Mentored Research Development Award (MRDA) Program

Program Goal

The principal goal of the MRDA program is to improve the success rate for grant submissions by junior faculty. To accomplish this objective, MRDA recipients (MRDA Scholars) will work with their chosen mentor(s) to achieve milestones associated with the preparation of a targeted grant application. To assure highly-competitive grant submissions, MRDA Scholars will also take advantage of extensive ACCEL resources. These include grant writing workshops, peer mentoring groups, grant review sessions, support from the Professional Development Core (PD Core), and biostatistics and study design consultations with experts from the ACCEL Biostatistics, Epidemiology, and Research Design (BERD) Core.

MRDAs support awardees by releasing them from non-research responsibilities (e.g., clinical work, teaching, administration) and/or providing minimal funding to allow for participation in defined activities associated with writing and submitting a competitive grant proposal. At the end of the MRDA period, awardees are required to submit a fully-developed grant proposal to one of the following mechanisms:

i. IDeA Program Pilot Grants (e.g., CTR, COBRE, INBRE, CTSA, ISPCTN);
ii. NIH; PCORI; AHRQ; other federal agency;
iii. A well-recognized grant-issuing foundation or organization (AHA, ACS, etc.).

Eligibility

The MRDA program supports junior faculty in their efforts to garner funding to build a program of research. The candidate must be sponsored and supported by a senior investigator / mentor (called the *Sponsoring Mentor* here) who will act as their advocate and primary mentoring contact throughout the process.

The junior faculty applicant must:

i. Hold a doctoral degree
ii. Hold a permanent faculty (e.g., tenure track) level position at CCHS, DSU, Nemours, or UD
iii. Fulfill the criteria of a NIH *New Investigator* (http://grants.nih.gov/grants/new_investigators/).

The junior faculty applicant cannot:

i. Hold a concurrent IDeA Pilot Grant (note that individuals may submit both Pilot and MRDA requests, but if the Pilot Grant is awarded, the MRDA application will be withdrawn);
ii. Have received a previous ACCEL MRDA for the same research grant opportunity.

Support Provided

MRDAs are designed to offset a portion of non-research effort, such as clinical, teaching, or administrative effort, to provide protected time to develop a grant proposal. If an investigator has sufficient research time to devote to writing their grant proposal, funds can be requested through the MRDA mechanism for specific activities or services that support development of their grant proposal (e.g., conferences or workshop attendance, technical or professional development courses, study design or data analysis consults, certain resources or supplies, publication fees, a grant editor). MRDA Scholars from historically underrepresented groups in biomedical clinical research (see Populations Underrepresented in the Extramural Scientific Workforce | SWD at NIH) may request more effort to bolster their professional network and develop their grant proposal (i.e., up to 40% effort over 6 months). A letter from the Department Head/Chair should detail the support requested (e.g., clinical time offset; academic course release; etc.) and

clearly indicate the applicant's need for additional career development resources.

Applicants may apply for one of the following mechanisms:

I. Clinical investigators can receive coverage for up to 20% of their time over 6 months to work toward the goals of their award. Half of this effort (i.e., half of the percentage of the awardees salary up to the NIH salary cap) is covered by the MRDA and half of this effort must be covered and protected by the clinician's Division Chief or Department Chair. The time covered by the MRDA can be spread over the entire 6 months (e.g., one day a week) or can be compressed into a shorter timeframe (e.g., five continuous weeks of effort). Although focused effort is often desirable for effective grant writing, it is likely that actual effort developing a grant application will vary across the timeframe covered and time should be flexibly allocated in a way that best suits the applicant, their Sponsoring Mentor, and their home Department/Division.

II. Academic investigators with scientific or engineering backgrounds who are seeking to develop clinical/translational research proposals can receive coverage for expenses for up to 10% faculty buyout or release from one course during one semester. In addition, academic investigators can request additional funds to cover costs up to $3,000 related to increasing the competitiveness of the grant proposal they are writing. See examples of allowable expenses below.

III. Clinical or academic investigators who have sufficient protected time to write their grant proposal and participate in ACCEL activities but who lack other substantive grant-writing support may request funds to cover costs up to $10,000 related to increasing the competitiveness of the grant proposal they are writing. In these cases, MRDA funds can support, for example: a) travel to meet with mentors and collaborators; b) attendance at conferences or workshops focused on the topic area of the grant or on grant writing; c) technical training or professional development activities; d) consultation regarding study design or data analysis; e) resources or supplies (e.g., books, datasets) supporting the writing of a competitive grant submission; f) publication fees for related manuscripts; and g) grant editing. Please note that MRDA funds **CANNOT BE USED TO FUND RESEARCH**. All funds requested in lieu of effort should be described and justified in a budget (see below).

IV. Clinical or academic investigators from historically underrepresented groups in biomedical clinical research (see Populations Underrepresented in the Extramural Scientific Workforce | SWD at NIH) may request additional time offset. They may request coverage for up to 40% effort over 6 months. These "enhanced" MRDAs will also provide for additional professional development and networking opportunities, ongoing needs assessment, and linkages to resources.

In addition to the support for awardees, Sponsoring Mentors who fully participate in the program will have access to a small amount of funding (~$2,250) that can be requested for travel, education, or other activities / materials that support the broader goals of the ACCEL Program to increase clinical and translational research capacity at the participating institutions. Full mentor participation means that:

During the MRDA submission process, the Sponsoring Mentor will:

i. Complete a templated Mentoring Plan and Support Letter specific to the MRDA applicant;
ii. Upload the letter of support through the online submission interface;
iii. Assist the applicant with the preparation of an initial Individual Development Plan specific to the MRDA.

If the MRDA is awarded, the Sponsoring Mentor will:

i. Complete an online survey detailing their position and experience;
ii. Assure the conditions of the submitted Mentoring Plan are met;
iii. Provide periodic online assessments of the MRDA recipient and their relationship with the mentor;
iv. Participate in their mentee's Mentoring and Advisory Council (MAC) session and agree to act as a reviewer for a future MAC session.

Activities Covered

MRDAs are designed to support activities associated with writing and submitting highly competitive clinical and translational research grants. MRDAs CANNOT be used to support new research activities such as the enrollment of subjects or prospective data acquisition.

Examples of activities that are allowed under an MRDA include:

i. Meet with mentors and collaborators;
ii. Participate in PD Core grant development workshops, peer group sessions, and mock study sections;
iii. Draft, refine, and finalize the specific aims and research strategy for a research grant submission;
iv. Complete analysis of existing pilot data and prepare figures for a research grant submission;
v. Determine best research methods and alternative approaches for the targeted grant submission;
vi. Consult and collaborate with the ACCEL BERD Core to develop an effective study design and analytic approach for a research grant submission and an envisioned larger program of research;
vii. Draft documents for Institutional Review Board consideration;
viii. Respond to comments / suggestions from previous reviewers or from leaders in the field to whom a copy of your potential grant submission was sent for review.

Letter of Intent Requirements

A letter of intent and demographic information must be submitted through REDCap by NOVEMBER 6, 2023 at this link: https://redcap.nemoursresearch.org/redcap/surveys/?s=K3NDKJ4738D8H3LY. The survey will ask you for the following:

i. the targeted funding mechanism and due date for the planned submission (include a link to the Notice of Funding Opportunity or Request for Applications);
ii. an overview of the research to be proposed;
iii. the name, title, institution and email address of the Sponsoring Mentor and, if applicable, mentoring team members;
iv. whether effort offset is being requested, if so, how much effort, and the name of the individual who will release the MRDA Scholar from clinical or other responsibilities if the MRDA is awarded;
v. whether funds are being requested in addition to or in lieu of an effort offset, and if so, how much;
vi. the desired start and end date for the MRDA activities. It is anticipated that this RFA will support MRDAs beginning on or after January 1, 2024 and ending no later than June 30, 2024 – or – beginning on or after July 1, 2024 and ending no later than June 30, 2025 (see Timeline below);
vii. demographic information.

This letter will be used to assign appropriate reviewers and ensure eligibility for the selected MRDA mechanism . You will not receive feedback and will only be contacted if there are questions/concerns.

Basic Application Requirements

Full applications are due by NOVEMBER 27, 2023 (submitted online at https://www.de-ctr.org/funding-opportunities/mentored-research-development-award-program-mrda/). Submission requires registration on the ACCEL site (www.de-ctr.org). Applications should be prepared by mentee-mentor pairs and BOTH the mentor and mentee will be evaluated as part of the review process. Applicants who have previously received an MRDA must provide documentation detailing the outcomes of their prior MRDA funding and explaining the need for additional support (please contact Julianne Ross for additional guidance).

Submission of applications is encouraged in advance of the November 27 deadline (preferably by November 20) so that if the initial application is found to be incomplete or inconsistent with the intent of the MRDA program, the investigator will have time to update the proposal and resubmit by the November 27 deadline. Awarded MRDA Scholars will be announced no later than December 22, 2023 and funding can start on or anytime after January 1, 2024 or on or after July 1, 2024 (see Timeline below).

Application Details

Applications should be prepared using 11pt Arial (or larger) font with 1/2 inch (or larger) margins. Applications must include the following sections:

i. A *Research Summary* (no more than 2 pages) including**:**
   a. Background and significance of the clinical/translational problem to be studied in the planned grant and a draft of your specific aims;
   b. Overview of the methodology to be used;
   c. Long-term research goals and potential impact of the line of research being developed by the applicant;
   d. The specific target funding agency (e.g., ACCEL, NIH, NSF, AHA), funding mechanism name and number (e.g., pilot grant, R21, CAREER Award, Grant-in-Aid), and grant submission deadline.

ii. An *MRDA Plan* (no more than 1 page) including:
   a. A specific description of the activities that will be undertaken during the MRDA;
   b. A list of resources readily available to the applicant to ensure attainment of the MRDA objectives (e.g., members of the mentoring team, collaborators, analytical tools, and grant readers/reviewers).

iii. A *Timeline* (no more than 1 page) including :
   a. The amount and duration of effort requested with justification for the time needed;
   b. A detailed timeline beginning with initiation of the MRDA work and ending with submission of the targeted grant listing the planned MRDA activities. Submissions for this call should propose an MRDA start date on or after January 1, 2024 or July 1, 2024. Please provide details (for example, specify the frequency of meetings with your mentor, identify the block of time set aside for the first draft of the grant, time for review of that draft, a second block of time for grant revision, etc.)

iv. A *Draft Budget Request with Justification* for any non-salary components of the MRDA plan including:
   a. An itemized list of each non-salary related request;
   b. The direct cost for each item;
   c. A justification for each item (emphasizing impact on grant competitiveness);
   d. The total direct costs requested.

Other Submission Requirements

i. Completion of an *Individual Development Plan (IDP): (*https://dash.de-ctr.org/profiles/idp/overview).

ii. Uploading of NIH-formatted Biosketches for the MRDA candidate, the sponsoring mentor, and any other mentors or collaborators who would play a significant role in accomplishing the goals of the MRDA. These Biosketches MUST be in current NIH format (https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm). **The Biosketches of the mentors should describe their experiences as mentors and why they are appropriate mentors for this applicant and this research plan.**

iii. A complete templated Mentoring Plan and Support Letter (use template provided with the same headings) detailing the candidate's potential, the existing mentoring relationship (if any), and specifics as to how and when the mentor will interact with the candidate during the MRDA funding period.

iv. A letter provided by the applicant's Division Chief and/or Department Chair confirming support for the applicant's participation in the MRDA program and providing assurance that the applicant currently has protected time or will be released from clinical or other responsibilities for the amount of time and duration requested, consistent with the Timeline specified, should the MRDA application be approved.
   If non-salary support is requested, the letter must:
   a. detail the support requested (e.g., attendance at a specific conference, etc.)
   b. clearly describe the applicant's need for the requested resources.
   If an effort offset is requested, the letter must:
   a. acknowledge that, if awarded, the MRDA will be used to offset clinical or other non-research effort and will not be used to cover time already released for research, free time spent on research, or time spent on days off;

b. clearly state the specific time release for the MRDA activities;
c. indicate agreement to split the MRDA-associated salary costs with the ACCEL Program.

v. Applicants who have received a previous MRDA must provide a *Progress Report* document detailing:
   a. the outcomes of their previous MRDA funding (e.g., grant funding, publications, presentations)
   b. a detailed explanation of the need for additional MRDA support

vi. Prior to funding, all MRDA awardees and sponsoring mentors will sign a compact agreeing to:
   a. Adhere to the mentoring plan conditions;
   b. Protect the awardee's research time based on the MRDA timeline proposed;
   c. Maintain communication with the PD Core. Note that in this regard, MRDA recipients will be assigned to a senior Mentoring Oversight Committee faculty member. This person will act as a resource for the MRDA recipient and their Sponsoring Mentor. They will provide linkages to the developing resources within the ACCEL Program and oversee the team's progress in order to remove potential roadblocks and determine alternative strategies as needed.

Merit Review Criteria

The following criteria will be used to evaluate the merit of the proposal:

i. The likelihood of the applicant's success in competing for an external grant based on the Mentor's assessment of the investigator's research potential and a review of the application materials.
ii. Relevance of the envisioned grant proposal to the DE-CTR ACCEL mission. Although all meritorious applications will be considered for funding, in cases where multiple applications are ranked at the same level of merit, priority will be given to areas of emphasis defined by the DE-CTR ACCEL. We also encourage submissions describing Community Engagement Research and/or addressing Social Determinants of Health, Health Disparities/Equity, and Substance Use (e.g., the Opioid Epidemic). ACCEL prioritizes:
   a. Projects addressing medically underserved populations
   b. Projects addressing conditions disproportionately affecting Delawareans
iii. The scope of the MRDA proposal and the likelihood of successfully accomplishing the proposed objectives.
iv. The availability of collaborators, core lab resources, analytical tools, and other relevant resources to support the applicant.
v. The feasibility of the proposed timeline to produce a competitive submission.

Please note that priority will be given to those who have not previously been a recipient of an MRDA.

Individual Development Plan Review Criteria

The following criteria will be used to evaluate the individual development plan component of the application:

i. The IDP puts forth a clear plan with "SMART" goals, measurable outcomes, and realistic timelines. (See: https://www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/research/fellows/career/individual/create/index.cfm)
ii. The goal(s) within the IDP will effectively contribute to achieving external funding and launching a research program.

NOTE: The IDP should refer only to the MRDA-related goals, not to professional development broadly.

Mentoring Component Review Criteria

The following criteria will be used to evaluate the mentoring components of the application:

i. The mentor has appropriate experience as a mentor to junior faculty seeking research funding (e.g., past record of numerous successful mentees).
ii. The mentor is suitable for this project (topic area, study design/methods, involvement in proposal) and this mentee.
iii. The mentoring plan is appropriate for this project and mentee, the mentor's role in the plan is clear, and the mentor is devoting enough time to the professional development of the mentee.

MRDA Submission, Review, and Required Activities Timeline

Due Date	**Action**
November 6, 2023	Letter of Intent due
November 27, 2023	Proposals are due for Mentoring Oversight Committee review
December 4, 2023	Additional information requests are sent to applicants to clarify budget requests (if needed)
December 22, 2023	Funding decisions will be made by the Executive Committee and awardees will be announced
January 1, 2024 (or July 1, 2024)	MRDA Scholars will be admitted to the MRDA program; scholars may begin work
June 30, 2024 (or June 30, 2025 for July 1, 2024 start)	Work on all MRDAs must be completed
**Dates are subject to change depending upon receipt of DE-CTR ACCEL award notification*	

Comments or Questions about the MRDA program?
Contact the PDC Program Coordinator Julianne Ross at Julianne.Ross@nemours.org.

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