

Massachusetts Neuroscience Consortium

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) ROUND 2

SUMMARY

Title: Massachusetts Neuroscience Consortium Program in Translational Neuroscience

Objective: Solicit applications from academic and research organizations interested in identifying and validating targets for neurodegenerative and neuroinflammatory diseases (such as ALS, AD, Huntington's, MS, PD), neuropathic pain and treatment-resistant depression. Proposed research must be translational (rather than exploratory) and anchored in recognized human disease genetics and pathophysiology, or within pathways of known relevance to human disease.

Issued By: The Massachusetts Life Sciences Center (MLSC) on behalf of the Massachusetts Neuroscience Consortium, **April 2, 2014**

Pre-Proposal Submissions (2 pages): must be received by Noon ET on **May 15, 2014**

Full Proposal Submissions (by invitation only): must be received by Noon ET on **July 25, 2014**

Awards will be announced by MLSC September 2014 for a funding start of October 2014.

Eligibility: Researchers based at any non-profit organization with operations in Massachusetts are eligible to apply as long as they meet the requirements below. Whereas each applicant may submit only one application (as PI or Co-investigator), there is no limit to the number of applications that may be submitted from any one institution. It is acceptable but not necessary for organizations to collaborate on joint proposals.

Participating Members:



Managed By:



BACKGROUND

Brain diseases are among the leading causes of disease burden in the US and worldwide and there is an urgent need for better prevention and treatment. There is a strong rationale for pharmaceutical companies to work more closely with academic researchers, who have historically been at the forefront of scientific discovery. There is an equally compelling case for the same companies to expand the precompetitive workspace and collectively address shared challenges, thereby creating efficiencies and reducing redundancies. Patients, families and society at large will be the ultimate beneficiaries of this program.

The **Massachusetts Neuroscience Consortium** (Consortium) is designed to accelerate pre-clinical research available to the pharmaceutical industry, introduce academic researchers to the challenges of targeted research, and facilitate industry-academic partnerships. The Consortium is comprised of pharmaceutical companies that recognize the value of leveraging the rich Massachusetts environment in the field of neuroscience. Through engagement with researchers working on CNS diseases, Consortium Members are seeking an opportunity to advance our collective understanding and treatment of such diseases.

It is anticipated that this structure and collaborative approach to the award will benefit both the awardee and the Consortium members. Awardees will be exposed to new approaches for making scientific discoveries more applicable to the invention of new and better treatments for diseases as they work in a collaborative team with members of the Consortium. Consortium members will benefit from early and collaborative access to top academic and research labs and expertise.

Biogen Idec, EMD Serono, Janssen Research and Development, Merck, and Sunovion (Members) have pooled their resources to fund the identification and validation of novel targets for the symptomatic treatment and modification of chronic and debilitating neurodegenerative and neuroinflammatory diseases (such as ALS, AD, Huntington's, MS, PD), neuropathic pain and treatment-resistant depression. Each of the Consortium Members has contributed for a total available amount of project funding of \$1,250,000. All funding decisions will be made by Consortium Members.

The Massachusetts Life Sciences Center (Center), a quasi-public agency of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, is responsible for administering this competitive solicitation on behalf of the Consortium. The Center is tasked with implementing the Massachusetts Life Sciences Act, a 10-year, \$1 billion initiative that was signed into law in June of 2008. The Center's mission is to create jobs in the life sciences and support vital scientific research that will improve the human condition. This work includes making financial investments in public and private institutions that are advancing life sciences research, development and commercialization as well as building ties among sectors of the Massachusetts life sciences community.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Scope of RFP: The Consortium will review proposals that aim to deliver key new target identification and/or validation results directed at the diseases of interest. The primary areas of interest are neurodegenerative and neuroinflammatory diseases (such as ALS, AD, Huntington's, MS, PD), neuropathic pain and treatment-resistant depression. All proposals must be anchored in recognized human disease genetics and pathophysiology, or within pathways of known relevance to human disease, and should be translational, rather than exploratory. Examples of such proposals include, but are not limited to, research that:

- Confirms or refutes the involvement of a particular pathway or mechanism in human disease.
- Identifies a new molecular target, strengthens the case for a previously proposed target, or substantially rules out a previously suspected target;
- Establishes new and improved animal models of human disease in the identified focus areas, with established face and/or construct validity;
- Develops a method for manipulating or measuring a pathway of known human pathological relevance;
- Identifies or validates a biomarker than can be used for drug discovery and/or development.

The Consortium is not interested in proposals that propose to conduct basic science; build technology platforms; or develop animal models of unknown relevance to human disease. In addition, research related to medical devices, diagnostics, personalized medicine, behavioral interventions or other therapeutic approaches that fall outside the core research areas will not be considered. This RFP is intended to leverage the existing resources, skills, and interests within academic and research laboratories. It is not intended as a mechanism to recruit new research personnel, launch major new research directions, cover general operating or lab infrastructure costs, provide bridging funds, or support major equipment purchases.

Milestone-Driven Projects: Unlike most standard NIH grants, funded projects will be unambiguously milestone-driven, with checkpoints to guide the research, and clearly defined timeframes for achieving deliverables (generally within 6 – 24 months). A project manager from one of the Consortium Members will be assigned to each project to help guide the work, provide access to additional resources if needed (expertise, reagents, model systems, advanced equipment, etc.), and serve as the contact between the academic team and the Consortium.

Budget: Awards up to \$250,000 (including overhead costs) will be made. Funds may be used for personnel, consumables, essential equipment, CRO support, subcontracts to collaborators, and other purposes directly attributable to the scientific aims of the project. We anticipate making 4-6 awards.

Application Process: This is a two-part application process. Part 1 consists of a 2-page pre-proposal to be used as an initial screen. A more detailed full proposal will be by invitation only.

The review process will be managed by the Center on behalf of Consortium Members, via an electronic portal. Applications will only be accepted electronically via the Center's web site, www.masslifesciences.com/program/neurosci. The Center recommends that applicants carefully follow instructions and prepare complete, clear, and concise applications. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that his/her application is complete, meets the requirements of the RFP and is properly and timely submitted to the Center.

Pre-proposals and full proposals will be reviewed by representatives of the Member companies. Final funding decisions will be made by the Consortium Members.

Eligibility: Any investigator from a non-profit organization located in Massachusetts is eligible to apply. We encourage applications from investigators at all eligible Massachusetts institutions. Whereas each applicant may only submit one application (as PI or Co-investigator); there is no limit to the number of applications that may be submitted from any one institution .

PROPOSAL DETAILS

All applicants are required to submit a 2-page pre-proposal consisting of:

- Summary of the proposed project, including its potential relevance to human disease.
- Specific objectives of the research including what questions will be answered if the project is successful.
- Proposed timeline for the work with start and end dates (assuming that funding will start October 2014).
- Total budget and a breakdown of major budget lines.

All of the above material must be incorporated into a single 2-page document. Text must be in Arial or Times New Roman font and can be no smaller than 12-point type. Figures, charts, and tables must be readily legible. Single-spacing is allowed. Margins, in all directions, must be at least 0.5 inches.

In addition to the above 2-page document, applicants should upload NIH-style biosketches (maximum of 4 pages per person) for key personnel only, and a list of relevant references, such as published papers, abstracts or patent applications. No other pre-proposal material, such as correspondence, support letters, appendices etc, will be accepted.

Pre-proposals must be submitted via the MLSC portal: [coming soon](#)

Full Proposals will be by invitation only and details of the full proposals will be provided at that time. For planning purposes only, this is likely to include: a more detailed description of the proposed project including background, relevance to human disease, and preliminary data (up to 5 pages); specific aims including what questions will be answered if the project is successful

(1-2 pages); evidence that the applicant has the necessary infrastructure, resources and expertise to complete the work (1 page); a detailed timeline for the work with start and end dates, and milestone steps (1 page); a detailed budget (1 page); biosketches and references. Consortium Members may present applicants with specific questions and issues that they would like addressed in the full proposal.

All proposals will be treated as confidential documents.

Announcement of Awards: Awards will be announced September **2014**. The Consortium anticipates funding additional rounds in subsequent years.

Funding Agreement: Awardees will be required to execute a Funding Agreement between the Center and Awardee's institution that includes a detailed scope, deliverables, and timeline for the work. Awardees must commit to attend at least one full-day workshop style meeting to discuss their ongoing work and that of the other awardees.