



Graduate Fellowship Program Request for Applications

Purpose and Overview

The Medical College of Wisconsin Cancer Center Fellowship Program is designed to train exceptional cancer scientists. The goal is to recruit and train the next generation of leaders in cancer research. Applications from basic, clinical or population sciences are welcome. This prestigious program funds fellowships for both pre- and post-doctoral trainees. This RFA is for Graduate (PhD student) fellows.

The MCW Cancer Center Graduate Fellowship provides research fellowships to support the development of highly promising and accomplished PhD trainees with the potential to become independent cancer research scientists. Due to the complexity of cancer, finding ways to prevent and cure this disease requires a multidisciplinary effort. Therefore, doctoral students in any discipline at MCW with an interest in cancer research are encouraged to apply. The MCW Graduate Fellowship will provide up to two years of support, providing an opportunity for the most promising students to become more immersed in cancer research.

Eligibility and Evaluation Criteria

Eligibility

- Proposed research must be cancer relevant.
- Applicants must have an identified mentor at the Medical College of Wisconsin or Versiti. The faculty mentor is not required to be a member of the Cancer Center.
- Mentor must commit \$5,000 in matching funds from either the mentor or their department. These funds can be used for attendance at national or international meetings, education, or a computer/accessories consistent with MCW policies.
- US citizenship or permanent residency is not necessary, but the applicant must hold a valid US Visa.
- Applicants may receive the MCW Fellowship award only once.
- Applicants may only apply twice. If a resubmission, a one-page response to previous critiques is required.
- Only two applications/cycle are allowed from a single research group, with only one application per category (*i.e.*, one postdoc, one grad student). The affiliation (research group) of the application is defined by the PI whose funds provide stipend support.
- A single research group (*i.e.* lab of a PI) can only hold one active MCWCC fellowship award per category (a maximum of one active award for a graduate student and a second active award for a fellow).
- Applicants must have passed their qualifying exam prior to starting funding.
- Graduate students who obtain extramural support while holding an MCWCC fellowship will be allowed to defer any remaining funds till after their extramural support ends, allowing them to extend the period they are funded.

Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be assigned to a minimum of two reviewers who have substantial expertise in cancer research and reviewing grants. These reviewers will score applications based on the standard NIH criteria for fellowships.

- Applicant strengths and research potential.
- For senior mentors, their track record of training will be evaluated. For more junior mentors, potential as a mentor will be considered. All mentors will be judged by their commitment to the career of the trainee and planned training experience as documented in their Sponsor Statement (see below).
- Significance, innovation, impact, approach, and cancer relevance of the project.

Application Instructions

- **Application Format:** Use standard 11-point font, single space, and half-inch margins throughout the application. Consecutively number all pages.
- **Face Page:** Completed through online application portal.
- **Career Development Plan** (1-page limit). This section is to be written by the applicant and mentor and should reflect career plans and aspirations after the completion of training, including the steps that the applicant plans to take to support the transition to the desired career path in cancer research.
- **Response to Prior Critiques** (for resubmissions only; 1-page limit): Please provide a response to reviewer critiques from your prior submission of this proposal.
- **Project Summary** (350-word limit): The project summary should include an abstract summarizing the proposed project, including the overall goal, methodology, and significance. A description of how your goals and proposed project will impact cancer research or treatment should also be included.
- **Specific Aims** (1-page limit): State concisely the hypothesis to be tested and the specific aims to be achieved during the two-year award period.
- **Research Strategy** (3-page limit, excluding literature cited):
 - Significance: Describe the scientific premise for the proposal, including relevant background and scientific rationale for the project.
 - Impact/Innovation: Briefly describe how your goals and the proposed project will impact cancer research or cancer treatment.
 - Approach: Describe how the research will be carried out. Include preliminary data that support the project, a description of methods and analyses to be used, and discussion of potential pitfalls and alternative strategies.
 - Cancer relevance: Describe how the proposed studies are relevant to cancer.
- **Literature Cited:** List only references pertinent to the proposed research. References do not count against the page limit.
- **Statistical Plan** (1/2-page limit): Identify aspects of the proposal that will require statistical evaluation and briefly explain why. Describe your plan for developing an appropriate analysis in the event funding is received. For assistance, consult the Cancer Center Biostatistics Shared Resource or alternative collaborator if needed.
- **Proposal Contributions** (200 words): Proposals should represent the original work of the student with appropriate but limited guidance from the mentor. Briefly describe the relative contributions made by the student, mentor, and any other individuals to the conceptual design, writing and revision of this proposal.

- **Letters of Support (if needed):** Letters from collaborators to state the specific activities that the collaborator and their group will contribute to the training of the applicant and feasibility of the proposal. These are distinct from Letters of Recommendation or Sponsor Statement (see below).
- **NIH Biosketch** (5-page limit for each): Submit one biosketch for the fellow and one for the mentor, both in the NIH format.
- **Letters of Recommendation:** Letters should be submitted in confidentiality to MCWCCResearchPrograms@mcw.edu with a subject line "Graduate Fellowship: 'applicant name' Letter of Recommendation."

Two letters of recommendation are required: 1) the sponsor statement (aka mentor's letter of recommendation, see below) and 2) one additional letter.

- **Sponsor's Statement** (2-page limit) **should include:**
 - Mentor's training record and scientific expertise.
 - A list of previous trainees' current positions in tabular form (name, pre- or post-doctoral, dates of training period, current position).
 - Specific training plans for the applicant's development as a cancer scientist. The mentor may amplify or add additional details to the Career Development Plan submitted by the applicant. Please do not simply reiterate the career development plan.
 - An evaluation of the student's potential as a cancer scientist.
 - The letter from the doctoral mentor must include a statement committing \$5,000 in matching funds from either the mentor or their department.
 - A stated commitment that the \$5,000 in matching funds will continue to be provided if the fellow successfully obtains an extramural fellowship.

Timeline

- RFA will be announced on **December 1, 2023**.
- Letter of Intent (LOI): One-page LOI with the trainee's name, the mentor's name and affiliations, and short summary of the proposed research is due by **January 12, 2024**. LOIs will be used to identify potential reviewers and to ensure the project has cancer relevance.
- Complete applications, including letters, are due by 5:00 p.m. on **February 16, 2024**.
- Notification of awards on **April 26, 2024**.
- Funding starts **July 1, 2024**.
- Questions about the RFA, guidelines, eligibility and other pre-award and post-award matters should be addressed to MCWCCResearchPrograms@mcw.edu
- Other questions regarding application reviews or funding decisions should be addressed to Vera Tarakanova and Sid Rao (vera@mcw.edu, sridhar.rao@versiti.org).

Program Expectations

- Publication of original, peer-reviewed research.
- Submission of proposals for extramural support from agencies such as NIH, NSF, and ACS.
- MCW trainee database information entered or updated for trainee.
- Year 1 progress report documenting significant progress to qualify for second year of funding. Significant documented progress is also expected for students eligible to reinstate the portion of their MCW award deferred due to receipt of external funding. In addition, document direct evidence of the mentorship provided, progress on the IDP, and how the additional \$5,000 supplied by the mentor has been used to advance the trainee's career.

- Final progress report summarizing project results, resulting publications, and grant applications submitted and planned.
- Fellow and mentor will be asked to participate in MCW Cancer Center sponsored philanthropic endeavors.