

APPENDIX A: ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS ABOUT PILOT PROJECT GRANTS

- 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 peer reviewed 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: 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 pilot project money from the IRG. [However, this does not apply to investigators with the K99/R00. These individuals already are receiving funding to help support an application for an independent research grant. Thus, an IRG pilot project grant would be more beneficial if awarded to an applicant who has no external support.](#)
- Q: I have a small grant from a local foundation. 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.
- Q: Is an individual eligible for more than one pilot project grant?
- A: An individual grantee may receive a second year of funding for the same pilot project only. The award is contingent upon the local IRG committee's review and approval of a progress report. An individual may NOT receive a second grant to initiate a different pilot project.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LOCAL IRG REVIEW COMMITTEE

- Q: Who is on the local IRG Review Committee?
- A: The local IRG Review 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 Review Committee?
A: That depends on the number of applications to be reviewed and the expertise required. A broad representation from departments with investigators doing cancer research should be included.
- 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 pilot project grants from the IRG because they have funding from a national agency are also recommended. Ideally, former IRG recipients will also become Committee members.
- 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 INSTRUCTIONS state that the local IRG Review Committee should include representatives from the local 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 Review 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: How do we identify these ACS representatives?
A: If you do not know your contact in the local American Cancer Society office, the IRG Program Director, Virginia Krawiec, can obtain the name of a contact for you.
- Q: Can you give some other examples of successful Division-institution interactions?
A:
 - 1) Hosting an event for the local ACS staff and volunteers where they can meet and hear presentations from the individual IRG awardees or other ACS grantees.
 - 2) Arranging visits of groups of ACS volunteers and staff to the institution to see the labs and investigators on an informal basis.
 - 3) Collaborating on advocacy efforts through the ACS Cancer Action Network.
 - 4) Collaborate on cancer control initiatives such as “80% by 2018” (National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable initiative to increase colorectal cancer screening)

On their part, local ACS staff 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 certificates to recipients of the pilot project grants.
- 2) Participate in the local IRG Review Committee when asked to do so by the institution.
- 3) Engage ACS grantees in ACS CAN advocacy efforts or other ACS initiatives.

QUESTIONS ABOUT COMMITTEE OPERATIONS

- Q: How does the pilot project grant 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: What should we do if the recipient of a pilot project grant 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. Another approach is to request letters of intent from all prospective beginning investigators in the institution to assess their numbers and level of interest in applying for a pilot project grant.
- 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 beginning investigators' projects. At the December 1993 meeting, the Board of Directors voted to eliminate indirect costs for the IRGs, 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 grant to the institution. Most institutions then create subaccounts for each individual pilot project grant. The term of the

pilot project grant is usually for one year following the notification date to the individual, not from the start date of the institution's IRG. The master account will be empty when all the pilot project grants have been made. Individuals with pilot project grant 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: Our institution didn't award all of its pilot project grants until April, and the IRG 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, it is important to award all of the pilot project grants by December 31 of the final year of the grant. As an example, IRG-16-003-01 is in effect from January 1, 2016, through December 31, 2018. Individuals receiving pilot project grants in September 2018 will have until August 2019 to spend their money, and a final report of expenditures for grant IRG-16-003-01 will not be due until March 31, 2020.

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

A: No, if the institution has received a renewal, IRG-16-111-04, any money from IRG-13-003-01 not allocated as pilot project grants by December 31, 2018, must be returned to the Society and cannot be applied to allocations made after that date. All allocations made from January 1, 2019, through the end of the grant, must come from the IRG-13-003-01 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: One of our individual grantees received a pilot project grant 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 local IRG review committee. Once the pilot project grant was awarded to the individual, the Society considers the funds expended. The committee can decide internally to extend the term of the individual's pilot project grant, or to return the leftover funds to the Society. Since the report of expenditures on an IRG ending December 31, 2018, will be due March 2020, it might 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 pilot project grant applicants?

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

- Q: I am an IRG pilot project grant recipient with a graduate student working in my lab. Can I use part of my \$30,000 allocation to pay this student's tuition or stipend?
- A: Stipend, yes; direct payment of tuition is not an allowable expense.

QUESTIONS ON SPECIAL INTEREST AWARDS

- 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 \$30,000 pilot project grant targeted for a project in the area of overall cancer control, such as population science or behavioral research or one of the following specific areas of special interest to the Society: cancer health equity, childhood cancer, palliative care, and nutrition and physical activity and cancer. Since applications in these areas may not compete well for limited funds, an institution may request up to \$30,000 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 cannot 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) [inaccuracy of and](#) inconsistency between application tables, (3) insufficient interaction with the local Division of the American Cancer Society, and (4) giving pilot project grants to inappropriate individuals (i.e., fellows or other non-independent investigators, senior investigators, investigators with national grants, etc.).