Michele Cleary, PhD
CEO
Health Research Alliance
Members Meeting
March 31, 2020
The Mark Foundation for Cancer Research

About us

• Established in 2017
• Over half of staff are scientists
• Agnostic to cancer type
• Priority is on projects that have difficulty with traditional funding mechanisms
• Projects should have a line of sight to clinic
• Foundation also invests in early stage companies
Portfolio to Date

Funding By Cancer Type

- 1.1% Prostate Cancer
- 1.1% Ovarian Cancer
- 2.1% Lymphoma
- 3.2% Lung Cancer
- 3.2% Colorectal Cancer
- 4.3% Breast Cancer
- 5.3% Pancreatic Cancer
- 6.4% Others
- 8.3% Melanoma
- 8.3% Leukemia
- 9.6% Brain Tumors
- 48.9% All Cancer Types

97 Grants, $85.7 Million Awarded

- 3.2% Clinical
- 3.2% Therapeutic Discovery
- 26.6% Basic Research
- 39.4% Technology
- 27.6% Translational Science

Over 50 Institutions in 6 Countries

- Canada
- Denmark
- France
- Netherlands
- United Kingdom
- United States
Grant Vehicles

**Emerging Leaders**
high risk/high reward projects not covered by early career investigator’s major grants

**ASPIRE (Accelerating Scientific Platforms and Innovative Research)**
for blue sky projects pursued by investigators or teams striving for:
• Phase 1 - proof-of-concept for novel idea with potential for impact
• Phase 2 - further development of high impact ideas that have achieved proof-of-concept

**Endeavor Teams**
highly integrated multi-investigator, multi-disciplinary programs aimed at changing paradigms in cancer prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment and patient care

**Postdoctoral Fellowships**
co-sponsored with foundation partners

**Momentum Fellowships**
nominated by Scientific Advisory Committee members

**Drug Discovery Partnership**
Resources for key activities that advance validated targets into preclinical development

**Therapeutic Innovation Awards**
for novel therapeutic solutions for unmet needs in rare cancers
Mechanisms for Application Submission

Traditional Open Calls for Proposal
Emerging Leader Awards
Endeavor Teams (coming soon)
Drug Discovery Partnerships (coming soon)

Direct Invitation
ASPIRE Awards – Concept letters invited after meeting with scientists during site visits

Hybrid
ASPIRE Awards – RFP is open to attendees of a theme-oriented workshop

Co-funding
Various methods of co-funding with other organizations
Developing an RFA

Considerations

• Eligibility
• Submission window
• RFP language
• Target number of applications to be reviewed
• Review structure
• Conflicts with conferences or other grant programs
• Marketing strategies
Mechanisms for RFA Marketing

Marketing streams

• Email blasts
• Social media
• Network
• Site visits
• Publish in free listings
• Paid advertising in scientific journals or newsletters
Lessons Learned

- Traditional open calls for proposals work best when there is a common theme or thread among all potential applications.
- Innovation happens on an ongoing basis, not just once a year
- Ideas can often be articulated better when discussed face to face than on the written page
- There is value in iterating with applicants who have great ideas that need a bit more focus.
- Diversity across applicants most likely needs proactive management

- Meeting scientists and visiting sites is a valuable way to build rapport and shape great projects, however:
  - Requires significant bandwidth and appropriate expertise
  - Doesn’t work during a pandemic
Thank you!