote transformational melanoma research advances with the potential for rapid clinical translation. Evidence of prior collaboration among team members is encouraged, but not required.

**Term:** 3 Years

**Amount:** Up to \$300,000 per year for three years (up to \$900,000 total)

**Eligibility:**

- Team must be multidisciplinary, and consist of two or more established Principal Investigators and a Young Investigator with complementary expertise;
- Teams may consist of investigators from the same institution, or different institutions, and may be international;
- The designated Administrative PI is responsible for administrative leadership. All PIs in the team share authority for scientific leadership;

- The Administrative PI and any collaborating PI Applicants must be senior investigators, past the initial four years of their first academic faculty appointment and must hold a full-time faculty appointment at the level of Assistant Professor (or equivalent) or above;
- An investigator may serve as a PI, including Administrative PI or as a collaborating PI, on only one proposal this cycle;
- **Each team must include at least one Young Investigator as a Co-Investigator**, whose work must be integral to one or more of the aims of the proposal (see and comply with all Young Investigator eligibility criteria below);
- An investigator may only be the designated Young Investigator on one application in the Team Science Award category. However, a Young Investigator identified within a Team Science Award application may also apply in the same cycle for their own, individual Young Investigator Award provided that application has a unique research focus and hypothesis.

## **YOUNG INVESTIGATOR AWARD**

***Applicant Eligibility Checklist due November 4, 2019***

***Full proposals due 5 p.m. Eastern Time, November 18, 2019***

**Description:** Young Investigator Awards aim to attract early career faculty with original ideas into the field of melanoma, thereby recruiting and supporting the next generation of melanoma research leaders. Awardees will be provided funding to accomplish innovative and original, preclinical, translational, and/or early clinical research projects. Young Investigators are scientists within the first four years of their first academic faculty appointment. A mentorship commitment from a senior investigator is required.

**Term:** 3 Years

**Amount:** Up to \$75,000 per year for three years (up to \$225,000 total)

### **Eligibility Requirements:**

- **Applicants must be within the first four years of their first independent, full time academic faculty appointment at the application deadline at the level of Assistant Professor (or equivalent position);**
- Applicants must designate at least one Mentor who is an established investigator at the same institution who will ensure that adequate support and guidance are provided for successful completion of the proposed research project and provide career mentorship;
- Applicants who have secured an independent full-time faculty position commencing by July 1, 2020 will be considered; in this case, a letter from an institutional official or department chairperson confirming the planned date of faculty appointment is required at the time of application;
- Applicants do not have to be on a tenure-track; however, fellows or others who are in training positions are not eligible to apply;
- Applicants who are in research support positions are not eligible to apply;
- Applicants who have been awarded a prior MRA Young Investigator Award are not eligible to apply for an additional MRA Young Investigator Award;

- Applicants may serve as PI on only one proposal submitted to MRA for any of the award mechanisms in this cycle;
- **All Young Investigator applicants must complete and return the Applicant Eligibility Checklist by November 4, 2019. Please email the completed checklist to MRA Scientific Program Manager Tasheema Prince at [tprince@curemelanoma.org](mailto:tprince@curemelanoma.org).**

## **PILOT AWARD**

***Full proposals due 5 p.m. Eastern Time, November 18, 2019***

**Description:** Pilot Awards support senior investigators who propose potentially transformative ideas that do not have extensive preliminary data but articulate a clear hypothesis and translational goals. Resources for such "high-risk, high-reward" projects are important to establish proof-of-concept, which may then leverage additional funding through more traditional avenues.

**Term:** 2 Years

**Amount:** Up to \$50,000 per year for two years (up to \$100,000 total)

### **Eligibility:**

- Applicants must be a senior investigator, past the initial four years of their first academic faculty appointment;
- Applicants must hold a full-time faculty appointment at the level of Assistant Professor (or equivalent) or above.

## **SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY: DERMATOLOGY FOUNDATION - MRA MELANOMA DETECTION OR PREVENTION MID-CAREER INVESTIGATOR AWARD**

***Applicant Eligibility Checklist due November 4, 2019***

***Full proposals due 5 p.m. Eastern Time, November 18, 2019***

With this Special Opportunity, MRA, in conjunction with the Dermatology Foundation, seek grant applications for dermatologic research addressing improved approaches for melanoma detection or prevention. This award will support innovations in melanoma diagnosis/detection/prevention and can include but are not limited to the following:

- Artificial intelligence algorithms or dermoscopy applications to evaluate clinical lesions;
- Artificial intelligence algorithms to evaluate histologic slides for melanoma diagnosis;
- Identification of novel biomarkers that improve diagnosis and/or predict outcomes for melanoma;
- Methods to detect circulating melanoma cells/DNA;
- Identification of DNA mutation patterns that improve diagnosis and treatment selection;
- Radiologic techniques to image metastatic disease; and
- Telemedicine approaches to improve community outreach to detect melanoma.

Please see detailed instructions below on how to apply. Note that all applications for the Dermatology Foundation-MRA Mid-Career Award should be focused on melanoma prevention and/or detection.

**Term:** One year, with option of renewal for one additional year.

**Amount:** Up to \$100,000 for one year, with option for renewal for additional \$100,000 for year two.

**Eligibility:** The award will support the research of an outstanding mid-career investigator with an established trajectory of excellence who meets the following requirements as of the date of funding, July 1, 2020 (or as otherwise noted):

- M.D.; M.D., Ph.D.; D.O.; or Ph.D. degree;
- Faculty member with a primary appointment in U.S. dept./division of dermatology with an ACGME (Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education) approved training program;
- Is no more than 10 years beyond initial appointment as an Assistant Professor as of January 1, 2020;
- At least 75% total effort committed to research;
- Applicants may serve as PI on only one proposal submitted to MRA for any of the award mechanisms in this cycle, including Special Opportunities;
- Applicant CAN concurrently hold other MRA funding at time of application;
- Applicant CANNOT hold other Dermatology Foundation support at the time of funding (applicants in year 3 of a Dermatology Foundation Career Development Award may apply);
- Applicant must have appropriate training and experience in relevant research and demonstrate a strong commitment to research in skin cancer;
- Strong institutional commitment for the applicant;
- Research aims must be unique to the award; and
- Recipient may concurrently hold federally funded awards or their equivalent (e.g., NIH, VA, DOD, FDA, Doris Duke, Burroughs Wellcome, etc.)

Please see instructions below on how to apply. Note that unlike other award mechanisms this cycle, we will NOT be able to provide reviewer feedback on these applications. Please contact Tasheema Prince, MRA Scientific Program Manager at [tprince@curemelanoma.org](mailto:tprince@curemelanoma.org) with questions.

### **SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY: BRISTOL-MYERS SQUIBB-MRA YOUNG INVESTIGATOR AWARDS IN IMMUNOTHERAPY**

***Applicant Eligibility Checklist due November 4, 2019***

***Full proposals due 5 p.m. Eastern Time, November 18, 2019***

Through the generous support of Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS), MRA is offering two awards for Young Investigators to conduct projects supported by preliminary data and focused on advancing immunotherapies in melanoma.

Please see descriptions of and instructions for Young Investigator Awards for specific details on eligibility, award terms, and amount, as well as instructions on how to apply.

Applicants should submit to the general Young Investigator Award program and designate their desire to be considered for this award when completing their online application in proposalCENTRAL. To do this, please select “BMS Immunotherapy” under subprogram in the Title Page step of the online application. **Selecting “BMS Immunotherapy” will not limit an applicant’s opportunity to also be selected under the general Young Investigator Award, but instead is meant to expand opportunities in an effort to increase overall funding of immunotherapy approaches for melanoma.**

## **SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY: ASTRO-MRA YOUNG INVESTIGATOR AWARD IN RADIATION ONCOLOGY**

***Applicant Eligibility Checklist due November 4, 2019***

***Full proposals due 5 p.m. Eastern Time, November 18, 2019***

Research in radiation oncology has led to advancements in technology and therapy that have improved patient outcomes and care. The MRA is pleased to partner with the [American Society for Radiation Oncology \(ASTRO\)](#) to offer a special opportunity to support research in radiation oncology to improve treatment options for melanoma patients. Early career radiation oncologists, radiation or cancer biologists, or physicists are encouraged to submit radiation oncology Research Proposals that include at least 50% effort on melanoma.

Please see descriptions of and instructions for Young Investigator Awards for specific details on eligibility, award terms and amount, as well as instructions on how to apply. Additional eligibility criteria include:

- Applicant must hold a position at an academic or other non-profit research institution within the United States; and
- Applicant must be a member in good standing of ASTRO at time of award activation (June 1, 2020 unless otherwise noted).

Applicants should submit to the general Young Investigator Award program and designate their desire to be considered for this award when completing their online application in proposalCENTRAL. To do this, please select “ASTRO-MRA” under subprogram in the Title Page step of the online application. **Selecting “ASTRO-MRA” will not limit an applicant’s opportunity to also be selected under the general Young Investigator Award, but instead is meant to expand opportunities in an effort to increase overall funding of radiation oncology approaches for melanoma.**

Please see instructions below on how to apply. Please contact Tasheema Prince, MRA Scientific Program Manager at [tprince@curemelanoma.org](mailto:tprince@curemelanoma.org) with any questions.

## **APPLICATION FORMAT AND INSTRUCTIONS**

**All applications are due by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time. Proposals will not be considered after the deadline. Applicants must utilize the proposalCENTRAL online application tool at <https://proposalcentral.com/> and the document templates and requirements therein. Please carefully follow the instructions in proposalCENTRAL and below. Applications include the following steps and components:**

## **TEAM SCIENCE AWARDS**

Applicants must submit a letter of intent (LOI) to MRA prior to submission of a full proposal (upon invitation). **Please carefully follow the instructions in proposalCENTRAL.**

### **Instructions for LOIs:**

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.
4. **Applicant/PI Information:** Team Science applications must identify one PI for administrative purposes (the Administrative PI for the proposal). This is the Applicant. The Young Investigator cannot be the Administrative PI.
5. **Organization/Institution Information:** This is the Administrative PI's institution.
6. **Key Personnel Information:** Identify other PIs on the team as well as the Young Investigator and their Mentor. All PIs share authority for project leadership. The position of "co-PI" is not offered under this award mechanism.
7. **Letter of Intent: One page maximum** that includes a) a description of the scientific aims and translational potential; and b) the nature of and rationale for the proposed collaboration, the specific role of each participant, and synergistic opportunities. **Letters exceeding the one-page limit will not be considered.**
8. **Signature Page:** All PIs (including the Administrative PI and collaborating PIs) must sign this form verifying that none of the PIs on this LOI are PIs on other MRA LOIs or other proposals this cycle. Electronic signatures are allowable.
9. **Young Investigator Eligibility Checklist:** Required to confirm eligibility. Requires signature of the Department Chair, Division Head, or Dean.
10. **PI Data Sheet:** Please enter your ORCID ID and other requested demographic information. If you do not have an ORCID ID, you can register for one here: <https://orcid.org/register>. Please note that requested demographic information will NOT be used by MRA in any way during the selection process. Having such information will help MRA better understand its applicant and awardee pool and detect and address any inequities that exist in the selection process.
11. **Validate:** Check for any missing required information.
12. **Submit:** Please note that no proposals will be able to be submitted past their deadline. Technical support for the on-line application system is not available after 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

Full length applications will be invited from meritorious LOIs by November 18, 2019.

### **Instructions for full length proposals**

Full length proposals must be prepared according to the following instructions and according to instructions in proposalCENTRAL. The application consists of the following components:

1. **Title Page:** Enter the project title. For proposals involving multiple institutions, please include a total amount requested for each institution in the designated spaces provided.
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.
4. **Applicant/PI:** Key information about the applicant PI. This must be the Administrative PI on Team Science Award applications.
5. **Organization/Institution:** Key information about the Applicant/PI's institution, including name and email address of the signing official who, in addition to the PI, will be contacted if the award is selected for funding.
6. **Key Personnel:** List and provide contact information for key persons. Include all PIs on the proposal as well as any additional key personnel. A designated Young Investigator and their Mentor is required.
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 that will be generated as part of the award and how they will be shared.
8. **Statement of Proposal's Fit Within MRA's Research Program:** Provide a brief statement (up to 2000 characters) of how the proposed research project fits within MRA's overall research portfolio. If the work builds on a previously funded project(s), please explain. A full list of MRA funded grants can be found here: <https://www.curemelanoma.org/grants/>
9. **Abstracts and Keywords:** Provide a lay audience friendly abstract and a technical abstract (2,000 characters maximum each) and key words. Please note: the lay abstract will become public if the award is selected for funding, therefore it should not contain any proprietary information.
10. **Budget Period Detail:** Enter budget detail for each award period requested. **MRA will not support indirect costs, overhead costs, or other similar institutional levies.** Fringe benefits for personnel salaries are allowable.
11. **Budget Summary and Justification:** A summary of the budget detail will be shown. 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 proposalCENTRAL forms (2,000 characters), applicants may upload the budget justification in document form in step #14. For proposals involving more than one institution: Do not include partner institution costs under contract

costs; this category should only be used for contracts with outside facilities for performance of services.

12. **Current and Pending Research Support:** Please list all current and pending support for the Administrative PI and all Key Personnel. Any overlap of current or pending support with the MRA proposal must be described and explained. If you cannot access the proposalCENTRAL profiles of Key Personnel, please use the template provided in step #2 to upload this information in the Upload Attachments section of the application.
13. **Organizational Assurances:** IRB and IACUC approvals, if applicable.
14. **Upload Attachments:** Upload the following:
  - a. **Biosketch for PIs, Young Investigator, and other Key Personnel:** Please upload an NIH format biosketch for the Administrative PI, other PIs, Young Investigator, Mentor, and any other Key Personnel. Biosketches for research support staff, students, postdocs and other training positions are not required. Applicants who do not have an NIH biosketch may use the template provided in proposalCENTRAL.
  - b. **Current and pending research support for the PIs and Young Investigator:** Use the template provided in proposalCENTRAL, which includes a statement of overlap, for any Key Personnel not included in step #12. Any overlap of current or pending support with the MRA proposal must be described and explained.
  - c. **Project description: Must be formatted in Arial 11 point or Times New Roman 12 point font with no less than ½ inch margins. 5 pages maximum,** inclusive of the following: Background and specific aims, preliminary data, experimental design and methods, statistical plan, figures (which may be embedded within the above sections), and rationale/fit with key criteria, including the potential for clinical impact.
  - d. **Scientific references:** A list of up to 20 references supporting the project description is allowed, in addition to the 5-page project description.
  - e. **Mentor Letter of Support for the Young Investigator:** 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 independent research program 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>.
  - f. **Young Investigator Eligibility Checklist:** Required to confirm eligibility. Requires signature of the Department Chair, Division Head, or Dean.

- g. **For clinical trials proposals:** Attach a brief protocol synopsis (no longer than 5 pages), along with a timeline and milestones, including but not limited to IRB and regulatory approval (if applicable), patient accrual timeline, and timeline for completion of analyses.
  - h. **For multi-institutional proposals:** Attach a letter from the Administrative PI's institution confirming that if the award is made, the institution will execute the necessary sub-award agreements within 60 days of execution of the award agreement between MRA and the applicant institution and will transfer funds from their institution to the collaborating institution(s). When uploading in proposalCENTRAL, select "Inter-Institutional Team Funding Letter."
15. **PI Data Sheet:** Please enter your ORCID ID and other requested demographic information. If you do not have an ORCID ID, you can register for one here: <https://orcid.org/register>. Please note that requested demographic information will NOT be used by MRA in any way during the selection process. Having such information will help MRA better understand its applicant and awardee pool and detect and address any inequities that exist in the selection process.
16. **Validate:** Check for any missing required information.
17. **Signature pages:** Print the signature page, which must be signed by the PI and the institution's signing official, and uploaded as part of the application package.
18. **Submit:** Please note that no proposals will be able to be submitted past their deadline. Technical support for the on-line application system is not available after 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

### **MID-CAREER, PILOT, AND YOUNG INVESTIGATOR AWARDS**

- 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.
- 4. **Applicant/PI:** Key information about the applicant PI.
- 5. **Organization/Institution:** Key information about the PI's institution, including name and email address of the signing official who, in addition to the PI, will be contacted if the award is selected for funding. For Mid-Career Investigator Award applications, please also provide the name and contact information for the institution's Fiscal Officer as well as the Dermatology Department Chair/Division Chief.
- 6. **Key Personnel:** List and provide contact information for key persons. For Young Investigator Award applicants, a Mentor from the same institution is required.
- 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 that will be generated as part of the award and how they will be shared.

8. **Statement of Proposal's Fit Within MRA's Research Program:** Provide a brief statement (up to 2000 characters) of how the proposed research project fits within MRA's overall research portfolio. If the work builds on a previously funded project(s), please explain. A full list of MRA funded grants can be found here: <https://www.curemelanoma.org/grants/>.
9. **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.
10. **Budget Period Detail:** Enter budget detail for each award period requested. Awards will not support indirect costs, overhead costs, or other similar institutional charges. Fringe benefits for personnel salaries are allowable.
11. **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 proposalCENTRAL forms (2,000 characters), applicants may upload the budget justification in document form in step # 14.
12. **Current and Pending Research Support:** Please list all current and pending support for the Applicant and all Key Personnel. Any overlap of current or pending support with the MRA proposal must be described and explained. If you cannot access the proposalCENTRAL profiles of Key Personnel, please use the template provided in step #2 to upload this information in step #14.
13. **Organizational Assurances:** IRB and IACUC approvals, if applicable.
14. **Upload Attachments:** Upload the following:
  - a. **Biosketch for PI and key personnel:** Please upload an NIH format biosketch for yourself and any Key Personnel. Biosketches for research support staff, students, postdocs and other training positions are not required. Applicants who do not have an NIH biosketch may use the template provided in proposalCENTRAL.
  - a. **Current and pending research support:** Use the template provided in proposalCENTRAL, which includes a statement of overlap, for any Key Personnel not included in step #12. Any overlap of current or pending support with the MRA proposal must be described and explained.
  - 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 5 pages maximum, inclusive of the following: Background and specific aims, preliminary data, experimental design and methods, statistical plan, 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 5-page project description.

- d. **For Young Investigator Award proposals:**
- i. *Mentor Letter of Support:* 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 independent research program 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>.
  - ii. *Young Investigator Applicant Eligibility Checklist:* Required to confirm eligibility. Requires signature of the Department Chair, Division Head, or Dean. Must be returned via email to MRA Scientific Program Manager Tasheema Prince at [tprince@curemelanoma.org](mailto:tprince@curemelanoma.org) by November 4, 2019. Please also upload a copy as part of the application.
- e. **For Mid-Career Award Proposals:**
- i. *Dermatology Department Chair/Division Chief Letter of Support.* The letter should confirm the eligibility of the applicant as a mid-career investigator, including certification that 75% of the applicant's total time is devoted to research. The letter should also include a brief statement about the applicant, the research 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>.
  - ii. *Mid-Career Award Applicant Eligibility Checklist:* Required to confirm eligibility. Requires signature of the Department Chair/Division Chief. Must be returned via email to MRA Scientific Program Manager Tasheema Prince at [tprince@curemelanoma.org](mailto:tprince@curemelanoma.org) by November 4, 2019. Please also upload a copy as part of the application.
- f. **For proposals involving clinical trials:** Attach a brief protocol synopsis (5 pages maximum), along with a timeline and milestones, including but not limited to IRB and regulatory approval (if applicable), patient accrual timeline, and timeline for completion of analyses.
15. **PI Data Sheet:** Please enter your ORCID ID and other requested demographic information. If you do not have an ORCID ID, you can register for one here: <https://orcid.org/register>. Please note that requested demographic information will NOT be used by MRA in any way during the selection process. Having such information will help MRA better understand its applicant and awardee pool and detect and address any inequities that exist in the selection process.
16. **Validate:** Check for any missing required information.
17. **Signature Page(s):** Print the signature page, which must be signed by the PI and the institution's signing official, and uploaded as part of the application package.

18. **Submit:** Please note that no proposals will be able to be submitted past their deadline. Technical support for the on-line application system is not available after 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

## TIMELINE

**All application deadlines conclude at 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time. Proposals submitted after the deadline will not be considered.**

- **October 7, 2019:** Deadline for Letters of Intent (LOI) for Team Science Awards
- **November 4, 2019:** Deadline for Mid-Career and Young Investigator applicants to submit Applicant Eligibility Checklist.
- **November 18, 2019:** Mid-Career Investigator, Pilot, and Young Investigator full proposal applications are due.
- **January 10, 2019:** Invited Team Science Award full proposal applications are due.
- **Late March/Early April 2020:** Awardees notified (Note that MRA may adjust the notification date without notice to applicants).
- **June 2020:** Pilot, Team Science, and Young Investigator projects start.
- **July 1, 2020:** Mid-Career Investigator projects start.

## REVIEW MECHANISM

All proposals will undergo rigorous peer review by the MRA Grant Review Committee (GRC), comprised of experts in diverse areas of translational cancer research (Full listing of the MRA GRC is available here: [www.curemelanoma.org/GRC](http://www.curemelanoma.org/GRC)). Applications will be scored according to MRA Review and Selection Criteria. To minimize any real or perceived conflicts of interest (COI), MRA asks GRC members to adhere to a rigorous set of COI guidelines. Further information about these guidelines are available upon request. Please contact Tasheema Prince, MRA Scientific Program Manager, at [tprince@curemelanoma.org](mailto:tprince@curemelanoma.org). All awards are contingent upon ratification by the MRA Board of Directors. **MRA will make every effort to provide brief, written reviewer feedback on full applications with the exception of Mid-Career Investigator Award applications to all applicants; however, occasionally such comments may not be available due to unforeseen circumstances.** A listing of GRC membership and descriptions of the projects funded in 2008-2019 are provided on our website, [www.curemelanoma.org](http://www.curemelanoma.org).

## COLLABORATIVE FUNDING OFFERS

For outstanding research proposals as determined by peer review that fall beyond MRA's funding pay-line, MRA may seek co-funding from applicant institutions in order to support these proposals. MRA will

reserve up to \$1.45 million of its support for the Collaborative Funding program this cycle. For our Collaborative Funding program, MRA will provide one half of the award funds made under this program and each PI's institution will provide the remaining one half of the relevant budget for that institution. In case of questions, please contact Tasheema Prince, MRA Scientific Program Manager at [tprince@curemelanoma.org](mailto:tprince@curemelanoma.org).

For proposals that meet the above criteria, MRA will contact the institutions for this Collaborative Funding offer, and institutions will be asked to verbally decline or accept the offer within 14 days. Signed agreements between MRA and the institution will be required within 30 days. Collaborative Funding terms are non-negotiable and relevant awardees are automatically considered for this program.

## **AWARD ADMINISTRATION**

### **AWARD LETTER**

Upon acceptance of the award, the PI and his/her 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 <https://www.curemelanoma.org/assets/Uploads/PDFs/TermsAndConditions2020.pdf>. 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 proposalCENTRAL 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. For clinical trials, a timeline and milestones must be included in the application package. Failure to meet these milestones within a reasonable time frame may result in termination of the award.

### **MULTI-INSTITUTIONAL PROJECTS**

For projects including key personnel at other institutions, the PI must verify in advance that funds can be transferred from their institution to the collaborating institution. This requirement can be easily met by attaching a letter from the PI's sponsored programs office stating a commitment to comply with this requirement. Sub-award agreements between collaborating institutions must be executed within 60 days of MRA's execution of the award agreement with the applicant institution.

### **FUNDING**

For all proposals, the level and duration of funding may be adjusted by MRA as appropriate for the scope of the proposal and the funds available. Partial funding will also be considered to obtain proof-of-principle data in support of innovative ideas with transformative potential. **Awards will not support indirect costs, overhead costs, or other similar institutional charges**; however, fringe benefits for personnel salaries are allowable. **Full-term funding will be contingent upon review of annual progress reports and other oversight activities conducted by MRA.** Multi-year support is not automatic for any MRA award and is conditioned on submission of complete and accurate progress reports, financial reports, and demonstrated progress on the funded proposal.

## MRA SCIENTIFIC RETREAT

PIs will be invited to attend the annual MRA Scientific Retreat. PIs are expected to attend and may be asked to present research findings made under their awards at these meetings. MRA will cover reasonable travel costs related to participation in the Scientific Retreat.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Eligibility

Q: Must PIs have an academic faculty appointment? Is this a hard-and-fast rule?

A: PIs must have a full-time appointment at an academic or non-profit research institution at the level of 'Assistant Professor' (or equivalent) or above; however, a tenure-track appointment is not required. Evidence of independent investigator status and an environment conducive and supportive of melanoma research is required. If there is any doubt or question about a PI's eligibility, please contact MRA (contacts provided in this RFP) before an application is submitted. Applications from PIs who do not fit the eligibility criteria will not be reviewed. **To confirm eligibility, Young Investigator and Dermatology Foundation-MRA Mid-Career Investigator applicants must complete the Applicant Eligibility Checklist** (see additional FAQs for Young Investigator and Dermatology Foundation-MRA Mid-Career Investigator applicants).

Q: Does MRA fund investigators and institutions outside of the United States?

A: Yes. Investigators at non-profit institutions outside of the United States are eligible. PIs must be at the level of 'Assistant Professor' or equivalent. Academic appointments at institutions outside of the U.S. can differ from those traditionally found in the U.S. Contact MRA if there are any questions about eligibility prior to submitting a proposal. Please note that the ASTRO-MRA and Dermatology Foundation-MRA Special Opportunities are limited to U.S. applicants only.

### Young Investigator Awards

Q: I do not hold the title of Assistant Professor but I do hold the title of my institution's entry level, full-time faculty position. Am I eligible to apply?

A: Appointments such as research assistant professor, adjunct assistant professor, assistant professor research track, instructor, or lecturer may be eligible to apply as long as your institution considers this an independent, faculty-level position and you have independent lab space. Please verify your eligibility by November 4, 2019, by emailing the signed and completed Young Investigator Eligibility Checklist to Tasheema Prince, at [tprince@curemelanoma.org](mailto:tprince@curemelanoma.org).

Q: I am within my first four years of an Assistant Professor position, but previously held an entry level full-time faculty position such as research assistant professor, adjunct assistant professor, assistant professor research track, instructor, or lecturer, either at my current institution or at a different institution. Am I still eligible to apply?

A: If you held any independent faculty-level position prior to November 18, 2015, then you are not eligible to apply.

Q: I will be past the first four years of my first faculty appointment at the time the project starts. May I apply for a Young Investigator Award?

A: No. Applicants should be within the first four years of their first faculty appointment at the time of proposal submission.

Q: I will be past the first four years of my first faculty appointment at the time of application but I took time off for personal, family or professional reasons. Does this count against eligibility?

A: If an applicant took leave of absence for family or medical leave or other personal or professional reasons, please inquire to MRA about eligibility. An appropriately documented leave of absence will not be counted in the four years of eligibility. Leaves of absence may include: military service (that does not include research training/experience), family leave, and maternity leave. MRA will extend the period of eligibility for a period equivalent to the time away from research.

Q: I am a Fellow at an academic institution. Am I eligible to apply for the Young Investigator Award?

A: Generally, no, unless the Fellow title is at least equivalent to Assistant Professor position (which is sometimes the case outside of the U.S.). Those in training positions are not eligible. Only those with a faculty level appointment will be considered. Young Investigator Award applicants who do not hold an 'Assistant Professor' title must contact MRA to verify their eligibility prior to submitting a proposal (see contact information in this RFP) and complete the Applicant Eligibility Checklist.

Q: What is the role of the Mentor?

A: It is expected that Young Investigators are independent faculty members and not in training or in research support positions. However, a Mentor is required to help ensure that the Young Investigator has the resources they need to successfully carry out the work at their institution.

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

A: No. All Young Investigator applicants must have a designated Mentor at their institution to help to ensure that the Young Investigator 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 Young Investigator applicants allowed to be a PI of an existing MRA award or award application this cycle?

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

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 is the expected level of percent effort for a Young Investigator?

A: There is no specific requirement around percent effort, but MRA encourages a minimum of 10% effort on the project.

Q: I hold an appointment at an institution outside of the United States. Am I still eligible to apply for ASTRO-MRA Young Investigator Award?

A: No. Applicants must hold an appointment at an institution in the U.S.

Q: I am not a member of ASTRO. Am I still eligible to apply for ASTRO-MRA Young Investigator Award?  
A: Yes, but you must be a member of ASTRO in good standing at the time of award activation. You can join ASTRO by visiting [www.astro.org](http://www.astro.org).

Q: I have previously been awarded an ASTRO Junior Faculty or Career Development Award. Am I still eligible to apply for ASTRO-MRA Young Investigator Award?  
A: No. Previous ASTRO Junior Faculty or Career Development Awardees are not eligible to apply.

### **Dermatology Foundation-MRA Mid-Career Awards**

Q: I do not hold the title of Assistant Professor but I do hold the title of my institution's entry level, full-time faculty position. Am I eligible to apply?  
A: Generally, no. This award is available to a mid-career investigator who is generally at or above Assistant Professor level. However, due to some variation in type and usage of faculty titles across institutions, applications will be accepted from candidates that have a certified faculty position and have established a research track record. Please verify your eligibility by November 4, 2019, by emailing the signed and completed Mid-Career Investigator Award Applicant Eligibility Checklist to Tasheema Prince, at [tprince@curemelanoma.org](mailto:tprince@curemelanoma.org).

Q: I am within my first ten years of an Assistant Professor position, but previously held an entry level full-time faculty position such as research assistant professor, instructor, or lecturer, either at my current institution or at a different institution. Am I still eligible to apply?  
A: Yes. As long as you are within the first 10 years for your first Assistant Professor appointment on January 1, 2020, you are eligible to apply.

Q: I will be past the first ten years of my first Assistant Professor appointment at the time of application but I took time off for personal, family or professional reasons. Can the eligibility window be extended?  
A: No. All applicants must be within the initial 10 years of their first Assistant Professor appointment as of January 1, 2020.

Q: I am a Fellow at an academic institution. Am I eligible to apply for the Dermatology Foundation-MRA Mid-Career Investigator Award?  
A: Generally, no. Those in training positions are not eligible. You must be a mid-career faculty member with an established research track record.

Q: I hold an appointment at an institution outside of the United States. Am I still eligible to apply for Dermatology Foundation-MRA Early Career Investigator Award?  
A: No. Applicants must hold an appointment at an institution in the U.S.

Q: I am not in a Department or Division of Dermatology. Am I still eligible?  
A: No. You must be in a Department or Division of Dermatology with an ACGME approved training program.

Q: Can I apply for both a Dermatology Foundation-MRA Mid-Career Investigator Award and another award offered by MRA this cycle?  
A: No. You may only apply for one award per cycle.

- Q: I am currently receiving MRA funding. May I apply for the Dermatology Foundation-MRA Mid-Career Award?
- A: Yes. You may hold multiple awards from MRA concurrently as long as they are from different cycles and are scientifically distinct.
- Q: I currently hold a Dermatology Foundation research award. May I apply for the Dermatology Foundation-MRA Mid-Career Award?
- A: You may apply for the award if you will not hold other Dermatology Foundation support at the time of funding (i.e., as of July 1, 2020). For example, Dermatology Foundation Career Development Award recipients in year three of their award may apply.
- Q: What is the expected level of percent effort for a Mid-Career Investigator Award?
- A: There is no specific percent effort required for the project, but a minimum of 5% effort is encouraged.
- Q: I meet all faculty position requirements, but my research project is focused on developing new treatments. May I still apply for a Dermatology Foundation-MRA Mid-Career Investigator Award?
- A: No. All applications should be focused on melanoma prevention and/or detection. If your project is treatment focused, consider applying to other MRA or Dermatology Foundation mechanisms.

### **Collaborative Funding Program**

- Q: Is my institution's willingness to participate in the Collaborative Funding Program going to affect my score in this or any future funding cycle?
- A: No. The evaluation by MRA's Grant Review Committee will not be influenced by any co-funding or collaborative funding considerations. Only those proposals that are deemed outstanding by peer review but fall below MRA's pay line will be considered for MRA's Collaborative Funding Program. The collaborative funding process will be conducted after the scientific review process has been completed.

### **Application components**

- Q: Do I need to have an ORCID ID?
- A: Yes. MRA now requires that all applicants provide an ORCID ID. If you do not have an ORCID ID, you can register for one here: <https://orcid.org/register>. More information about ORCID IDs can be found here: <https://orcid.org/>.
- Q: Why is MRA collecting demographic information?
- A: MRA now requests that applicants provide demographic information in proposalCENTRAL; however, this information is NOT required and will NOT be used in any way during the selection process. Having such information will help MRA better understand its applicant and awardee pool and detect and address any inequities that exist in the selection process.
- Q: How are proposals submitted? Do I need to send a hard copy?

A: All proposals must be submitted electronically via proposalCENTRAL, <https://proposalcentral.com/>. The signature page should be signed and a scanned PDF copy be uploaded as part of the application in proposalCENTRAL. Hard copies will not be accepted.

Q: Does MRA require the NIH salary cap to be used when calculating salary and fringe benefit requests for the budget?

A: No, but applicants may use it at their discretion.

Q: What needs to be included in the “Current and Pending Support” section?

A: Please submit a listing of all sponsored research support for the effort of the PI that is active or pending (submitted or awarded by a research sponsor but not yet started). Include the name of the title of the project, research sponsor, total annual funding, start and end dates, and percent of committed time. For each project, you must include a statement of overlap or non-overlap with the MRA proposal. A template is provided in proposalCENTRAL.

Q: Is the NIH biosketch format acceptable for submission to MRA?

A: Yes, MRA encourages you to use your NIH biosketch. You may also use the template provided in proposalCENTRAL.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CONTACTS**

Email questions about this RFP, eligibility, or other issues about MRA or its awards to Tasheema Prince, MRA Scientific Program Manager at [tprince@curemelanoma.org](mailto:tprince@curemelanoma.org).

Technical questions about the proposalCENTRAL submission system should be directed to their customer support at 800-875-2562 (Toll-free U.S. and Canada), +1 703-964-5840 (Direct Dial International) or by email at [pcsupport@altum.com](mailto:pcsupport@altum.com). Support is available from 8:30am-5pm Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.