



## **Postdoctoral and Clinical 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 postdoctoral and clinical fellows.

The purpose of the Postdoctoral and Clinical Fellowship Program is to recruit and train high quality, innovative basic science and clinical/translational cancer researchers with the potential to successfully compete for extramural funding. Fellowships will be awarded to promising postdoctoral or clinical fellows who are focused on cancer. For clinical fellows, this award is intended to support additional years of research training after completion of their clinical training.

At this point in their careers, postdoctoral researchers can usually work on their own independent research projects. They have some experience presenting their work and having their results published in research journals. However, they often lack the skills and funding necessary to become truly independent researchers. These fellowship awards provide up to two years of stipend support for postdoctoral fellows and clinical fellows during this critical juncture. Priority will be given to postdoctoral fellows who have received a doctorate during the past two years, but all qualified candidates are encouraged and eligible to apply. Stipends are based on NIH guidelines. Fellowships will be awarded to those with the greatest potential to become independent cancer researchers and successfully compete for extramural grants.

### **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.
- Clinical fellow applicants must be enrolled in a MCW residency or fellowship program, have completed their core clinical training by the award start date, and have sufficient time to commit to the research project. During the period of funding the expectation is the clinical trainee will devote >75% of their effort to research. Preference will be given to fellows who need additional mentored time after the end of their standard fellowship-mandated training.

- 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 or clinical fellow, 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).
- Fellows 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 and funding 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 letter of support and Career Development Plan (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 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.
- **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 applicant with appropriate but limited guidance from the mentor. Briefly describe the relative contributions made by the applicant, mentor, and any other individuals to the conceptual design, writing and revision of this proposal.
- **Letters of Support:** 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 Mentor Letters (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](mailto:MCWCCResearchPrograms@mcw.edu) by the application deadline, with a subject line "Postdoctoral Fellowship: 'applicant name' Letter of Recommendation." Three letters of support are required: for Postdocs: one from the postdoctoral mentor, one from the PhD mentor, and one additional are required; for clinical fellows: one from the training program director, one from the relevant section chief or department chair, and one additional are required.
  - **The letter from the current mentor should address the following:**
    - 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 applicant's potential as a cancer scientist. Please specifically address the mentor's commitment to the eventual independence of the trainee.
    - The letter from the postdoctoral 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, 2022**.
- 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](mailto:MCWCCResearchPrograms@mcw.edu)

- Other questions regarding application reviews or funding decisions should be addressed to Vera Tarakanova and Sid Rao ([vera@mcw.edu](mailto:vera@mcw.edu), [sridhar.rao@versiti.org](mailto:sridhar.rao@versiti.org)).

### **Program Expectations**

- Publication of original, peer-reviewed research.
- Submission of proposals for extramural support from agencies such as NCI 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 postdocs eligible to reinstate the portion of their MCW award deferred due to receipt of external funding. In addition, 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.