

2026–2027 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

July 13, 2026

The Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA) is pleased to announce a Request for Proposals (RFP) for pre-clinical, translational, and early clinical research with the potential to produce unusually high impact, near-term advancements in melanoma prevention, detection, diagnosis, and treatment. This cycle, proposals will be accepted for Established Investigator Awards, Academic-Industry Partnership Awards (for Established Investigator Award), Young Investigator Awards, Pilot Awards, and Special Opportunity Awards in Acral Melanoma, Uveal Melanoma, and for UK- and Israel-based researchers. MRA plans to support at least \$7.9 million in new funding in the 2026–2027 cycle. **Please note that MRA may release additional special opportunities in August 2026.**

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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, as well as better melanoma prevention, detection, and diagnostic modalities.

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 reduce the incidence of melanomas. To date, the MRA has awarded \$200 million to support over 565 research projects in 20 countries. Please visit www.curemelanoma.org for additional information about 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, diagnosis, prevention, 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 to an awarded proposal.

MRA welcomes proposals in the following areas:

- **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.
- **Prevention:** Elucidation of environmental, epidemiological, and biological factors in melanomagenesis that lead to improved strategies for melanoma prevention.

2026–2027 Special Emphasis Areas: For the 2026–2027 cycle, MRA seeks proposals in the following areas, which are focused on current unmet clinical needs in melanoma. These areas are of particular interest, will receive special consideration, and can include pre-clinical, translational, clinical, and/or correlative studies:

- Identifying new treatment strategies for rare melanoma subtypes, including acral, mucosal, uveal, or pediatric melanomas, with a focus on targets such as NF1, CRKL, B7-H3, YAP1, Gαq/11, GAB2, and NY-ESO-1
- Understanding melanoma brain metastasis and leptomeningeal disease and identifying new treatment options
- Identifying biomarkers of response/resistance to targeted and immune therapies
- Identifying biomarkers to determine which patients with primary melanoma are at risk of progression

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. 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 applicants, selected Mentor(s) is appropriate to advance applicant's career and project with evidence of a strong mentorship relationship.* One Mentor must be at the same institution as the applicant.
- For Established Investigator, Academic-Industry Partnership, and Pilot Award applications, each of the above criteria will account for approximately one-third of the overall score.
- Young Investigator applications will be evaluated using the above criteria and will be weighted as: 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 our research goals and to ensure 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 that the UK/Israel-based Special Opportunity is limited to UK- and Israel-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.** PIs of Next Steps Awards, or those who submitted applications to the 2026 Next Steps Program, are eligible to apply to opportunities in this RFP.
- Mentors for Young Investigator Award applicants may serve as a PI on a separate proposal this cycle; however, that proposal must represent a distinct hypothesis from the Young Investigator's proposal.
- Multiple applications will be accepted from a single institution, provided that each application has a different PI and represents a distinct hypothesis.

If there are any questions about eligibility, please contact science@curemelanoma.org before submitting an application. Applications from PIs who do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be reviewed.

TYPES OF AWARDS

YOUNG INVESTIGATOR AWARD

Applicant Eligibility Checklist and biosketch due September 14, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET
Full proposals due November 5, 2026 at 5:00 pm 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 with 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 at the applicant's institution 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 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, 2027 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 have their eligibility confirmed prior to submitting an application. Applicants must upload the [Applicant Eligibility Checklist](#) and their biosketch in Proposal Central using the LOI function in the Young Investigator Award by 5:00 pm ET on September 14, 2026. No LOI is required. MRA will confirm applicant eligibility by email.**

ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR AWARD

Letter of Intent (LOI) due August 21, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Estimated LOI decisions: October 31, 2026

Invited proposals due December 10, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

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 hold a full-time faculty appointment at the level of Assistant Professor (or equivalent) or above.
- It is **strongly recommended** that Principal Investigators be beyond the first five years of their first faculty appointment.

ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR ACADEMIC-INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP (AIP) AWARD

Letter of Intent (LOI) due August 21, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Estimated LOI decisions: October 31, 2026

Invited proposals due December 10, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

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 hold a full-time faculty appointment at the level of Assistant Professor (or equivalent) or above.
- It is **strongly recommended** that Principal Investigators be beyond the first five years of their first faculty appointment.
- 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 5, 2026 at 5:00 pm 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 hold a full-time faculty appointment at the level of Assistant Professor (or equivalent) or above.
- It is **strongly recommended** that Principal Investigators be beyond the first five years of their first faculty appointment.

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

Established Investigator Award deadlines:

Letter of Intent (LOI) due August 21, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET
Estimated LOI decisions: October 31, 2026
Invited proposals due December 10, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Young Investigator Award deadlines:

Applicant Eligibility Checklist and biosketch due September 14, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET
Full proposals due November 5, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Pilot Award deadlines:

Full proposals due November 5, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Acral melanoma is a rare and difficult-to-treat form of melanoma that arises on the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, or beneath the nails. Acral melanoma accounts for approximately 2-3% of all melanomas and affects people of all races and ethnicities, but disproportionately affects people of color. Compared to cutaneous melanoma, acral melanoma is more likely to be diagnosed at a later stage, leading to poor survival.

Approved drugs for cutaneous melanoma do not appear to be as effective in acral melanoma, creating an urgent medical need to identify better treatment options for patients with acral melanoma. In addition, little is known about the anti-tumor immune response in acral melanoma, and a better understanding of what drives anti-tumor immunity in acral melanoma is urgently needed.

With this Special Opportunity, MRA intends to issue Established Investigator, Established Investigator – Academic Industry Partnership, Pilot, and Young Investigator Awards 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 and GAB2 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 Established Investigator, Established Investigator – Academic Industry Partnership, Young Investigator, 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 Established Investigator, Established Investigator – Academic Industry Partnership, Young Investigator, 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: ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR, ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR ACADEMIC-INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP, YOUNG INVESTIGATOR, AND PILOT AWARDS ON ADVANCING TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH FOR UVEAL MELANOMA

Established Investigator Award deadlines:

Letter of Intent (LOI) due August 21, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Estimated LOI decisions: October 31, 2026

Invited proposals due December 10, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Young Investigator Award deadlines:

Applicant Eligibility Checklist and biosketch due September 14, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Full proposals due November 5, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Pilot Award deadlines:

Full proposals due November 5, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Uveal melanoma arises in the uveal tract of the eye and accounts for approximately 5% of all melanoma cases in the United States. It has a very distinct disease biology and clinical features from cutaneous melanoma. Different types of treatment modalities used for primary uveal melanoma can achieve local control in more than 90% of patients, but over 40% of patients ultimately develop metastases, most commonly to the liver. Approved therapies for cutaneous melanoma have limited effectiveness in uveal melanoma. Despite recent FDA approvals for treating patients with uveal melanoma, there is still a high unmet medical need to find other therapeutics to treat this disease.

With this Special Opportunity, MRA intends to issue Established Investigator, Established Investigator – Academic Industry Partnership, Young Investigator, and Pilot Awards 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 Established Investigator, Established Investigator – Academic Industry Partnership, Young Investigator, 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 Established Investigator, Established Investigator – Academic Industry Partnership, Young Investigator, and Pilot Awards 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: UK-BASED ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR, YOUNG INVESTIGATOR, AND PILOT AWARDS

Established Investigator Award deadlines:

Letter of Intent (LOI) due August 21, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Estimated LOI decisions: October 31, 2026

Invited proposals due December 10, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Young Investigator Award deadlines:

Applicant Eligibility Checklist and biosketch due September 14, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Full proposals due November 5, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Pilot Award deadlines:

Full proposals due November 5, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

The MRA is pleased to offer a special opportunity to fund Established Investigator, Young Investigator, and Pilot Awards focused on melanoma research from United Kingdom-based researchers.

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

- PI must be based at an institution located in the United Kingdom.

Applicants should submit to the general 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” under subprogram in the Title Page step of the online application. **Selecting “UK/Israel” will not limit an applicant’s opportunity to also be selected under the general award mechanisms, but instead is meant to expand opportunities in an effort to increase overall funding of investigators focused on melanoma who are based in the UK.**

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY: ISRAEL-BASED ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR, YOUNG INVESTIGATOR, AND PILOT AWARDS

Established Investigator Award deadlines:

Letter of Intent (LOI) due August 21, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Estimated LOI decisions: October 31, 2026

Invited proposals due December 10, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Young Investigator Award deadlines:

Applicant Eligibility Checklist and biosketch due September 14, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Full proposals due November 5, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

Pilot Award deadlines:

Full proposals due November 5, 2026 at 5:00 pm ET

The MRA is pleased to offer a special opportunity to fund Established Investigator, Young Investigator, and Pilot Awards focused on melanoma research from Israel-based researchers.

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

- PIs must be based at an institution located in Israel.

Applicants should submit to the general 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” under subprogram in the Title Page step of the online application. **Selecting “UK/Israel” will not limit an applicant’s opportunity to also be selected under the general award mechanisms, but instead is meant to expand opportunities in an effort to increase overall funding of investigators focused on melanoma who are based in Israel.**

PLEASE NOTE THAT MRA MAY RELEASE ADDITIONAL RFPs DESCRIBING SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES IN AUGUST 2026.

LETTER OF INTENT FORMAT AND INSTRUCTIONS (ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR AND ESTABLISHED INVESTIGATOR-ACADEMIC INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP AWARDS ONLY)

Established Investigator Award applicants must submit a letter of intent (LOI) to MRA prior to submission of a full proposal (upon invitation). **Please carefully follow the instructions in Proposal Central.**

1. **Title Page:** Enter the project title.
 - Under subprogram, select a Special Opportunity if applicable (otherwise select N/A).
 - *For Academic-Industry Partnership proposals:* Include name of Industry Partner.
2. **Enable Other Users to Access this Proposal:** Allow others (e.g., institutional administrators or collaborators) to view, edit, or submit your proposal.
3. **Applicant/PI:** Key information about the applicant PI.
4. **Organization/Institution:** This is the PI’s institution. If your institution has a [ROR](#) (Research Organization Registry ID), please include.
5. **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. *Please see Key*

Personnel requirements and descriptions of roles under step #6 of the Application Instructions section of the RFP.

6. **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 Established Investigator-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.**
7. **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.
8. **Validate:** Check for any missing required information.
9. **Submit:** Please note that LOIs will NOT be able to be submitted past their deadline. Technical support for the on-line application system is not available after 11:59 pm Eastern Time.

Full length applications will be invited from meritorious LOIs by approximately October 31, 2026.

APPLICATION FORMAT AND INSTRUCTIONS (ALL AWARDS)

All applications are due by 5:00 pm Eastern Time. PROPOSALS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AFTER THE DEADLINE. Applicants must use [Proposal Central](#) and the document templates and requirements therein. Please carefully follow the instructions in Proposal Central and below. 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. ***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 TO YOUR INSTITUTION'S SIGNING OFFICIAL IN ADVANCE TO AVOID ANY LAST-MINUTE ISSUES WITH SIGNING AND SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION.
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 and Mentor.

Descriptions of Key Personnel roles:

Principal Investigator (PI, required for all applications): This is the applicant for Established Investigator, Established Investigator Academic Industry Partnership, Pilot, and Young Investigator applications.

Co-Investigator: Co-I's are vital scientific contributors (at the same or a different institution from the 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 Young Investigator applications only): All Young Investigator applicants must designate at least one mentor who is an established investigator at the same institution as the Young Investigator. 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 is strongly advised.** Mentor(s) must provide a letter of support for the Young Investigator and 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) 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.

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

- Established Investigator Awards: \$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

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.

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 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.

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 only required if the staff are included as key personnel. Besides publications, MRA welcomes the inclusion of research outputs such as datasets, code, patents, and papers posted to preprint servers.

- b. **Project description:** Must be formatted in Arial 11-point or Times New Roman 12-point font with no less than ½ inch margins. The project description should be 5 pages maximum, inclusive of the following: Background and specific aims, preliminary data, experimental design and methods, statistical plan, figures (which may be embedded within the above sections), and rationale/fit with key criteria, including the potential for clinical impact.
 - c. **Literature references:** A list of up to 30 references supporting the project description is allowed, in addition to the 5-page project description.
 - d. **For Young Investigator 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: [Avoiding Bias in Reference Writing](#)
 - 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 must be submitted, along with a biosketch, through Proposal Central by 5:00 pm ET on September 14, 2026.** Checklist must be uploaded as an attachment in Proposal Central.
 - e. **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 can be directed to science@curemelanoma.org.
 - f. **For proposals involving clinical trials:** Attach a brief protocol synopsis (5 pages maximum), along with a timeline and milestones, including but not limited to IRB and regulatory approval (if applicable), patient accrual timeline, and timeline for completion of analyses.
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/research/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 5:00 PM EASTERN TIME. PROPOSALS SUBMITTED AFTER THE DEADLINE WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED.

- **August 21, 2026:** Deadline for Letter of Intent (LOI) for Established Investigator Awards and Established Investigator Academic Industry Partnership (AIP) Awards.
- **September 14, 2026:** Deadline for Young Investigator Award applicants to submit Applicant Eligibility Checklist and Biosketch.
- **November 5, 2026:** Applications are due for Young Investigator and Pilot Award proposals.
- **December 10, 2026:** Deadline for invited full applications for Established Investigator Awards and Established Investigator Academic Industry Partnership (AIP) Awards.
- **Early April 2027:** Awardees notified (Note that MRA may adjust the notification date without notice to applicants).
- **June 1, 2027:** Projects start.

REVIEW MECHANISM

All proposals will undergo rigorous peer review by the [MRA Grant Review Committee](#) (GRC), comprised of experts in diverse areas of translational cancer research. Applications will be scored according to MRA Review and Selection Criteria. To minimize any real or perceived conflicts of interest (COI), MRA asks GRC members to adhere to a rigorous set of COI guidelines. MRA also

provides GRC 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 science@curemelanoma.org with questions. 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 <https://www.curemelanoma.org/research/grants>.

COLLABORATIVE FUNDING OFFERS

For outstanding research proposals that are deemed fundable by peer review 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. 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 science@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 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 2027 Annual Scientific Retreat is scheduled for March 3 – 5, 2027, 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. For questions about eligibility, please contact science@curemelanoma.org before an application is submitted. Applications from PIs who do not fit the 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 UK/Israel-based Special Opportunity is limited to UK- and Israel-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. Your eligibility checklist and biosketch must be uploaded to Proposal Central by 5:00 pm ET on September 14, 2026.
- 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 5, 2021, 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/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 and complete the Applicant Eligibility Checklist.
- Q: What is the role of the Mentor?
- A: It is expected that Young Investigators are independent faculty members and not in training or in research support positions. However, a Mentor is required to help ensure that the Young Investigator has the resources they need to successfully carry out the work at their institution. It is strongly advised that Young Investigator applicants have at least one Mentor with expertise in melanoma research at their institution.
- Q: I would like to have a Mentor that is not at my institution. Is this allowed?

- A: No. All Young Investigator applicants must have a designated Mentor at their institution to help to ensure that the Young Investigator has the resources they need to successfully carry out the work at their institution. An applicant may have additional Mentors outside of their institution for other purposes, including providing scientific guidance for the project.
- 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.

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](#).

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?

A: All proposals must be submitted electronically through [Proposal Central](#). 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: There is no salary cap, but applicants may use the NIH salary cap for calculating salary and fringe benefit requests for the budget 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.

Budget

Q: Are subawards allowed, and how should these charges be entered in the Budget?

A: Subawards are allowed, and the costs can be entered under “Contracted and Partner Services” in the budget. Please note that MRA will disperse all grant funds to the PI’s institution.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CONTACTS

Email questions about this RFP, eligibility, or MRA or its awards to science@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. Support is available from 8:30am-5pm Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.