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 Mentoring, Education, and Career Development Core (MED Core), and biostatistics and study design consultations with experts from the ACCEL Epi-Biostats Core.

MRDAs release awardees from significant non-research responsibilities in order for them to participate in defined activities associated with grant writing and submission. At the end of the MRDA period, awardees are required to submit a fully-developed grant proposal to one of the following mechanisms.

i. ACCEL Pilot Project Grant (https://www.de-ctr.org/research/pilot-grants);
ii. ACCEL Big Data Pilot Grant (https://www.de-ctr.org/research/bigdatagrant);
iii. ACE Research Award (https://www.de-ctr.org/community/ace-award);
iv. Other IDEa Program Pilot Grants (e.g., COBRE, INBRE);
v. NIH; PCORI; AHRQ; other federal agency;
vii. Another well-recognized grant-issuing organization.

Eligibility

The MRDA program supports junior faculty in their transition to research independence on a tenure or equivalent track. 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 faculty level position.
ii. Be based at UD, CCHS, MUSC, or Nemours;
iii. Fulfill the criteria of NIH New Investigator (http://grants.nih.gov/grants/new_investigators/).

The junior faculty applicant cannot:

i. Hold a concurrent ACCEL Pilot Grant or MUSC pilot grant (note that individuals may submit both Pilot and MRDA requests, but if the Pilot Grant is awarded, the MRDA grant will be tabled or withdrawn at the discretion of the MED Core Leadership Committee);
ii. Have ever been a target or principal investigator on a COBRE, INBRE, or other IDEa program grant;
iii. Have received a previous ACCEL MRDA – unless the result of the previous award was a funded grant and the applicant is seeking support for a different grant application.

Support Provided

MRDAs offset a portion of non-research effort especially clinical effort. MRDA Scholars are expected to spend up to 20% of their time over 6 months working toward the goals of their award. The time covered by the MRDA can be spread over
the entire 6 months (e.g., one day a week) or can be accomplished in a compressed timeframe (e.g., five continuous weeks of effort). Time may be allocated in a way that best suits the applicant, their Sponsoring Mentor, and their home department/division.

In exchange for this time commitment, the ACCEL Program will provide half of the awardee's salary up to the NIH salary cap for their approved research effort. For example, if an investigator is awarded an MRDA to cover 2 days a week (40% of their time) over three months to develop an ACCEL Pilot grant application for 2016, their Division Chief or Department Chair would have to guarantee protection of that 40% time for the three months indicated. During the MRDA period, 20% of the MRDA recipient’s salary (up to the NIH salary cap) would be covered by the ACCEL program with the remaining 20% of their protected time covered by the awardee's home department or division.

In addition to the salary support for awardees, Sponsoring Mentors who fully participate in the program will have access to a small amount of funding (~$1,250) 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. Register on the ACCEL web site;
ii. Submit an online Mentoring Plan specific to the MRDA applicant;
iii. Upload a letter of support through the online submission interface;
iv. Assist the applicant with the preparation of an initial Individual Development Plan.

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 ACCEL’s Mentoring the Mentor program by attending at least 4 of the monthly group sessions and the annual Best Practices in Mentoring Retreat held by the MED-Core.

Activities Covered

MRDAs are designed to support activities associated with writing and submitting highly competitive clinical and translational research grants. MRDAs are NOT intended to support research activities such as the purchase of supplies, enrollment of subjects, or prospective data acquisition. In particular, the MRDA program was designed to help clinicians and other junior faculty burdened by non-research duties to focus their efforts on preparing highly competitive grant submissions to support their research.

Examples of activities that are allowed under an MRDA include:

i. Meet with mentors and collaborators;
ii. Participate in MED-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 data set and prepare figures for a research grant submission;
v. Determine best methods and alternative approaches for the targeted grant submission;
vi. Consult and collaborate with the ACCEL Epi-Biostats group 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.

Basic Application Requirements

A Letter of Intent is required and should be emailed to Erin Riegel at Erin.Riegel@nemours.org by July 31, 2015. Letters of Intent must include

i. A draft title of the project;
ii. The name, position, and institutional affiliation of the Sponsoring Mentor and other members of the mentoring team;
iii. The proposed time frame of the MRDA;
iv. The specific grant mechanism being targeted for submission;
v. An attached copy of the applicant’s NIH biosketch;
vi. An attached copy of each mentors’ NIH biosketch.

A three page application must be submitted online (https://www.de-ctr.org/research/mrda) by August 10, 2015. Submission requires registration on the ACCEL site. Applications should be prepared by mentee-mentor pairs and both the mentor and mentee will be evaluated as part of the review process.

If the initial application is found to be incomplete or inconsistent with the intent of the MRDA program, the investigator will be given an opportunity to update the proposal and resubmit. Updated proposals will be due no later than September 11, 2015. Awarded MRDA Scholars will be announced October 12, 2015. MRDA Scholars may start work any time between November 1, 2015 and February 1, 2016. Due to certain funding restrictions, University of Delaware MRDA Scholars must complete their work by May 31, 2016.

**Application Details**

Applications may be no longer than 3 pages using 11pt Arial (or larger) font with 1/2 inch (or larger) margins. Applications must include the following sections:

i. A *Research Summary* (~1¼ page) including:
   a. Significance of the clinical/translational problem to be studied in the planned grant;
   b. Long-term research goals of the applicant;
   c. Potential impact of the line of research being developed by the applicant;
   d. Your rationale for choosing the research project that is the subject of your grant proposal;
   e. The specific target funding agency (e.g., ACCEL, NIH, NSF, AHA), funding mechanism (e.g., pilot grant, R21, CAREER Award, Grant-in-Aid), and grant submission deadline.

ii. An *MRDA Plan* (~¾ 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, especially members of the mentoring team, collaborators, analytical tools, and grant readers/reviewers.

iii. A *Timeline* (~¾ 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

**Other Submission Requirements**

i. Completion of an online *Individual Development Plan* (https://www.de-ctr.org/redcap/surveys/?s=gnABSe7Gtv).

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.

iii. A detailed mentoring plan submitted by the sponsoring mentor through an online interface (https://www.de-ctr.org/redcap/surveys/?s=TFyXuiC9rE).

iv. A letter of support from the sponsoring mentor detailing their mentoring experience, 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.

v. 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 will be released from clinical or other responsibilities for the amount of time and duration requested should the MRDA application be approved. 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 specify time release for the MRDA activities;
   c. indicate agreement to split the MRDA-associated salary costs with the ACCEL program.
vi. Prior to funding, MRDA awardees and sponsoring mentors will sign a compact agreeing to:
   a. Adhere to the mentoring plan conditions;
   b. Protection of the awardee’s research time based on the MRDA timeline proposed;
   c. Maintain communication with the MED Core. Note that in this regard, MRDA recipients will be assigned to a senior MED Core 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.

Stages of the MRDA Review Process
i. Administrative review of the application for completeness and consistency with the funding mechanism (MED Core Director’s Office)
ii. Review and ranking of the submitted information including review of the mentoring components and the scientific merit of the proposal (MED Core Mentoring Committee).
iii. Final approval of ranked applications for funding (ACCEL Executive Committee).

Mentoring Component Review Criteria
i. The sponsoring mentor’s level of experience and expertise to guide the MRDA Scholar in preparing a highly competitive grant submission of the type identified.
ii. The inclusion of additional mentors to augment the role of the sponsoring mentor as needed.
iii. The thoughtfulness and thoroughness of the mentoring plan and its potential to support the MRDA Scholar in the activities proposed for the MRDA period.
iv. The strength of the IDP provided.

Merit Review Criteria
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. Areas of high importance include:
   a. Rehabilitation
   b. Cancer
   c. Cardiovascular Diseases
   d. Stroke
   e. Obesity
   f. Women’s Health
   g. Infant Mortality
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.
vi. Priority will be given to those who have not previously been a recipient of an MRDA.
## MRDA Submission and Review Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 31, 2015</td>
<td>Email Letter of Intent with attachments to <a href="mailto:Erin.Riegel@nemours.org">Erin.Riegel@nemours.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 10, 2015</td>
<td>Proposals are due for MED Core Director review- if proposal is complete and in line with funding source, it will be sent to Mentoring Team for review. If a second submission is required, the MED Core office will contact the applicant and Sponsoring Mentor with details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 11, 2015</td>
<td>Updated proposals are due for Mentoring Team review</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 12, 2015</td>
<td>Awardees will be announced and admitted to the MRDA program</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 1, 2015</td>
<td>MRDA Scholars are eligible to start</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 12, 2015</td>
<td>Mandatory orientation for MRDA Scholars</td>
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<tr>
<td>January, 2016 (specific date to be announced)</td>
<td>Start of six session grant preparation class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1, 2016</td>
<td>Final date to start an MRDA</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 31, 2016</td>
<td>Work on MRDAs at UD must be completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 31, 2016</td>
<td>Work on all MRDAs must be completed</td>
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**Comments or Questions** about the MRDA program? Contact the MED Core Adminstrative Coordinator, Erin Riegel ([Erin.Riegel@nemours.org](mailto:Erin.Riegel@nemours.org)).

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