

**2024-2025 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

August 12, 2024

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 and near-term advancements in melanoma prevention, detection, diagnosis, and treatment. This cycle, proposals will be accepted for Established Investigator Awards, Academic-Industry Partnership Award (for Established Investigator Award), Young Investigator Awards, Pilot Awards, Dermatology Career Development Awards, and Special Opportunity Awards in Acral Melanoma, Neoadjuvant Therapy, Pediatric Melanoma, Radiation Oncology, Uveal Melanoma, and UK/Israel/Australia-based researchers. MRA plans to support at least \$9.2 million in new funding in the 2024-2025 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. More effective treatment options for patients and those at risk for melanoma are urgently needed. While research and treatments have advanced significantly in recent years, leading to the availability of new immunotherapies and molecularly targeted therapies for patients, there remains a substantial need for the development of additional treatment options, including treatment approaches for rare melanoma subtypes, optimization of existing and emerging therapies, and better prevention, detection, and diagnosis of melanoma.

**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 \$162 million to support 475 research projects in 19 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 AND CLINICAL 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, 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 and Diagnosis:** 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.

**2024-25 Special Emphasis Areas:** For the 2024-2025 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:

- Advancing neoadjuvant/adjuvant therapies for melanoma, including biomarker-based and personalized treatment approaches. (e.g., Developing sensitive and reproducible blood-based or tumor-based biomarkers to predict and monitor response/resistance).
- Identifying biomarkers of response/resistance to targeted and immune-based therapeutics and ones to assess which patients with primary melanoma are at risk of metastatic disease.
- Understanding melanoma brain metastasis and leptomeningeal disease and identifying new treatment options.
- Identifying new treatment strategies for rare melanoma subtypes, including acral, mucosal, uveal, or pediatric melanomas, particularly focusing on validated targets shown to be molecularly altered in these sub-types (e.g., NF1, CRKL, NRAS, KIT, YAP1, GNAQ, GNA11) and inclusion of geographically diverse patient populations.
- Advancing non-T cell-based immunotherapy approaches (i.e., B cells, NK cells, macrophages, etc.) and other approaches examining the tumor microenvironment (i.e. stromal cells, fibroblasts, and other non-immune cells).

## REVIEW AND SELECTION CRITERIA

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

- **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 treatment for patients with melanoma or for individuals at risk will be prioritized. Proposals that articulate a clear path to near-term clinical application will be strongly 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.
- **Investigator/Environment:** Applicant has appropriate training, expertise, and evidence of productivity (inclusive of publications, datasets, code, patents, etc.), to carry out proposed research. The 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. *In the case of Young Investigator and DERM Career Development applicants, selected Mentor(s) is appropriate to advance applicant's career and project with evidence of a strong mentorship relationship.*
- For Established Investigator, Special Opportunity Team Science, Academic-Industry Partnership, and Pilot Award applications, each of the above criteria will account for approximately one-third of the overall score.
- **Young Investigator and DERM CDA applications will be evaluated using the above criteria; however, will be approximately weighted as follows: One-third Scientific and Clinical Importance, Rigor and Feasibility; one-third Investigator; and one-third Environment/Mentor(s).**

## APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

General eligibility requirements:

- **MRA encourages applications from a diverse pool of investigators with respect to race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, and disability.** MRA recognizes that diversity in the biomedical research 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.
- **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 is limited to U.S. applicants only. The UK/Israel/Australia-based Special Opportunity is limited to UK- Israel- Australia- based 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 across any and all of the award mechanisms in this cycle. This includes any Special Opportunity Awards.**
- Mentors for Young Investigator Award and Dermatology Career Development 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 or Dermatology Career Development 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 Nico Starink MPH., MRA Senior Associate, Registry and Grants Program, at [nstarink@curemelanoma.org](mailto:nstarink@curemelanoma.org) before submitting an application. Applications from PIs who do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be reviewed.

## TYPES OF AWARDS AND SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES

### YOUNG INVESTIGATOR AWARD

***Applicant Eligibility Checklist due October 21, 2024***  
***Full proposals due November 4, 2024 at 11:59 p.m. ET***

**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 **five years** of their first academic faculty appointment. A mentorship commitment from a senior investigator is required.

**Term:** 3 Years

**Amount:** Up to \$85,000 per year for three years (up to \$255,000 total)

**Eligibility Requirements:**

- **Applicants must be within the first five 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. At least one Mentor with expertise in melanoma research is strongly advised;
- Applicants who have secured an independent full-time faculty position commencing by June 1, 2025 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 October 21, 2024. Please email the completed checklist to Kris'tina Ackerman, MRA Operations & Grants Admin Coordinator at [kackerman@curemelanoma.org](mailto:kackerman@curemelanoma.org).**

**ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR AWARD**

***Full proposals due 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time, November 4, 2024***

**Description:** Established Investigator Awards support senior investigators with an established record of scientific productivity and accomplishment.

**Term:** 3 Years

**Amount:** Up to \$125,000 per year for three years (up to \$375,000 total)

**Eligibility:**

- Applicants must be a senior investigator, past the initial **five 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.

## **ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR ACADEMIC-INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP (AIP) AWARD**

***Full proposals due 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time, November 4, 2024***

**Description:** The Academic-Industry Partnership (AIP) Award (for Established Investigators) is designed to enhance translational research by extending academic capabilities to clinical investigations and to facilitate interactions between the academic and industrial research sectors. These awards will be co-funded by MRA and an industry partner whose involvement is essential to the project.

**Term:** 3 years

**Amount:** Up to \$125,000 per year for three years (up to \$375,000 total). *Industry partner must provide funds and/or in-kind support (e.g., reagents, clinical grade drugs, equipment, and contract services) that matches or exceeds MRA funds for the award period.* Non-contract industry personnel costs may not be counted as in-kind support.

### **Eligibility:**

- Applicants must be a senior investigator, past the initial **five 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.
- Applicants must identify an industry partner at the time of application.
- Industry scientists may serve as co-investigators or collaborators but may not be PIs.

### **Additional Information:**

Industry will negotiate contract terms directly with the PI's institution and will dispense its portion of the research funds directly to that institution. In the event that an award is granted by MRA, **both a finalized contract between the industry partner and the institution, as well as a letter agreement between the industry partner and MRA, must be executed within 90 days of the award date.** Funds will not be dispensed until such a contract and agreement are in place and, MRA may withdraw its offer of award if such a contract and agreement are not in place within the 90-day period.

## **PILOT AWARD**

***Full proposals due November 4, 2024 at 11:59 p.m. ET***

**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 Requirements:**

- Applicants must be a senior investigator, past the initial **five 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.

**DERMATOLOGY CAREER DEVELOPMENT AWARD**

***Applicant Eligibility Checklist due October 21, 2024***

***Full proposals due November 4, 2024 at 11:59 p.m. ET***

**Description:** The Dermatology Career Development Award aims to attract early career faculty and clinical research fellows in departments or divisions of dermatology with original ideas into the field of melanoma, thereby recruiting and supporting the next generation of melanoma research leaders. This award will support research projects (including epidemiological data gaps), practice changing demonstration projects, and/or immersive studies aimed at improving melanoma prevention, early 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. MRA also encourages the application of artificial intelligence (AI) across any of these areas, especially to reduce variable biopsy-referral and/or diagnostic standards. Dermatology Career Development Award applications will be reviewed by the MRA Dermatology Council, as well as ad hoc experts in diverse areas of dermatology, translational, and clinical research.

**Term:** 2 Years

**Amount:** Up to \$75,000 per year (up to \$150,000 total)

**Eligibility Requirements:**

- Applicants must have a doctoral degree (M.D., D.O. and/or Ph.D.) by the date of award activation.
- It is preferred that applicants conduct their proposed research/project in the host institution's Department/Division of Dermatology. MRA will consider applicants in Departments from other clinical fields involved in the treatment of melanoma (e.g. medical oncology, surgery, immunology, dermatopathology, pathology, bioengineering).
- Supports early career investigators (clinical instructors or new assistant professors)
  - Applicants may hold the title of Junior Faculty, Clinical Instructor, Assistant Professor, or a similar title used by their institution to describe early career faculty.
  - Applicants in a Fellowship position may apply if they are board eligible or board certified in Dermatology, Dermatopathology and/or Micrographic Surgery and Dermatologic Oncology (i.e. Mohs micrographic surgery/procedural dermatology). Trainees (i.e. med students, residents, grad students, or postdocs) **are not eligible** to apply.
  - Applicants with full academic faculty appointments (i.e. Assistant Professors or equivalent) must be within the first five years of their first independent, full time

academic faculty appointment at the application deadline. Assistant Professors on a clinical, tenure, or research track will be accepted.

- Applicants who have secured an eligible position commencing by June 1, 2025 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.
- ***The MRA strongly encourages you to reach out with any questions regarding your potential eligibility.***
- Applicants must designate at least one Mentor who is an established investigator at the same institution and will ensure that adequate support and guidance are provided for successful completion of the proposed research project and provide career mentorship. At least one Mentor with expertise in dermatology is strongly advised.
- **All Dermatology Career Development Award applicants must complete and return the [Applicant Eligibility Checklist](#) by October 21, 2024. Please email the completed checklist to Kris'tina Ackerman, MRA Operations & Grants Admin Coordinator at [kackerman@curemelanoma.org](mailto:kackerman@curemelanoma.org).**
- Applicants who have been awarded a prior MRA Young Investigator Award are **not** eligible to apply.
- Applicants may serve as PI on only one proposal submitted to MRA for any of the award mechanisms in this cycle.

### **SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY TEAM SCIENCE AWARD IN PEDIATRIC MELANOMA OR NEOADJUVANT TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH ONLY (PLEASE SEE SECTION BELOW ON SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES IN 2024-2025 RFP)**

***Letter of Intent (LOI) due September 27, 2024 at 11:59 p.m. ET***

***Applicant Eligibility Checklist due with LOI***

***Estimated LOI decisions: November 7, 2024***

***Invited proposals due January 6, 2025 at 11:59 p.m. ET***

**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. **For the 2024-2025 review cycle, Team Science proposals will ONLY be accepted for the two special opportunities announced in this RFP: Pediatric Melanoma or Neoadjuvant Translational Research.**

**Term:** 3 Years

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

#### **Eligibility Requirements:**

- Team must be multidisciplinary, and consist of two or more established Principal Investigators, one of whom is designated the Administrative PI, a Young Investigator with complementary expertise, and a Mentor for the Young Investigator;
- 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 other Principal Investigators on the team share authority for scientific leadership;
- The Administrative PI and any other Principal Investigators on the team must be senior investigators, past the initial five 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. Co-PIs are **not** allowed. Other investigators on the team need to be designated as Co-Investigators, Collaborators, or Consultants. See Step #6 under the Application Instructions below for additional details and descriptions of these roles;
- An investigator may serve as a PI, including Administrative PI or Principal Investigator on a Team, on only one proposal this cycle;
- **Each team must include at least one Young Investigator and a designated Mentor for the Young Investigator** (the Mentor is not required to have any additional role within the team), whose work must be integral to one or more of the aims of the proposal (see and comply with all Young Investigator eligibility criteria above);
- **All Young Investigators on Team Science Award applications must complete the [Applicant Eligibility Checklist](#) and upload it as an attachment with the LOI.**
- 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.

**SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY TEAM SCIENCE ACADEMIC INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP AWARD IN NEOADJUVANT TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH ONLY (PLEASE SEE SECTION BELOW ON SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES IN 2024-2025 RFP)**

***Letter of Intent (LOI) due September 27, 2024 at 11:59 p.m. ET***

***Applicant Eligibility Checklist due with LOI***

***Estimated LOI decisions: November 7, 2024***

***Invited proposals due January 6, 2025 at 11:59 p.m. ET***

**Description:** The Academic-Industry Partnership (AIP) Award (for Teams) is designed to enhance translational research by extending academic capabilities to clinical investigations and to facilitate interactions between the academic and industrial research sectors. These awards will be co-funded by MRA and an industry partner whose involvement is essential to the project. This award will only be available for the special opportunity in Neoadjuvant Translational Research.

**Term:** 3 years

**Amount:** Up to \$300,000 per year for three years (up to \$900,000 total). *Industry partner must provide funds and/or in-kind support (e.g., reagents, clinical grade drugs, equipment, and contract services) that matches or exceeds MRA funds for the award period.* Non-contract industry personnel costs may not be counted as in-kind support.

**Eligibility Requirements:**

- Team must be multidisciplinary, and consist of two or more established Principal Investigators, one of whom is designated the Administrative PI, a Young Investigator with complementary expertise, and a Mentor for the Young Investigator;
- 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 Principal Investigators on the team share authority for scientific leadership;
- The Administrative PI and any other Principal Investigators on the team must be senior investigators, past the initial five 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. Co-PIs are not allowed. Other investigators on the team need to be designated as Co-Investigators, Collaborators, or Consultants. See Step #6 under the Application Instructions below for additional details and descriptions of these roles;
- An investigator may serve as a PI, including Administrative PI or as a Principal Investigator on a Team, on only one proposal this cycle;
- **Each team must include at least one Young Investigator and a designated Mentor for the Young Investigator** (the Mentor is not required to have any additional role within the team), 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);
- **All Young Investigators on Team Science Award applications must complete the [Applicant Eligibility Checklist](#) and upload it as an attachment with the LOI.**
- 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.
- Applicants must identify an industry partner at the time of application.
- Industry scientists may serve as Co-investigators or Collaborators, but may not be PIs.

**Additional Information:**

- Industry will negotiate contract terms directly with the PI's institution and will dispense its portion of the research funds directly to that institution. In the event that an award is granted by MRA, **both a finalized contract between the industry partner and the institution, as well as a letter agreement between the industry partner and MRA, must be executed within 90 days of the award date.** Funds will not be dispensed until such a contract and agreement are in place and MRA may withdraw its offer of award if such a contract and agreement are not in place within the 90-day period.

**SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE 2024-2025 RFP:**

**SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY – ACRAL MELANOMA: MRA ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR AWARD, ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR ACADEMIC-INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP AWARD, YOUNG INVESTIGATOR AWARD, AND PILOT AWARD ON ADVANCING TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH FOR ACRAL MELANOMA**

**Established Investigator, Established Investigator-AIP, Young Investigator and Pilot Award deadlines:  
Full proposals due November 4, 2024 at 11:59 p.m. ET**

Acral melanoma is a rare and difficult-to-treat form of melanoma that arises on the palms, soles, or beneath the nails. Acral melanoma accounts for approximately 2-3% of all melanomas and affects people of all races and ethnicities with a proportionately higher percentage of total melanomas in people of color when compared to the Caucasian population. Compared to cutaneous melanoma, acral melanoma is more likely to be diagnosed at a later stage ultimately leading to poor survival. Approved drugs for melanoma do not appear to be as effective for acral melanoma compared to cutaneous melanoma therefore creating an urgent medical need to identify better treatment options for acral melanoma patients. In addition, little is known about the anti-tumor immune response in acral melanoma. Acral melanomas typically have far fewer point mutations relative to cutaneous melanoma with an increased number of complex chromosomal rearrangements and copy number alterations. BRAF and NRAS mutations occur less frequently in acral melanoma compared to cutaneous melanoma whereas KIT mutations are more common. However, mutations leading to inactivation of NF1, TERT alterations as well as amplification of genes including GAB2, CRKL, CCND1, PAK1, and CDK4 have been identified in acral melanoma.

With this Special Opportunity, MRA intends to issue an Established Investigator and/or Established Investigator-AIP, Pilot, and Young Investigator Award for conducting translational research that will lead to more effective treatment of acral melanomas. **Priority will be given to proposals that focus on the following areas:**

- Understanding how to effectively target NF1 loss, CRKL, GAB2, YAP1 amplification, and/or TERT alterations in acral melanoma;
- Characterizing the anti-tumor immune response to acral melanoma, including identification of prognostic indicators of response/non-response, and/or development of resistance to checkpoint immunotherapy;
- Identifying and developing novel immune, targeted and combination approaches for preclinical testing in acral melanoma models.

Please see descriptions of and instructions for EIA, EIA-AIP, YIA, and Pilot Awards for specific details on eligibility, award terms, and amount, as well as instructions on how to apply.

Applicants should submit to the general EIA, EIA-AIP, YIA, or Pilot Award programs and designate their desire to be considered for this award when completing their online application in Proposal Central. To do this, please select “Acral” under subprogram in the Title Page step of the online application. **Selecting “Acral” will not limit an applicant’s opportunity to also be selected under the general awards, but instead is meant to expand opportunities in an effort to increase overall funding of acral melanoma research.**

**SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY – UVEAL MELANOMA: MRA ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR AWARD,  
ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR ACADEMIC-INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP AWARD, AND YOUNG  
INVESTIGATOR AWARD ON ADVANCING TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH FOR UVEAL MELANOMA**

**Established Investigator, Established Investigator-AIP, and Young Investigator Award deadlines:**

**Full proposals due November 4, 2024 at 11:59 p.m. ET**

Uveal melanoma arises in the uveal tract of the eye accounting for approximately 5% of all melanoma cases in the United States. It has a very distinct disease biology and clinical features from the more common form of melanoma, cutaneous melanoma. Uveal melanoma is characterized by unique genomic features with the majority initiated by mutations that occur early in tumorigenesis leading to constitutive activation of the signaling pathway mediated by the Gαq/11-family of heterotrimeric G proteins. Different types of treatment modalities used for primary uveal melanoma can achieve local control in more than 90% of patients even though over 40% of patients ultimately develop metastases with the most common ones to the liver. Approved therapies for cutaneous melanoma have limited effectiveness in uveal melanoma. In 2022, a T-cell receptor–bispecific molecule that targets glycoprotein 100 and CD3, Tebentafusp, was approved by the FDA to treat uveal melanoma that cannot be removed or has spread to other parts of the body. In 2023, the FDA approved the Hepzato Kit (melphalan for Injection/Hepatic Delivery System) as a liver-directed treatment for adult uveal melanoma patients with unresectable liver metastases. Despite the progress, there is still a high unmet medical need to find other therapeutics to treat this disease.

With this Special Opportunity, MRA intends to issue an Established Investigator and/or Established Investigator-AIP, and Young Investigator Award for conducting translational research that will lead to more effective treatment of both primary and metastatic uveal melanoma. **Research areas of interest include but are not limited to:**

- Identifying additional key vulnerabilities in uveal melanoma that help drive the disease;
- Achieving an understanding of the reasons why uveal melanoma has a high propensity to metastasize to the liver;
- Identifying and developing novel immune, targeted and combination approaches for preclinical testing in uveal melanoma models.

Please see descriptions of and instructions for EIA, EIA-AIP, and YIAs for specific details on eligibility, award terms, and amount, as well as instructions on how to apply.

Applicants should submit to the general EIA, EIA-AIP, or YIA programs and designate their desire to be considered for this award when completing their online application in Proposal Central. To do this, please select “Uveal” under subprogram in the Title Page step of the online application. **Selecting “Uveal” will not limit an applicant’s opportunity to also be selected under the general awards, but instead is meant to expand opportunities in an effort to increase overall funding of uveal melanoma research.**

## **SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY: ACIS-MRA PILOT AWARDS IN UVEAL MELANOMA**

### **Pilot Award Deadline:**

**Full proposals due November 4, 2024 at 11:59 p.m. ET**

The MRA is pleased to partner with [A Cure In Sight \(ACIS\)](#) to offer a special opportunity to support research focused on near-term clinically relevant proposals for new treatments for uveal melanoma. Proposals may focus on new treatments for primary uveal melanoma (initial tumor in the eye), or on reoccurrence and metastatic uveal melanoma.

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

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

### **SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY –ST. BALDRICK’S FOUNDATION-MRA ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR AWARD FOR PEDIATRIC MELANOMA**

#### ***Established Investigator Award Deadline:***

***Full proposals due November 4, 2024 at 11:59 p.m. ET***

The MRA is pleased to partner with [St. Baldrick’s Foundation](#) to offer a special opportunity to support research focused on near-term clinically relevant proposals for a better understanding and finding new treatments for pediatric melanoma. Proposals may focus on:

- Identifying novel techniques and biomarkers to aid in accurate diagnosis and optimize management of pediatric/adolescent patients;
- Elucidating the underlying mechanisms of melanoma development in pediatrics;
- Understanding clinical differences in presentation between pediatric and adult melanoma;
- Collecting real-world data on pediatric melanoma to inform the biological basis for melanoma formation in children versus adults; and
- Analyzing similarities and differences between melanoma in children/adolescents and in adults relevant to immunogenicity and potential impact of immunotherapies.

Please see descriptions of and instructions for Established 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 Established Investigator Award program and designate their desire to be considered for this award when completing their online application in Proposal Central. To do this, please select “Pediatric Melanoma” under subprogram in the Title Page step of the online application. **Selecting “Pediatric Melanoma” will not limit an applicant’s opportunity to also be selected under the general Established Investigator Award program, but instead is meant to expand opportunities in an effort to increase overall funding of pediatric melanoma.**

### **SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY –ST. BALDRICK’S FOUNDATION-MRA TEAM SCIENCE AWARD FOR PEDIATRIC MELANOMA**

#### ***Team Science Award Deadline:***

***Letter of Intent (LOI) due September 27, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. ET***

***Applicant Eligibility Checklist due with LOI***

***Estimated LOI decisions: November 7, 2024***

***Invited proposals due January 6, 2025 at 11:59 p.m. ET***

The MRA is pleased to partner with [St. Baldrick's Foundation](#) to offer a special opportunity to support research focused on near-term clinically relevant proposals for a better understanding and finding new treatments for pediatric melanoma. Proposals may focus on:

- Identifying novel techniques and biomarkers to aid in accurate diagnosis and optimize management of pediatric/adolescent patients;
- Elucidating the underlying mechanisms of melanoma development in pediatrics;
- Understanding clinical differences in presentation between pediatric and adult melanoma;
- Collecting real-world data on pediatric melanoma to inform the biological basis for melanoma formation in children versus adults; and
- Analyzing similarities and differences between melanoma in children/adolescents and in adults relevant to immunogenicity and potential impact of immunotherapies.

Please see descriptions of and instructions for Special Opportunity Team Science Awards for specific details on eligibility, award terms, and amount, as well as instructions on how to apply.

Applicants should submit to the general Team Science program and designate their desire to be considered for this award when completing their online application in Proposal Central. To do this, please select "Pediatric Melanoma" under subprogram in the Title Page step of the online application.

**SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY –MRA TEAM SCIENCE AWARD OR TEAM SCIENCE ACADEMIC INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP FOR TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES FROM PATIENTS RECEIVING NEOADJUVANT TREATMENT APPROACHES**

***Team Science/Team Science Academic Industry Partnership Award Deadline:***

***Letter of Intent (LOI) due September 27, 2024 at 11:59 p.m. ET***

***Applicant Eligibility Checklist due with LOI***

***Estimated LOI decisions: November 7, 2024***

***Invited proposals due January 6, 2025 at 11:59 p.m. ET***

Immune checkpoint inhibitors and targeted agents administered in the neoadjuvant setting have shown encouraging results as new and promising options for treatment of advanced melanoma patients with resectable disease. Furthermore, the neoadjuvant treatment paradigm provides an excellent opportunity to address important translational research questions from the biospecimens (tumor, blood, etc.) collected before, during and after neoadjuvant treatment. Molecular, immunologic, histopathological and/or other approaches that interrogate pre-, on-, and/or post-treatment samples may lead to better prediction of who will respond to neoadjuvant therapy and those who may develop resistance and/or toxicity. For example, analyses may inform the identification of patients who are more likely to achieve a pathological complete response (pCR) versus other response patterns. Efforts to deploy AI/digital pathology solutions that may enhance assessment of, for example, pathological response, and/or incorporation of radiomic approaches to enhance assessment of clinically relevant endpoints are also of

interest. Such approaches may also guide exploration of different combination approaches and/or new targets for drug development to test in the neoadjuvant setting.

The goal of this special opportunity Team Science award is to provide researchers with the opportunity to analyze samples collected from patients being treated with neoadjuvant treatment approaches to address important research questions, including, but not limited to:

- Identification of biomarkers of response/resistance/toxicity to neoadjuvant treatment;
- Identification of new drug targets to explore and therapies or combination approaches to test in the neoadjuvant setting;
- Development and implementation of new technologies to improve response and other outcome assessment to neoadjuvant treatment.

It is encouraged to use this special opportunity in a collaborative and multi-institutional manner using state of the art technologies and resources across different centers to optimize the potential for correlative science evaluation of samples. This Team Science Award is also being offered as an Academic/Industry partnership to potentially increase the opportunities to include biospecimens collected during the conduct of neoadjuvant clinical trials.

Please see descriptions of and instructions for Special Opportunity Team Science Awards and Team Science Academic Industry Partnership Awards for specific details on eligibility, award terms, and amount, as well as instructions on how to apply.

Applicants should submit to the Team Science or Team Science AIP program and designate their desire to be considered for this award when completing their online application in Proposal Central. To do this, please select “Neoadjuvant Translational Research” under subprogram in the Title Page step of the online application.

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

### ***Young Investigator Award Deadline:***

***Applicant Eligibility Checklist due October 21, 2024***

***Full proposals due November 4, 2024 at 11:59 p.m. ET***

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, 2025 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 Proposal Central. To do this, please select “ASTRO Radiation Oncology” under subprogram in the Title Page step of the online application. **Selecting “ASTRO Radiation Oncology” 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.**

## **SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY: UK- ISRAEL- OR AUSTRALIA- BASED YOUNG INVESTIGATOR AWARD**

***Young Investigator Award Deadline:***

***Applicant Eligibility Checklist due October 21, 2024***

***Full proposals due November 4, 2024 at 11:59 p.m. ET***

The MRA is pleased to offer a special opportunity to fund a Young Investigator Award focused on melanoma research from United Kingdom- Israel- or Australia-based researchers.

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:

- Applicants must be based at an institution located in the United Kingdom, Israel, or Australia

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 Proposal Central. To do this, please select “UK/Israel/Australia” under subprogram in the Title Page step of the online application. **Selecting “UK/Israel/Australia” 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 early career investigators focused on melanoma who are based in the UK, Israel, or Australia.**

# LETTER OF INTENT FORMAT AND INSTRUCTIONS (SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY TEAM SCIENCE AND TEAM SCIENCE-ACADEMIC INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP AWARDS ONLY)

Team Science Award applicants must submit a letter of intent (LOI) to MRA prior to submission of a full proposal (upon invitation only). **LOIs must be submitted through the Proposal Central online LOI/application tool at <https://Proposal Central.com/>.** Please carefully follow the instructions in Proposal Central.

1. **Title Page:** Enter the project title.
  - Under subprogram, select the Special Opportunity Pediatric Melanoma or Neoadjuvant Translational Research (must select one or the other).
  - *For Academic-Industry Partnership proposals:* Include name of Industry Partner.
2. **Download 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:** 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:** This is the Administrative PI's institution. If your institution has a [ROR](#) (Research Organization Registry ID), please include.
6. **Key Personnel:** Two or more established Principal Investigators (one of whom is designated the Administrative PI), a Young Investigator, and a Mentor for the Young Investigator are required on all Team Science Award LOIs and applications. All PIs share authority for project leadership. The position of "co-PI" is not offered under this award mechanism. ORCID IDs are required for PI, Young Investigator and Mentor roles. *Please see Key Personnel requirements and descriptions of roles under step #6 of the Application Instructions section of the RFP.*
7. **Upload Attachments:** Upload the following
  - a. **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. For Team Science-Academic Industry Partnership Award applicants, please briefly describe the nature of the partnership and whether the matching funds will be provided as cash, in-kind, or both. **Letters exceeding the one-page limit will not be considered.**
  - b. **Young Investigator Eligibility Checklist:** Required to confirm eligibility. Requires signature of the Department Chair, Division Head, or Dean. Can be accessed [here](#).

8. **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.
9. **Validate:** Check for any missing required information.
10. **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 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time.

**Full length applications will be invited from meritorious LOIs by approximately November 7, 2024.**

## Application Format and Instructions (ALL AWARDS)

**All applications are due by 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://Proposal Central.com/> and the document templates and requirements therein. Please carefully follow the instructions in Proposal Central and below. Please make sure that you provide your institution with enough time before the submission deadline to sign off on the application.**

**Applications include the following steps and components:**

1. **Title Page:** Enter the project title. Please note: the grant title (along with the PI's name and institution) will become public if the award is selected for funding, therefore, it should not contain any proprietary information.
  - Under subprogram, select a Special Opportunity if applicable (otherwise select N/A).
  - *For Academic-Industry Partnership proposals:* Include name of Industry Partner.
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.  
**\*PLEASE MAKE SURE TO GRANT ACCESS AHEAD OF TIME TO YOUR INSTITUTION'S SIGNING OFFICIAL TO AVOID ANY LAST-MINUTE ISSUES WITH SIGNING AND SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION. PROPOSALS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AFTER THE DEADLINE\***
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. If your institution has a [ROR](#) (Research Organization Registry ID), please include.

6. **Key Personnel:** List and provide contact information for key persons. Include everyone **except the applicant** who will contribute to the scientific development or execution of the project in a substantive, measurable way whether they receive salaries or compensation under the grant. Besides the applicant, ORCID IDs are required for the following roles: PI, Young Investigator and Mentor.

**Descriptions of Key Personnel roles:**

**Administrative PI (required for Team Science applications only):** Serves as the team leader and primary point of contact for MRA Staff. Along with sharing scientific leadership with other team PIs, the Administrative PI ensures the team complies with the terms of the award, including all reporting, contractual, and financial obligations. The Administrative PI's institution will oversee all organization assurances and certifications.

**Principal Investigator (PI, required for all applications):** This is the applicant for Established Investigator, Pilot, Young Investigator and DERM CDA applications. For Team Science Award applications, PI(s) share authority for project leadership equally with the Administrative PI. Team Science Award applications must include at least one PI, in addition to the Administrative PI.

**Co-Investigator:** Co-I's are vital scientific contributors (at the same or a different institution from the Administrative PI), often bringing a needed expertise to the research team. They commit some level of measurable effort to the project and are, therefore, always designated as Key Personnel whether being compensated or otherwise.

**Collaborator:** Play a lesser role in the thinking and logistics of the project than a Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator. Depending on the role and effort, a collaborator may be designated as Key Personnel (although not required) and may be compensated.

**Mentor (required for Team Science, Young Investigator, and DERM CDA applications only):** All Young Investigator applicants (including Young Investigators on Team Science Awards) and DERM CDAs must designate at least one mentor who is an established investigator at the same institution as the Mentee. Mentors must ensure that adequate support and guidance are provided for successful completion of the proposed research project and provide career mentorship. **Designating at least one Mentor with expertise in melanoma research for Young Investigators or in the case of DERM CDAs a mentor with expertise in dermatology is strongly advised.** Mentor(s) must provide a letter of support for the Young Investigator or DERM CDA and be designated as Key Personnel.

**Young Investigator (required for Team Science applications only):** Each team must include at least one Young Investigator whose work must be integral to one or more of the aims of the proposal. Young Investigators must be within the first five years of their first independent, full time academic faculty appointment at the application deadline, at the level of Assistant Professor (or equivalent position). Young Investigators must be designated as Key Personnel.

**Consultant:** Provides guidance on specific aspects of the research project, as their expertise applies. A consultant may be designated as Key Personnel (although not required) and may be compensated.

**Others:** Key Personnel may also include (but are not required) people at the master's or baccalaureate level (such as Project Managers, Technicians, Postdoctoral Associates, Fellows, Research Assistants or Graduate Students), if they will contribute to the scientific development or execution of the project in a substantive, measurable way whether they receive salaries or compensation under the grant.

REQUIRED SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS FOR KEY PERSONNEL					
Personnel	Include in KP Section	Biosketch	Current/Pending Support	Letter of Support	ORCID ID required
<b>Administrative PI</b>	Yes (Teams)	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes
<b>Principal Investigator</b>	Yes (All)	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes
<b>Co-Investigator</b>	If applicable	Yes	No	Optional	No
<b>Collaborator</b>	If applicable	Yes, if included as KP	No	Optional	No
<b>Mentor</b>	Yes (Young Investigator, Teams; DERM CDA)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Young Investigator</b>	Yes (Teams)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Project Manager</b>	Optional	Yes, if included as KP	No	No	No
<b>Technician</b>	Optional	Yes, if included as KP	No	No	No
<b>Consultant</b>	If applicable	Yes, if included as KP	No	No	No
<b>Postdoctoral/Fellow</b>	Optional	Yes, if included as KP	No	No	No
<b>Graduate Student</b>	Optional	Yes, if included as KP	No	No	No
<b>Other (such as research asst, etc)</b>	Optional	Yes, if included as KP	No	No	No

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.

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

- MRA **recommends** 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 **recommends** the posting of research outputs (data, code, software) to public data repositories at the time such research outputs are generated.
- MRA **recommends** that manuscripts based on or developed under an MRA Award be published in open-access journals.
- MRA **recommends** 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](#)).

- 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, *including spaces*, 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 details 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. Please also include any costs associated with compliance with MRA's data sharing policy. For Academic-Industry Partnership applications, the budget should contain all costs associated with the project including contributions from both MRA and the industry partner, and the expected contributions from each should be clearly explained in the Budget Justification.

The yearly and total budget caps for each mechanism are as follows (do not exceed these amounts):

- Established Investigator Awards (including Academic-Industry Partnership): \$125,000 per year; \$375,000 total over 3 years
- Young Investigator Awards: \$85,000 per year; \$255,000 total over 3 years
- Pilot Awards: \$50,000 per year; \$100,000 total over 2 years
- Dermatology Career Development Awards: \$75,000 per year; \$150,000 total over 2 years
- Team Science Awards (including Academic-Industry Partnership): \$300,000 per year; \$900,000 total over 3 years

10. **Budget Summary and Justification:** A summary of the budget details 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. For Academic-Industry Partnership applications, the budget should contain all costs associated with the project, including contributions from both MRA and the industry partner, and the expected contributions from each should be clearly explained in the Budget Justification.
11. **Current and Pending Research Support:** Please list all current and pending support for the Applicant. For Team Science applications, please also list all current and pending support for any appropriate Key Personnel (Principal Investigators and Young Investigators ONLY). For Young Investigator, Pilot, and DERM CDA applications, current and pending support is only required 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 (and other Key Personnel's) 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. For Key Personnel (Administrative PI, Principal Investigators, and Young Investigators ONLY), if they have granted you at least 'View' access to their profile, you can select Other Support from their profile as well. If they have not provided you 'View' access, please download the "Current and Pending Support" template provided in step #2 of the application, fill it out with their Other Support, and upload the completed document as an attachment in step #13.

12. **Organizational Assurances:** IRB and IACUC approvals, if applicable.

13. **Upload Attachments:** Upload the following:

- a. **Biosketch for PI and Key Personnel:** Please upload an NIH format biosketch for yourself and all Key Personnel listed in step #6. 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 Proposal Central. Besides publications, MRA welcomes the inclusion of research outputs such as datasets, code, patents, and papers posted to preprint servers.
- b. **Current and pending research support (Team Science applications ONLY):** Use this template ONLY for Key Personnel where the applicant does not have access via Proposal Central to their support. Whenever possible, please enter PI and Key Personnel support directly into Proposal Central in the "Current and Pending Support" section (step #11). Use the template provided in Proposal Central (in steps #2 and #13) to provide information on all current and pending support for appropriate Key Personnel (Administrative PI, Principal Investigators, and Young Investigators ONLY) not included in step #11. 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. 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.
- d. **Literature references:** A list of up to 30 references supporting the project description is allowed, in addition to the 5-page project description.
- e. **For Young Investigator, Team Science, and Dermatology Career Development Award proposals:**
  - i. *Mentor Letter of Support:* Include letters of support from any Mentor(s) designated in the Key Personnel section of the application. The letter(s) 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. **Applicant Eligibility Checklist:** Required to confirm eligibility. Requires signature of the Department Chair, Division Head, or Dean. Young Investigator checklist can be accessed [here](#) and Dermatology Career Development Award checklist can be accessed [here](#). *For Young Investigator and Dermatology Career Development Award applications:* Checklist must be returned via email to Kris'tina Ackerman, MRA Operations & Grants Admin Coordinator at [kackerman@curemelanoma.org](mailto:kackerman@curemelanoma.org) by October 21, 2024. Please also upload a copy as part of the application. *For Team Science Award LOIs and Applications:* Checklist must be uploaded as an attachment in Proposal Central.
  
  - f. **For Academic-Industry Partnership Award proposals:** Include a letter of support from the industry partner, which should include at a minimum:
    - i. A description of the total amount of support, clearly indicating the portion that is monetary and/or in-kind, for the full term of the award (which must match the total funding requested in this application).
    - ii. Acknowledgement that if the Award is made, the industry partner will execute an agreement with the awardee Institution within 90 days.
    - iii. Acknowledgement that if the Award is made, the industry partner will execute an agreement with MRA within 90 days. An example template agreement may be requested from MRA. Any questions about this can be directed to Kris'tina Ackerman, MRA Operations & Grants Administration Coordinator at [kackerman@curemelanoma.org](mailto:kackerman@curemelanoma.org).
  
  - g. **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.
  
  - h. **Application checklist:** Please complete the checklist to ensure that all application materials are provided, and that the applicant is eligible to apply.
14. **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, which can be found here: <https://www.curemelanoma.org/grants/>. If the work builds on a previously funded project(s), please explain.
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 identified.
16. **Validate:** Check for any missing required information.
17. **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.

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 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time or on weekends.

## TIMELINE

**All application deadlines conclude at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time. Proposals submitted after the deadline will not be considered.**

- **September 27, 2024\*:** Deadline for Letter of Intent (LOI) for Special Opportunity Team Science Awards or Special Opportunity Team Science Academic-Industry Partnership Award.
- **October 21, 2024:** Deadline for Young Investigator & Dermatology Career Development Award applicants to email Applicant Eligibility Checklist to Kris'tina Ackerman at [kackerman@curemelanoma.org](mailto:kackerman@curemelanoma.org).
- **November 4, 2024:** Applications are due for Established Investigator, Young Investigator, Dermatology Career Development, and Pilot Award proposals.
- **January 6, 2025\*:** Deadline for invited full applications for Special Opportunity Team Science Awards.
- **Early April 2025:** Awardees notified (Note that MRA may adjust the notification date without notice to applicants).
- **June 1, 2025:** Estimated projects start date.

**\*IMPORTANT NOTE: For 2024-2025 review cycle, LOIs and invited full applications for Team Science Awards will only be accepted for the two special opportunities including Pediatric Melanoma or Neoadjuvant Translational Research. Applications for Team Science Academic Industry Partnership Awards will only be accepted for the Neoadjuvant Translational Research Special Opportunity.**

## 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. Dermatology Career Development Award applications will be reviewed by the [MRA Dermatology Council](#) (DC), as well as ad hoc 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 GRC and DC members to adhere to a rigorous set of COI guidelines. MRA also provides GRC and DC members with curated resources to help mitigate any potential implicit bias in the review process. Further information about these guidelines and resources is available upon request. Please contact Kris'tina Ackerman, MRA Operations & Grants Administration Coordinator at [kackerman@curemelanoma.org](mailto:kackerman@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 to all applicants; however, occasionally such comments may not be available due to unforeseen circumstances.** A listing of all research projects funded by MRA, along with abstracts, are provided on our website, and are searchable by investigator, institution, or award at [www.CureMelanoma.org/grants](http://www.CureMelanoma.org/grants).

## **COLLABORATIVE FUNDING OFFERS**

For outstanding research proposals as determined by peer review that are deemed fundable, but that fall beyond MRA's full-funding pay-line, MRA may seek co-funding/cost sharing from applicant institutions in order to support these proposals. MRA will reserve up to \$375,000 of its support for the Collaborative Funding program this cycle specifically for Established Investigator Awards. 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 Kris'tina Ackerman, MRA Operations & Grants Admin Coordinator at [kackerman@curemelanoma.org](mailto:kackerman@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 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. 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 out of the agency budget, and as such, travel for the retreat should not be included within your submitted budget. The 2025 Annual Scientific Retreat is scheduled for February 26-28, 2025, in Washington, DC.

# 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 to 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.

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 Special Opportunity is limited to U.S. applicants only, and the UK/Israel/Australia-based Special Opportunity is limited to UK- Israel- Australia- based 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 October 21, 2024, by emailing the signed and completed [Applicant Eligibility Checklist](#) to Kris'tina Ackerman, MRA Operations & Grants Admin Coordinator at [kackerman@curemelanoma.org](mailto:kackerman@curemelanoma.org).

Q: I am within my first five 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 4, 2019**, then you are not eligible to apply.

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

A: Yes, as long as you are within the first five years of your first faculty appointment at the time of proposal submission.

Q: I will be past the first five 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 five 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 Investigators have the resources they need to successfully carry out the work at their institution. It is strongly advised that Young Investigator applicants have at least one Mentor with expertise in melanoma research.

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.

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 (June 1, 2025). 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 Career Development Awards**

Q: What positions are eligible to apply for the Dermatology Career Development Award?

A: Applicants may hold the title of Junior Faculty, Clinical Instructor, Assistant Professor, or a similar title used by their institution to describe early career faculty. Applicants in a Fellowship position may apply if they are board-eligible or board certified in Dermatology, Dermatopathology and/or Mohs surgery. Trainees (i.e. med students, residents, grad students, or postdocs) are **not** eligible to apply. Please verify your eligibility by October 21, 2024, by emailing the signed and completed [Applicant Eligibility Checklist](#) to Kris'tina Ackerman, MRA Operations & Grants Admin Coordinator at [kackerman@curemelanoma.org](mailto:kackerman@curemelanoma.org). ***The MRA strongly encourages you to reach out with any questions regarding your potential eligibility.***

Q: I am within my first five 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 4, 2019**, then you are not eligible to apply.

Q: I will be past the first five years of my first faculty appointment at the time the project starts. May I apply for a Dermatology Career Development Award?

A: Yes, as long as you are within the first five years of your first faculty appointment at the time of proposal submission.

Q: I will be past the first five 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 five 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: What is the role of the Mentor?

A: It is expected that applicants to the Dermatology Career Development Award are independent researchers and not in training or in research support positions. However, a Mentor is required to help ensure that the applicant has the resources they need to successfully carry out the work at their institution. It is strongly advised that Dermatology Career Development Award applicants have at least one Mentor with expertise in Dermatology.

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

A: No. All Dermatology Career Development Award applicants must have a designated Mentor at their institution to help to ensure that the applicant 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.

Q: Are Mentors of Dermatology Career Development Award 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 Dermatology Career Development Award applicant?

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

### **Academic-Industry Partnership Awards**

Q: How are partnerships between academic scientists and industry formed?

A: It is the responsibility of the academic scientist to find an industry partner whose involvement and collaboration will be vital to conducting the research project, or vice versa. However, applicants interested in this mechanism are welcome to seek MRA's guidance on potential industry partners.

Q: In the application budget, do I itemize expenses associated with only the request from MRA or the total budget from both MRA and industry?

A: The overall budget should contain all costs associated with the project including contributions from both MRA and the industry partner, and the expected contributions from each should be clearly explained in the Budget Justification. The value of in-kind support from industry should be estimated in U.S. Dollars. The amount of funding solely requested from MRA should also be clearly indicated in the Budget Justification.

## 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, cost sharing, or collaborative funding considerations. Only those proposals that are deemed outstanding by peer review but fall below MRA's pay line for full funding 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, as well as the following Key Personnel roles: PI, Young Investigator, and Mentor. 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 requests that applicants and selected Key Personnel roles (PI, Young Investigator, and Mentor), provide demographic information in Proposal Central; 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 Proposal Central, [https://Proposal Central, https://Proposal Central.com/](https://ProposalCentral.com/). Proposal Central will only accept electronic signatures on applications.
- 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 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 Proposal Central.
- 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 Proposal Central.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CONTACTS**

Email questions about this RFP, eligibility, or other issues about MRA or its awards to Kris'tina Ackerman, MRA Operations & Grants Administration Coordinator at [kackerman@curemelanoma.org](mailto:kackerman@curemelanoma.org).

Technical questions about the Proposal Central 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.