Guidance for Internal Grant-making Programs at CHOP

Numerous internal grant programs have been established at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. These differ from externally sponsored projects in that they are funded using CHOP's own internal funds, whether derived from endowments, gifts, department or division funds, or other internal sources. The range of internal grant competitions is diverse and goals may include helping young investigators get started, supporting pilot projects to generate data for external funding, stimulating research innovation in a particular scientific area, establishing key research and patient care programs, providing "bridge" funding between periods of external funding, or a combination of these.

PURPOSE OF GUIDANCE

The number of internal grant programs has proliferated in recent years. They are developed and administered by a wide range of groups and individuals throughout the Research Institute. This guidance is intended to provide a set of recommendations and best practices for establishing and administering internal grant programs so there is clarity and, to the extent possible, consistency for applicants, those running the competitions, central administrators, and all other stakeholders. At some point, most of these grant programs require the involvement of Pre- and Post-Award Research Administration, Research Business Operations, and Financial Controls. As the number of such programs has increased, so has the administrative burden on these groups. As there are rarely if ever indirect costs allowed, it is important to provide clear and consistent information to these groups to help streamline their work in establishing these awards in CHOP's grant and financial systems.

APPLICABILITY

This guidance applies to all research grant programs funded by internal CHOP funds and requiring a formal application and a competitive selection process.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS FOR INTERNAL GRANTS

There are many elements that should be considered when establishing a program that will award and oversee internal grants. The circumstances and goals of each program will inform the overall program structure. Following are some of the important considerations and elements that can help guide the creation and operation of an internal grant making program. They are divided into three sections: establishing a program, the application process, and the award and post-award process.

Establishing an Internal Grant Program
The following elements should be considered when establishing, reviewing, or updating an internal grant program.

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- **Goal of the program**- In using CHOP funds, it is important for an internal grant competition to have a clear purpose that will contribute to the advancement of research and patient care at CHOP. Further, will the purpose for your program be unique? If there is significant overlap in purpose and audience with another existing program, does it make sense to start another one? Once established, what is your plan to assess the impact of your grant program? Will the data you need exist, and how will you collect it? How often will reviews be conducted?

- **Application criteria and eligibility**- Consider who will be eligible to apply to your competition. There are many different categories of scientific personnel at CHOP who may be interested in applying for grants, so consider the details of who you are willing to fund. In addition, there should be specific criteria by which applications will be assessed for funding. Both of these should be documented.

- **Application process**- What will the application process look like? Will it require a detailed, full application? Or perhaps multi-step, with a letter of interest followed by a full application. What materials will be required? When making this determination, you should consider the overall burden of researchers as well as what you are willing to ask of reviewers. Will any approvals be required of applicants? What will be the timelines? Please try to avoid having deadlines on or near cyclical NIH deadlines if possible.

- **Review process**- Programs should establish a fair and objective review process, with awards made based on the published application criteria. Decide how the applications will be assessed. Will a new or existing committee review them, or will ad hoc reviewers be recruited based on the applications themselves? Will reviews be simple or detailed? Will some form of the reviews be available to applicants?

The Application Process
The following elements should be considered when developing the application guidelines for an internal grant program.

- **Call for applications**- Each program should have a detailed, written call for applications. It should describe the background and purpose of the program, eligibility, required application materials, start date and duration, budget parameters, how to submit, and the review process. Programs should be well-publicized using available channels, including announcements through Research Creative Services. In addition, news of opportunities should be provided to the Office of Faculty Development (ofd@chop.edu), which maintains and disseminates information on funding programs.

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- **Use of funds**- Provide guidelines on eligible uses of funds for the grant. Particular consideration should be given to outgoing subawards to other institutions. Since the primary purpose of using CHOP funds for internal grant programs is to advance CHOP research, you should consider whether to allow sending some of these funds elsewhere. When subawards are allowed, no indirect costs should be provided to the subawardee as internal funds do not allow for indirect costs.

- **Application submission**- Describe how the applications should be submitted. CHOP's proposal and award tracking system, eSPA, can be used to collect internal grant applications. Many programs do not require use of eSPA for applications, only for account setup for awarded applications. The call for applications should clearly specify whether all applications need to be entered in eSPA.

Award and Post-Award Processes

The award letter should clearly specify key terms of an award, and processes should be developed for questions that can arise on awarded grants.

- **Award letter**- While it is convenient to distribute award notices by email, the award terms should be contained in a discrete document, preferably a PDF, rather than in the body of an email. This will facilitate subsequent administrative processes. The letter should include start and end dates, award amount, any reporting requirements or other obligations, and how the funds will be disbursed or accessed. Most internal grants require establishing an account number in Workday by setting up a Funding Proposal record in eSPA. To help ensure expeditious setup through Pre- and Post-Award Research Administration, provide as much detail as possible on this step.

- **Re-budgeting**- Determine if your program will allow grantees to rebudget funds from their proposed budgets, and if so whether there are any thresholds or required approvals.

- **No-cost Extensions, Carryovers**- Many projects encounter delays in spending, scientific progress, or both. Determine whether your program will allow carryovers (if multi-year) and no-cost extensions (NCEs). Decide what information will be required and how the determination will be made. Keep in mind that some internal funds (for example, endowment-derived) may only be used within a fiscal year and carryover and NCEs are not allowed. If this is the case, awardees should be informed in the award letter.

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ELEMENTS OF A CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Required

- Sponsoring entity
- Name and purpose of program
- Eligibility
- Deadline
- Start date and duration of awards
- Maximum funding amount and budget guidelines
- Are subawards to other institutions allowed?
- Application materials
- How to apply/ instructions
- Internal approvals
- Do all applications need to be entered in eSPA?
- Review criteria
- Reporting requirements if awarded
- Contact person

Recommended

- Are no-cost extensions allowed?
- Is re-budgeting allowed?

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ELEMENTS OF AN AWARD NOTICE

Required

- PI Name
- Name of project being funded
- Award amount
- Start date and duration
- How to access funds
- Restrictions on use of funds
- Is account setup through eSPA required?
- Reporting requirements and any other obligations

Recommended

- Are no-cost extensions allowed?
- Is re-budgeting allowed?

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