# Request for Proposals (RFP)

# Pilot Translational Awards

**OVERVIEW:**
The Melanoma Research Foundation (MRF) is committed to advancing research across the spectrum of melanoma – from prevention through diagnosis, staging, treatment and survivorship. The MRF proactively partners with the NCI, Congress, the Department of Defense and other foundations to develop and collaborate on a broad agenda for melanoma research that takes full advantage of all opportunities, while also sharing challenges. Since 1998, the MRF has provided over $29 million in funding for 410 innovative, high impact, basic, translational, and clinical research projects.

**GRANT OPPORTUNITY OVERVIEW:**
This year, the MRF is offering this Pilot Translational Award opportunity to fund two grants of $50,000 for one-year projects. As this is for a pilot award, preliminary data is not required. Additional details, including grant categories, research tracks, eligibility information, the review process, award administration, application instructions, and deadlines are provided below.

Please direct any questions to research@melanoma.org.

**GRANT CATEGORIES:**

**1) Circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA) Pilot Translational Award:** Projects that incorporate circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA)-based Molecular Residual Disease testing to advance the management of melanoma. One grant of up to $50,000 will be awarded in this category, subject to the results of application review and availability of funds. Research tracks for this category are:

- **A.** Evaluating ctDNA Performance in Early-Stage (I–IIA) Melanoma: Investigations assessing the clinical performance and utility of circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA) in early-stage (I–IIA) melanoma. Eligible proposals may include retrospective analyses of existing datasets, or prospective observational studies designed to explore ctDNA dynamics with baseline and longitudinal ctDNA collection in the peri-operative setting, with outcomes including recurrence patterns. Cohorts may be enriched for high-risk features, such as those identified by gene expression profiling (GEP).
- **B.** ctDNA Monitoring During Targeted Therapy (BRAF/MEKi) in Metastatic Melanoma: Research evaluating the role of circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA) monitoring in patients with BRAF-mutant metastatic melanoma receiving targeted therapy (BRAF ± MEK inhibitors). Eligible studies may include retrospective analyses or prospective observational cohorts designed to correlate ctDNA dynamics with radiographic and clinical response, progression-free survival (PFS), and time-to molecular progression.

**2) Vulvar or Mucosal Melanoma Pilot Translational Award:** Projects that focus on vulvar or mucosal melanoma. While projects on vulvar melanoma are the priority, the MRF will also consider applications focusing more broadly on mucosal melanoma. One grant of up to $50,000 will be awarded in this category, subject to the results of application review and availability of funds.

**TIMELINE AND KEY DATES:**

- Application Submission Deadline: January 14, 2027 at 11:59 PM ET
- Anticipated award period: June 1, 2027 – May 31, 2028.

**ELIGIBILITY & REQUIREMENTS:**

- Applicants may be postdoctoral fellows or hold the title of Instructor, Assistant Professor, or equivalent. All applicants must be within 10 years of receiving their terminal degree (PhD, MD) at the time the grant is awarded.
- Applicants that are postdoctoral fellows or non-tenure track professors are required to have at least one mentor. Mentors do not have to be at the applicant's own institution.
- Applicants must hold a PhD or MD degree or equivalent at the time of the grant submission.
- Applicants may be the PI or co-PI on only one submitted application.
- Applicants are eligible to respond to other MRF RFPs, as long as the research proposals are significantly different.
- American citizenship is not required. However, for all grants, the proposed research must be conducted in a non-profit research organization, a medical institution, or an educational institution located in the United States.
- Applicants must show evidence of strong departmental or institutional support and commitment.
- Applicants and co-PIs may not have an active MRF grant that's still in its base award period (please note: Applicants and co-PIs with an MRF award under a no-cost extension period are eligible to apply).
- Proposed research must not overlap with any other active funding to the PI or Co-PI.
- The use of relevant genetic models and/or human derived tumor samples is highly encouraged but not required.
- Proposed research must comply with all applicable National Institutes of Health (NIH) animal and human welfare guidelines.
- Applicants are encouraged to discuss any eligibility questions with the MRF prior to applying.

**REVIEW PROCESS:**

All proposals will undergo rigorous peer review, where reviewers are selected based on their expertise in diverse areas of basic, translational and clinical melanoma research. Reviewers will focus on five key areas: scientific significance, the investigative team, innovation, approach, and the research environment. Reviewers include members of the MRF's Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC), the Breakthrough Consortium (MRFBC), the Community United for Research and Education of Ocular Melanoma (CURE OM) and the Dermatology Advisory Council (DAC) as well as members of the scientific and clinical melanoma community who are not in conflict with the application. A minimum of two non-conflicted reviewers will review each application. Applications will be scored using the NIH scoring system which ranges from 1 (Excellent) to 9 (Poor). Applications with the highest scores will be assessed by a panel of representatives from the initial review group. The top ranked applications will be recommended for funding, and the number of grants awarded will be based on available funds.

**AWARD ADMINISTRATION AND REPORTING:**

To accept an award, the selected recipient PI and Institution will be required to sign an award agreement accepting the MRF's terms and conditions. Recipients must return the signed agreement to the MRF within 30 days of award notification.

The anticipated award period is June 1, 2027 – May 31, 2028. Funds will be disbursed as one payment on or before June 30, 2027.

A final financial and scientific progress report must be submitted to the MRF no later than 60 days following

the end of the award period. All reporting is done through Proposal Central. Grantees are expected to provide summaries and outcomes on the research, as well as information on presentations, publications, patents, clinical trials, new collaborations, and/or new research funding pursuant to the proposed research.

If the PI needs more time beyond the base award period to complete the proposed research, the MRF may consider a no-cost extension (NCE) request. The award agreement will include the requirements for no-cost extension requests. Such requests generally must be well justified and made before the base award period ends. The MRF will consider NCE requests on a case-by-case basis.

Acknowledgment of support from the MRF must accompany any published report using data or findings from research conducted under an MRF-funded award. Any intellectual property reviewed remains solely within the institution.

**SCIENTIFIC DATA SHARING:**
To expedite melanoma research, the MRF encourages the sharing of data and model organisms/ resources generated from its funded awards whenever possible. The MRF follows the NIH Policies on Scientific Data Sharing as applicable; specifically:

- A Data Management and Sharing Plan using the NIH DMS Plan format must be submitted as part of the MRF grant application. Information on the format page is available via this link.
- It is anticipated that the Data Management and Sharing Plan will include information on the sharing of scientific and genomic data, as well as model organisms/ resources stemming from MRF funded work.
- The MRF requires journal articles resulting from MRF funding be submitted to PubMed Central immediately upon acceptance for publication. We recommend these manuscripts be published in open-access journals or that they be made freely available.
- Costs related to data and specimen sharing (e.g. open-access publication charges, data storage, etc.) can and should be included in the budget of your MRF research grant.

**STEP-BY-STEP APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS:**

The MRF will accept applications until January 14, 2027 at 11:59 PM ET. All submissions, notifications and critiques will be completed entirely online through ProposalCentral (https://proposalcentral.com/).

**Please read the instructions carefully prior to beginning the online grant submission process.**

**Step 1: Title Page**
The project title should not exceed the space provided (75 characters, including spaces).

Any award resulting from this RFP is expected to be a one-year award beginning June 1st, 2027 – May 31st, 2027.

Please specify which grant category you are applying for:
-Circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA) Pilot Translational Award
-Vulvar or Mucosal Melanoma Pilot Translational Award

Please specify if this is a new application or a resubmission. Applications that represent resubmission of

previously proposed studies, in whole or in part, may be submitted for consideration only twice; however, there is no restriction on the timing of the resubmissions. A one-page letter referencing the project title and a summary of changes to the application from the previous submission, plus a one-page response to reviewers' critiques must be uploaded as an attachment during Step 11: Upload Attachments.

*Enable Other Users to Access This Proposal:* You have the option to allow other individuals to access your application. You can choose from three different levels of permission.

**Step 2: Applicant/PI**
Profile information is pre-loaded in this section. You may update your profile information here as well.

**Step 3: Additional Applicant/PI Information**
Additional applicant/PI information is requested in this section. All answers for this step are optional. This information will only be used for internal MRF purposes.

**Step 4: Institution and Contacts**
Institution information and contact information can be updated and/or changed here. Institution Signing Official and Financial Officer contacts are required.

**Step 5: Key Personnel**
Key personnel, other than the applicant, who will provide support to the project will be listed here. The PI and Co-PI must have a NIH Biosketch and Other Support Page, which will be uploaded in the attachments section (see Step 11). The Other Support page must include information on both active and pending support.

**Step 6: Environment**
Please provide a description of your institutional environment in which the research will be conducted. Please describe how this environment will contribute to the probability of success (e.g. institutional support, physical resources including laboratory, office space, and common use facilities contributing to the proposed work, etc.).

**Step 7: Abstracts/Grant Information**

**Scientific Abstract**
In the space provided, include a summary of the proposal that gives a brief description of the objectives, rationale, methods, and expected results. The total length of the summary may not exceed 3,000 characters (including spaces) and should be written in scientific terms.

**Lay Abstract**
In the space provided, include a brief (<3,000 characters, including spaces) summary of the proposal. The lay level abstract needs to be written so that non-scientific audiences can understand the significance, impact, and innovation of the proposed research.

**Summary Quote**
In 100 characters or less, please provide up to two sentences that describe the impact of your research on the melanoma community. As this will be used for promotional purposes, please write this using language that the lay community can understand.

**General Description**
In the space provided, please describe how the research findings may lend themselves to larger,

multicenter grant proposals (3,000 characters max including spaces).

**Alignment with Grant Category**
In the space provided, please describe how your proposed research aligns with the grant category you are applying to.

**Keywords**
Please select up to six appropriate keywords (from the list provided) that characterize the proposed research project.

*If the project is awarded, portions of the abstracts will be used in the MRF's various publications, press releases, fundraisers, and educational events.*

**Category**
Please make one selection for each category that best describes your research proposal.

**Step 8: Budget Period Detail**
The award will be made for a one-year period. Please fill out the budget information using the form in this section. Please note that for **all grants**, only **direct** costs are allowed.

**Personnel Costs**

- Cost of living adjustments for personnel or non-personnel costs are not allowed.
- When calculating salaries, please use actual costs – not the salary allowed by the NIH salary cap. The salary and fringe benefits included in the budget is calculated based on total of salary and fringe benefits multiplied by the % effort. Salary distribution of supporting personnel is up to the discretion of the PI.
- No more than 25% of the grant should go towards the salaries plus fringe benefits of the PI or co-PI.

**Non-Personnel Costs**

- All budgeted expenses such as consumable supplies, animal costs, service fees and consultant fees must be itemized.
- Requests for major equipment will be closely scrutinized, should be carefully justified, and should not exceed 15% of the total budget.
- Indirect institutional costs are not allowed.
- Allowable travel expenses for meetings and research purposes – including international meetings – are capped at $2,000 per project year.

As a reminder, the amount of the budget for this award should not exceed $50,000 for the one-year award period.

**Step 9: Budget Summary**
This is a summary of the Budget Period Detail. Please give a brief justification for each budget item here.

**Step 10: Organization Assurances**
Information regarding human subjects, vertebrate animals, and/or recombinant DNA will be entered here (if relevant). If an application has just been submitted, please note that as well.

**Step 11: Upload Attachments**
All attachments must be in PDF form. Uploaded documents should fall under one of the following descriptions:

**Letter of Support** – A letter of support from your institution is required. This letter should be from the department chair or other leader at the institution with direct knowledge of the applicant's value to the department and institution. Additional letters of support from other faculty members or individuals familiar with the applicant's background or research are allowed.

**Biosketch and Other Support –** A Biosketch and Other Support must be uploaded for the PI and Co-PI(s) using the NIH Common Forms for Biographical Sketch and Current and Pending (Other) Support. The Other Support page must include information about all types of active and pending research support (including costs and percent effort).

**Data Management and Sharing Plan**- Applicants must upload a Data Management and Sharing Plan using the NIH DMS Plan format.

**Resubmission Information** - If the application is a resubmission of a previously proposed study, a summary of changes to the application from the previous submission (up to 1-page in length), and responses to reviewers' comments (up to 1-page in length) must be uploaded here.

**Research Plan**
The research plan is limited to **2 pages, Arial font, at least 11pt font with ½ inch margins.** Single line spacing is acceptable. The text of the Research Plan should contain sufficient information for the review committee to evaluate it and should cover:

1. Specific Aims
2. Background, rationale and significance.
3. Preliminary Data: not required, but can be included if available.
4. Experimental design and procedures
5. References (References ARE NOT counted in the page limit)

**Step 12: Validate**
Click the 'Validate' button here to check for any missing required information or files. All missing required information will be listed on the screen. Please correct any missing information before proceeding to the next step.

**Step 13: Signature Page(s)**
You may print the signature page(s) after you have completed all the proposal sections. Signatures from the applicant and Signing Official are required.

**Final Step: Submit**
Submit your application. You will be unable to submit if you have not provided all the required information. We encourage you to submit your application as early as possible so that we can assist you with any issues that may arise. **The deadline is January 14, 2027 at 11:59 PM ET.**

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

**How do I apply for a grant?**
The grant application will be available ONLY during the time applications are being accepted. During that time, you can apply online at http://proposalcentral.altum.com/.

**Do I need to be a U.S. citizen?**
No. However, the proposed research must be conducted in a non-profit research organization, a medical institution or an educational institution located in the United States.

**Am I eligible?**
Please read all eligibility requirements on pages 1 and 2. Should you have questions not answered here, please contact the MRF at research@melanoma.org.

**Will the MRF only accept the new NIH Common Form for Biosketch and Other Support generated through SciENcv, or will the MRF accept the legacy templates of these forms?**
The MRF follows the NIH's format for the Biosketch and Other Support. Therefore, we will only accept the Common Form for Biosketch and Other Support forms generated through SciENcv, which the NIH started implementing on May 8, 2026 for most grant application submissions.

**Can an award be transferred to a new institution?**
A grant can be transferred upon approval by the MRF. For detailed criteria and instructions, please contact the MRF at research@melanoma.org.

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| **Key Personnel** | The PI and other individuals who contribute to the scientific development or execution of a project in a substantive, measurable way, whether or not they receive salaries or compensation under the grant. Typically, these individuals have doctoral or other professional degrees, although individuals at the masters or baccalaureate level may be considered key personnel if their involvement meets this definition. Consultants also may be considered key personnel if they meet this definition. |
| **Principal Investigator (PI)** | This is the grantee responsible for all activity being supported by the grant. He or she is responsible and accountable to the MRF for the proper conduct of the project or activity. |
| **Other Support** | Includes all financial resources, whether Federal, non-Federal, commercial or organizational, available in support of an individual's research endeavors, including, but not limited to, research grants, cooperative agreements, contracts or organizational awards. Other support does not include training awards, start-up funds, prizes or gifts. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Institutional Animal Care & Use Committee (IACUC)** | Established at institutions in accordance with the PHS Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals with broad responsibilities to oversee and evaluate the institutions' animal programs, procedures and facilities. IACUC review and approval is required for all PHS supported activities involving live vertebrate animals prior to funding. |
| **Institutional Review Board (IRB)** | IRBs are set up by research institutions to ensure the protection of rights and welfare of human research subjects participating in research conducted under modifications in or disapprove research protocols based on whether human subjects are adequately protected, as required by federal regulations and local institutional policy. |
| **Clinical Trial** | A biomedical or behavioral research study of human subjects designed to answer specific questions about biomedical or behavioral interventions (drugs, treatments, devices, or new ways of using known drugs, treatments, or devices). Clinical trials are used to determine whether new biomedical or behavioral interventions are safe, efficacious, and effective. Clinical trials of an experimental drug, treatment, device, or intervention may proceed through four phases:<br><br>Phase I: Testing in a small group of people (e.g. 20-80) to determine and evaluate safety (e.g. determines a safe dosage range and identify side effects).<br><br>Phase II: Study in a larger group of people (several hundred) to determine efficacy and further evaluate safety.<br><br>Phase III: Study to determine efficacy in large groups of people (from several hundred to several thousands) by comparing the intervention to other standard or experimental interventions, to monitor adverse effects, and to collect information to allow safe use.<br><br>Phase IV: Study done after the intervention has been marketed. These studies are designed to monitor the effectiveness of the approved intervention in the general population and to collect information about any adverse effects associated with widespread use. |

Visit www.melanoma.org for additional information on the MRF and to learn more about previously funded research. All questions or concerns regarding the MRF's Research Grant Program can be directed to research@melanoma.org.