

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS ABOUT INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

- Q: I am a new assistant professor without any grant support from a national agency. Can I apply to the American Cancer Society National Office for an IRG?
- A: NO! Only the institution may apply. If there is an IRG in effect at your institution, you may apply to the local IRG Committee for support. If you don't know whether your institution holds an American Cancer Society IRG, contact the Society's Extramural Grants Department at 404-329-7558 or grants@cancer.org.
- Q: I am an assistant professor, and my initial nationally competitive research grant was not renewed. Can I apply to my institution for an IRG?
- A: Yes. Individuals whose initial grant was not renewed and who are still at the level of assistant professor may apply for an individual IRG--provided they are within the first six years of their independent faculty (or equivalent) appointment and have not received funds from the IRG before.
- Q: I have an NIH R29 (FIRST) award. Am I eligible for an individual IRG allocation on the same or a different topic?
- A: No. The NIH R29 is a nationally competitive research grant.
- Q: What about personnel grants that are primarily intended for the junior investigator's salary, such as the NIH K series?
- A: As long as the applicant meets all other criteria, holders of personnel awards are eligible to receive seed money from the IRG.
- Q: I have a small grant from the local Division of the American Cancer Society, or a small foundation grant. Am I eligible for an individual IRG award?
- A: As long as the grant is not the result of a national peer-reviewed competition and is for support of a different project, you may still apply for an IRG award.
- Q: I am an assistant professor with an RO1 award, but want to initiate a project in a totally different area. May I apply for an individual IRG Award?
- A: No. The IRG is intended for new investigators without an active (i.e., NIH, NSF, ACS) national competitive research grant, no matter what the topic.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LOCAL IRG COMMITTEE

- Q: Who is on the local IRG Committee?
- A: The local IRG Committee should be composed of representatives from all the health science schools and colleges of the institution. The chair of the Committee is the principal investigator of the IRG.
- Q: How many people should serve on the local IRG Committee?
- A: That depends on the number of applications to be reviewed and the expertise required. All departments with investigators doing cancer research should be represented.

- Q: Should the Committee be composed only of senior researchers?
- A: Preferably not, although the principal investigator of the IRG is usually a senior investigator. Junior researchers who are not eligible to receive an individual award from the IRG because they have funding from a national agency are also recommended.
- Q: How long should a Committee member serve?
- A: We suggest that committee members serve four or five year staggered terms, similar to our National peer review committees.
- Q: The POLICIES state that the local IRG Committee should include representatives from the local Division of the American Cancer Society. Why is this?
- A: The Society wishes to increase awareness among our volunteers and staff about the importance of our Research Program. It is only because of the hard work of the volunteers in soliciting contributions that we are able to award money for research. When staff or volunteers serve on the local IRG Committee, they develop identification with both research and researchers and their understanding of and enthusiasm for research increases. This interaction is a very important criterion for judging the success of renewal applications.
- Q: Where do we find these volunteers?
- A: Each Division has a designated "Research Liaison," who is appointed by the Chief Executive Officer. The Research Liaison's name is available from the IRG Program Director upon request. The Liaison in your Division will work with you to recruit potential members.
- Q: Can you give some other examples of successful Division-institution interactions?
- A. (1) Hosting an annual/biannual dinner for the local ACS staff and volunteers where they can meet and hear presentations from the individual IRG awardees or other ACS grantees.
- (2) Hosting visits of groups of ACS volunteers and staff to the institution to see the labs and investigators on an informal basis.
- (3) Publishing a newsletter featuring a column from the local area ACS office.
- On their part, the Units and Divisions can:
- (1) Invite individual grantees and/or the principal investigator of the IRG to present research updates at local ACS events such as Relay for Life, major donor receptions or Board of Directors meetings; present simulated checks and certificates to individual awardees.
- (2) Participate in the local IRG review panels when asked to do so by the institution.
- (3) Feature ACS grantees in local newsletters or fund-raising brochures.

QUESTIONS ABOUT COMMITTEE OPERATIONS

- Q: How does the local review process occur?
- A: The timing and operations of the review process are determined by the institution, but should follow the guidelines in the POLICIES.
- Q: What is a good way to publicize the availability of funds?

A: Campus-wide publicity via E-mail or letters to all eligible junior faculty, not just to department chairs, is the best way. Notices on bulletin boards and in campus newsletters also work well. One institution put posters and a box of individual application forms at the entrances of all science buildings and received a record number of applications.

Q: Who decides on the amount of the individual awards?

A: Again, this is up to the local committee. Although the Society's guidelines permit up to \$20,000 to be awarded to each investigator, some investigators may not need this much to carry out their project.

Q: What should we do if an individual awardee receives a national competitive grant on the same topic before any of the IRG award is spent?

A: If the Institutional Research Grant is still in effect, the unspent funds may be awarded to the next approved applicant; otherwise, the money must be returned to the Society.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FORMAT OF THE APPLICATION

Q: Why is so much documentation required?

A: The present forms were designed with the advice of the members of the National Peer Review Committee for Institutional Research Grants. The Tables present the relevant information in a clear and consistent fashion, facilitating the evaluation process and enabling comparison of institutions with very diverse characteristics.

Q: How do we determine the number of junior investigators doing cancer research at our institution?

A: One way is to survey department chairs for the number of newly hired faculty and the number of recruitments planned for the next three years.

Q: We have no idea what has happened to our awardees from previous years. What do we do?

A: The requirement for a five-year track record has been in effect since 1989, so five years of documentation should be available for inclusion in all renewal applications. The track record of awardees in obtaining publications and grants is the most important criterion on which renewals are evaluated.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TERMS AND BUDGET

Q: Please explain the American Cancer Society policy on indirect costs for IRGs.

A: The Society wants as much money as possible to be used for the junior investigators' projects. At the December 1993 meeting, the Board of Directors voted to eliminate indirect costs on these awards, beginning with new and renewal grants initiated on or after July 1, 1994.

Q: How does an institution's business office handle IRG accounts?

A: The institution must set up a separate, master account for the block grant. Most institutions then create subaccounts for each individual award. The term of the subaward is usually for one year following the notification date to the individual awardee, not from the start date of the block award. The master account will be empty when all the individual awards have been made. Individual awardees have one year from the time of receipt of their award to spend their allocations, even if this extends past the end date of the entire IRG.

Q: What about awards made to other institutions as part of a consortium agreement?

A: These can usually be handled as subcontracts to the other institution.

Q: When is the final report of expenditures on an IRG due?

A: The final report of expenditures is not due until 15 months after the termination date of the award. For example, if IRG-02-003-01 was in effect from January 1, 2002 to December 31, 2004, the report of expenditures will be due on February 28, 2006.

Q: Our institution didn't make all of its yearly individual awards until April, and the grant year terminates December 31. Can the individual investigators spend their funds after December 31 without violating the Society's policy of not allowing carryover of unexpended funds from one grant period to the next?

A: Yes. Because of the special nature of the IRGs, the Society considers the funds to have been expended once they have been allocated to, but not necessarily spent by, an individual investigator. Therefore, in our IRG-02-003-01 example, it is important to make all of the individual awards by December 31, 2004. Individuals receiving awards in April 2004 will have until April 2005 to spend their money, and a final report of expenditures for grant IRG-02-003-01 will not be due until February 28, 2006.

Q: May unspent funds be carried over from an existing IRG to a new grant?

No, if the institution has received a renewal, IRG-02-111-05, any money from IRG-02-003-01 not allocated to an individual investigator by December 31, 2004, must be returned to the Society and cannot be applied to allocations made after that date. All allocations made from January 1, 2005, through the end of the grant, must come from the IRG-02-111-05 award. If the institution's renewal application is not successful, then, and only then, can an extension in time be granted, if so requested by the institution.

Q: Is an individual eligible for more than one sub-award?

A: Absolutely not! Even if the initial award was for less than \$20,000, an individual grantee cannot receive an additional sub-award.

Q: One of our individual grantees received an award in November, before the grant year ended that December 31. He has had a hard time getting started and has money left over after a year. Can we extend him for an additional year?

A: That is up to the institution. Once the award was made to the individual, the Society considers the funds expended. The institution's IRG committee can decide internally to extend the term of the individual's sub-award, or to return the leftover funds to the Society. Since the report of expenditures on an IRG ending December 30, 2004, will be due February 2006, it will be necessary for the principal investigator of the IRG in this example to request a delay in filing the report of expenditures.

Q: One of our awardees from a previous IRG has left the institution and has money remaining in her account. Can we apply that money to one of the new grant awardees?

A: Only if the grant is still in effect. Otherwise, that money must be returned to the Society.

QUESTIONS ON STUDENT AND SPECIAL INTEREST AWARDS

Q: I am working on a PhD in pathology, a clinical science. Am I eligible for the \$2500 student stipend?

- A: No. Research is the focus of the training for a doctoral degree in pathology. The purpose of the student stipend is to expose students in medical, dental, and other health professional degree programs to the possibilities of a research career.
- Q: The guidelines state that only one student award of \$2500 may be given per year. What about giving two student awards of \$1250 each?
- A: Since the purpose of the student award is to expose students in the health professional sciences to research, the Society would endorse such a proposal, as long as no more than \$2500 per year went to student support.
- Q: How will we ever keep track of the students until their career tracks are established? That may be 10 years!
- A: There are probably many ways of doing this, beginning with informing the student awardee that this will be expected and requesting a permanent (i.e., family address). Interim reports on the status of the student awardees are part of the renewal application. Institutions that are successful in providing this information are more likely to continue being granted funds for student support.
- Q: I am an IRG individual award recipient with a graduate student working in my lab. Can I use part of my \$20,000 allocation to pay this student's tuition or stipend?
- A: Stipend, yes; tuition is not an allowable expense.
- Q: Our institution was approved for a \$2500 student stipend, but no suitable applicant was found. May we use the money to make an additional award to a junior investigator or supplement an award already made?
- A: No, the money must be returned to the Society.
- Q: What is a Special Interest Award and how does the National Peer Review Committee decide who gets one?
- A: A Special Interest Award is a \$20,000 individual award targeted for a project in an area of special interest to the Society, such as psychosocial and behavioral research, health policy or services research, cancer in the poor and underserved, and childhood cancer. Since applications in these areas do not often compete well for limited funds, an institution may request up to \$20,000 to be allocated for a project in one of these areas in addition to the funds requested for other research projects. If the National peer review committee believes that the institution has a good environment for, and a sufficient number of applicants in the special interest area, it will recommend approval of the request for a Special Interest Award. This portion of the award cannot be used for any other purpose. If no suitable applicant is found, the money must be returned to the Society and may not be used to support projects in other disciplines.
- Q: Our institution was not recommended for a Special Interest Award. Does that mean we can't accept applications in those areas?
- A: You may review applications in those areas in competition with applications in all other areas.
- Q: How does the local IRG Committee review the applications for a Special Interest Award?

A: Some institutions set up a separate subcommittee to review applications in the special interest area. The subcommittee is chaired by a voting member of the local IRG Committee, who presents the recommendations of the subcommittee to the full group.

MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS

Q: What are the most common reasons for the disapproval of an IRG application?

A: For new applications, the most common reasons for disapproval or failure to make the cutoff are (1) an apparent bias in the composition of the local IRG Committee and the procedure for the allocation of funds toward one school or department, (2) failure to document an adequate pool size of junior investigators, or (3) insufficient ongoing cancer research at the institution.

For renewals, the most common reasons are (1) lack of productivity of past awardees, (2) inconsistency between application tables, (3) insufficient interaction with the local Division of the American Cancer Society, and (4) giving awards to inappropriate individuals (i.e., fellows or other non-independent investigators, senior investigators, investigators with national grants, etc.).

Q: Whom do I call if I have any more questions?

A: The Program Director for the Institutional Research Grants program is Virginia (Ginger) Krawiec, MPA, 404-329-5734, email: Ginger.Krawiec@cancer.org.