

**NYSTEM Summer Undergraduate Experience in Stem Cell Research RFA
FAU # 0809080949**

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
4/8/09 – 5/11/09
Including an applicant conference**

Letter of Intent and Pre-application Materials

1. Must applicants attend the Applicant Conference?
 - A. No, but if you do plan to attend, please register so that we can notify security that you are coming and ensure that we have enough space to accommodate everyone.
2. Is there a pre-application process?
 - A. No. However, a Letter of Intent form (Attachment 4) must be received by the due date (May 1, 2009 by 2pm). See Section IV.C. of the RFA.
3. Do we need to include any information in addition to the Letter of Intent form?
 - A. Submit only the information requested on the form. No additional information will be considered.
4. On the Letter of Intent form, do we need to include all internal collaborators (faculty at our institution that will help to design and/or deliver the program) or is this for primary contacts at our collaborating institutions?
 - A. Identify all participants involved in the program, both internal and external to your organization.
5. When will my application number be sent to me?
 - A. If the Letter of Intent form is accepted, an application number will be sent to the Principal Investigator during the week of 5/6/09. That number must appear on application Form 1 for the applicant and each subcontractor.

Submitting the Application

1. Which address listed in Section IV.E. is best to be used when submitting the application?
 - A. For any mail being sent via the US Postal Service, including their Express Mail option, use the “Regular Mail Services” address. For all other carriers (FedEx, UPS, etc.) use the “Express Mail Services” address. The application **must be received** at one of these addresses no later than 2pm on June 1, 2009.

2. What is to be submitted by the application due date?
 - A. Refer to Section V.A. An application package must contain a CD-ROM with the required forms and any appendix material and a complete paper copy. The paper copy should include original signatures on all Face Pages (Form 1). The electronic files to be completed and included on the CD-ROM are:
 - Contractor Forms 1-3 in a single Microsoft Word (.doc) file. This version of Form 1 will not be signed. The contents will be extracted and used in various ways by NYSTEM and the peer review contractor.
 - Contractor Forms 1-3 in a single Portable Document Format (.pdf) file. This .pdf should be created from the electronic Word file of the contractor (not the subcontractors). This file will be sent to the peer reviewers.
 - Signed Forms 1 (Face Pages) for the contractor and all subcontractors in a single .pdf. These forms will be scanned into .pdf after original signatures are obtained. This file will be sent to the peer reviewers.
 - Forms 4-10 and all appendix material in a single .pdf not greater than 12MB. This file will be sent to the peer reviewers.

Forms can be downloaded from: <http://www.nyhealth.gov/funding> .

Also see Attachment 2 regarding the submission.

Scope and Content of the Proposed Program

1. What type of facilities should be made available at the institution for the interns? Libraries, labs...?
 - A. Form 8 requires that applicants describe the facilities and resources that will be used for the performance of the proposed Work Plan. See instructions on the Form and on page 15 of the RFA. Also refer to

Section I.B., Purpose of the Funds and Section III.A., General Expectations.

2. Is it beneficial to recruit student interns from other schools?
 - A. Refer to Section III.A., General Expectations regarding recruitment of students from other schools.
3. If an application proposes \$75,000 to train five students and another proposes the same amount to train 10 students will the first one be at a disadvantage?
 - A. Not necessarily. Much would depend on the remainder of the application. See Sections V.B. and V.C., for a description of the review and award process, the evaluation criteria to be used by the reviewers and the respective weight attributed to the scores for each of the criterion.
4. Is it advantageous to use the same students each summer or is the intent to have different students each year?
 - A. The RFA does not specifically state one or the other. The proposed program could allow for the ongoing development of a set of students over more than one summer. See Section I.B., Purpose of the Funds and Section III.A., General Expectations.
5. Where should the student presentation take place?
 - A. Refer to Section III.A., General Expectations.
6. Is there an expectation that the institution will sustain the program after the end of the contract?
 - A. No. See Section III.A., General Expectations and Section V.C., Review Criteria regarding institutional expectations and institutional support.
7. Is there a pre-defined set of benchmarks for tracking the students into the future or is the way we do that up to us?
 - A. Applicants should describe their process for tracking students in the application. Institutions with long-standing NIH T32 (institutional training) awards are likely to have an effective process for such tracking.

8. Do you anticipate that the bulk of the students in the program will be pre-med or have research experience?
 - A. Not necessarily. See Section I.B., Purpose of the Funds and Section III.A., General Expectations.
9. Does the stage of undergraduate study matter? Is there a preference for training freshman versus seniors, for example?
 - A. No. See Section I.B., Purpose of the Funds and Section III.A., General Expectations.
10. This could become a very competitive paid internship experience. What guidance can you offer regarding the selection of interns?
 - A. The process for selecting candidates is up to the applicant institution and should be described in the Work Plan. See Section III.A., General Expectations.
11. As per Section III.A., how do we demonstrate previously successful efforts to recruit women and minorities since we've not had an undergraduate stem cell internships program in the past?
 - A. Applicants should make the strongest case possible using examples from similar efforts at the applicant institution.
12. Is there a list of what is considered under-represented minorities in the sciences?
 - A. Yes. The National Science Foundation has made this data public. See <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/showpub.cfm?TopID=2&SubID=27>.
13. Is there a letter of support required from the institution that states that it will provide additional support?
 - A. No such letter is required (see Attachment 2 of the RFA for mandatory items). Section V.C., Review Criteria addresses the need to demonstrate Institutional Support.
14. Should the success of prior students be demonstrated in the work plan or the appendix? Should we include the student names and state what they are doing currently?
 - A. Typically, anything essential to a complete understanding of the proposal and its success/effectiveness should be included in the application rather than the appendix.

Application Contents and Forms

1. Must we submit a biosketch for everyone we list on Form 2? What about unknowns like mentors and students?
 - A. A biographical sketch (Form 7) must be provided for all key personnel listed on Form 6. Form 2 is a list of all staff, collaborators, consultants and contributors that is used to identify potential members of the Independent Scientific Merit Peer Review Panel and should include mentors as well as other personnel, collaborators, etc. Biosketches are not required for students.
2. Is the administrative assistant, clearly important to the implementation of the project, considered Key Personnel?
 - A. No. Include such persons as support personnel on Form 6.
3. When assembling the section of the application that includes Form(s) 7, should we group the PI, Co-PI and then all key personnel from the same institution or should we group the PI, Co-PI and then the PIs and Co-PIs from each of the subcontractors next?
 - A. See the instructions at the bottom of Form 7. Beyond these, the general grantsmanship principle is usually “which order would make most sense for the reviewers?”
4. Can we insert an NIH biosketch form instead of using Form 7?
 - A. To do so would cause a penalty of five points (see Section V.A., Application Content).
5. Does the biosketch form provide a place to list teaching history, related honors and prior undergraduate internship awards?
 - A. Honors information could be put in the Honors section of Form 7. The others should be discussed in the Work Plan.
6. What if our application includes mentors who are also included on other applications? Will our score suffer?
 - A. This is allowable. However, applicants should clearly indicate that the mentor can provide the appropriate research experiences for multiple undergraduate summer interns. See also Sections I.B and III.A. Also note that Section V.B.1. outlines the role of the Funding Committee in making award recommendations to the Commissioner of Health.

Budgeting

1. The awards are up to \$270,000 for 5-10 interns for three summers each. Does this mean that the maximum award for each intern per summer is \$7,500?

- A. Section I.C of the RFA states:

“Approximately \$2.7 million is available to support approximately 10 awards. The number of awards made will be contingent upon the quality of applications submitted. Awards will be made in amounts up to \$75,000 per year in direct costs, plus Facilities and Administrative costs of up to eight percent of the modified total direct costs for a period up to three years.

Each application should provide summer internships for five to ten undergraduate students.”

In other words, we expect to award contracts to approximately 10 institutions to establish undergraduate internship programs that will operate each summer for three consecutive years. Each institutional award will not exceed \$243,000 (\$75K x 3yrs + 8%). Each summer, the program should support 5-10 students.

2. How do I budget for student stipends, whose names are unknown at this time?
 - A. Students would not be considered key personnel and need not be named in the application. Any student stipends would be reflected under Misc. Other Expenses on the budget.
3. Are indirect costs in addition to the \$75,000 per year in direct costs?
 - A. Yes, see Section I.C., Available Funds.
4. Do we report percent effort or calendar months on the budget forms?
 - A. Percent effort is to be reported (see Form 6).
5. How much budget justification is necessary?
 - A. Form 6 requires that you describe and justify all elements of the budget. Also see the instructions for completion of the form on page 14 of the RFA.

6. What are the rules regarding equipment purchases?
 - A. See Section V.A., Application Content, where instructions regarding completion of the budget (Form 5) state:
“Requests for purchase of equipment may be granted if strongly justified as essential to the proposed project; a current price quote should be included in the application appendix. During the course of the contract term, prior approval will be required for all equipment purchases that were not detailed in the application and its appendix.”

Peer Reviewers

1. How will the peer reviewers be selected and will they be more heavily weighted to ethical issues since this RFA was initiated by the Ethics Committee?
 - A. No. Section V.B.1. states: “The Panel members will be selected from among non-New York State experts in the appropriate fields based on the nature of the applications received.” Peer reviewers are also screened for conflict of interest with applicant participants (see Form 2 of the application).
2. Will the peer reviewers have experience in all types of stem cell research or is there a preference toward certain areas? If we proposed cancer stem cell studies, for instance, would there be cancer stem cell scientists on the review panel?
 - A. The NYSTEM program supports all kinds of stem cell related research except for activities related to human reproductive cloning. Peer reviewers will be “experts in the appropriate fields based on the nature of the applications received.” See also Section I.B., Purpose of the Funds.

Awards and Contracting Process

1. Section V.B. references a set of Pass/Fail requirements and refers to Attachment 2. How is this done?
 - A. After applications are received, they are inspected for the four mandatory elements listed on Attachment 2. If any one or more of those criteria are not met, the application will not pass the preliminary review and will not be forwarded for peer review. The applicant will be notified of this determination.

2. Section V.B. suggests that if we don't get 60 points or more, we have no chance of funding. Is that correct?
 - A. Yes. The Funding Committee has decided that it will not consider applications that score 0-59 points.
3. How is the budget scored?
 - A. The peer reviewers are required to score each criterion listed in Section V.C. They will determine the score for this criterion (weighted at 20% of the overall score of the application) based upon "the appropriateness of the budget allocations to the accomplishment of the proposed internship program, including an assessment of cost reasonableness and percentage of effort." In other words, is the budget reasonable for implementation of the program as described in the application? Section V.B.1. also states "The Panel will also consider the appropriateness of the requested project duration, effort and overlap with other resources. Additionally, the Panel will evaluate the application and provide comment with regard to the Contract Policy Statements and Conditions (Contract Appendix A-2)."
4. Please explain the Funding Committee vote and notification process. Do they have full latitude or does everything that scores 60 points or better get funded as long as there is funding available?
 - A. Following the peer review scoring process, the resulting critiques, recommendations, comments and scores are distributed to the members of the Funding Committee for consideration at an upcoming meeting. During that meeting, as described on page 16 of the RFA (Section V.B.1.), the members will discuss the applications and make recommendations for funding to the Commissioner of Health based on "responsiveness to the mission of the ESSCB, responsiveness to the RFA, programmatic balance, availability of funds and compliance with Public Health Law Article 2, Title 5-A, Section 265." There may be many reasons for deciding not to recommend an application for funding, including but not limited to, geographic diversity of the applicants and diversity of the subject matter covered by the applicants. If the Committee does not fund an application in order to fund another with a lower score, or stops before the designated funding runs out, it must explain the rationale to the Office of the State Comptroller. The Funding Committee recommendations are voted on during the public portion of the meeting, which can be viewed by webcast live and for approximately 30 days thereafter.

5. How long will it take to get feedback from peer reviewers? When will an official notice of award be sent?
 - A. After the Funding Committee meeting recommendations are made, several administrative approvals to enter into a contract are needed before formal communications can be sent from the Extramural Grants Administration office. These approvals generally take six to eight weeks. Upon approval, letters of award or regret will be sent to the Principal Investigator and the Grants Official from the applicant institution. With that correspondence, the PI will also receive a copy of the reviewer critiques, scores, summary statement and review panel roster. The letter of award is not a guarantee of funding; a contract must first be executed before funding is provided.

6. If our application is not funded, can we resubmit it?
 - A. The Funding Committee has not made a determination about whether to re-issue the RFA. If it does, the RFA will indicate whether resubmissions will be accepted.

7. What is a Vendor Responsibility Questionnaire?
 - A. This is a tool used by the Department and the Office of the State Comptroller to assess the risk of entering into contract with an organization. It can be completed and updated on-line. See Section IV.I. for details.

8. What can we do to facilitate contract execution?
 - A. Upon receipt of the letter of award, PIs should gather “just in time” information including any required IRB (human subjects), IACUC (vertebrate animals), IBC (recombinant DNA) and ESCRO (human pluripotent stem cell) approvals; and Grants Offices should complete/update the Vendor Responsibility Questionnaire (see Section IV.I.) and get the Workers’ Compensation and Disability Insurance forms (see Section IV.K. of the RFA) ready for submission/return with the signed contract. Then, when the contract is sent to the institution for signature, it can expeditiously return all necessary documents to the Department of Health with the signed contract.

9. When will we actually receive the funds?
 - A. Funds under the contract are reimbursed in accordance with the payment and reporting schedule (Attachment 5, Appendix C to the contract, a sample of which can be found in the RFA). The contract must be executed (signed by all required parties and returned to the

applicant institution) in order for allowable expenditures to be reimbursed. Contract execution generally takes six months from the date of the notice of award. The contract start date will be noted on the letter of award; it is expected to be May 1, 2010. Eligible expenses incurred prior to contract execution are made at the applicant's risk. If the contract is not executed, no funds will be reimbursed.

10. Can we count on receipt of the funds in this fiscal/economic environment? Under what circumstances might we not receive them?

A. Once the contract is executed, eligible expenses will be reimbursed according to the terms of the contract. For purposes of program stability and demonstration of fiscal accountability, it is important that quarterly vouchers and semi-annual progress reports are submitted in a timely fashion. If the contract is terminated in accordance with Section III of the grant contract agreement (Attachment 5), expenses incurred beyond the date of termination will not be reimbursed.

11. Are "no cost extensions," "carry-forwards" and budget modifications allowed and are they treated in the same way as the NIH?

A. They are allowable under the contract but are treated very differently than an NIH grant. Each must be formally requested and none are guaranteed. A formal contract amendment process, which is both lengthy and time-consuming, is generally necessary. Careful budgeting in the application should reduce the need for contract amendments.

General

1. Based on your experience, what have been the major mistakes made by applicants?

A. Common mistakes have included: failure to submit the Letter of Intent with both required signatures; submission of a DVD instead of CD-ROM; submission of a blank CD-ROM; failure to complete the forms as directed (especially human subjects, vertebrate animals and human embryonic stem cell forms); failure to appropriately justify the budget; failure to meet the minimum required percent of effort (where applicable); and failure to check the final Questions, Answers and Modifications to the RFA that are posted to the Department website.