



HSCI Collaborative Seed Grant Program 2020

FAQ

Seed Grant Program Eligibility

How does the HSCI define PI (Principal Investigator) status?

If you have PI rights at your home institution, then HSCI considers you a PI.

I am a post-doc. Can I still submit a proposal?

Post-docs are subject to the same eligibility requirements that are listed on the RFP. Only individuals who meet all the eligibility criteria may apply for the 2020 HSCI Seed Grant Program.

Can I still apply if I have been declined funding in the past?

Yes.

Can I re-apply with the same proposal?

It is not recommended that you submit a proposal with aims identical or very similar to those found in a previously unfunded submission. If a project does have similar or identical aims, there should be an explanation of what new findings or factors warrant a reconsideration of the proposal. If a proposal is resubmitted, new recommendations, institutional support letters, and signatures are required.

Can I apply if I have been awarded an HSCI seed grant in the past?

Yes, but only if your seed grant has ended and you have not been awarded more than two seed grants previously. However, please note that, all other factors being equal, priority will be given to those applicants who have not received prior HSCI seed grant funding.

Can I submit more than one proposal?

No. An applicant may only be the Principal Investigator on one seed grant application per grant cycle. It is expected that, should you have multiple proposals in mind, you will submit the one that you consider to be the strongest. However, an applicant may be listed as a PI on one proposal and as a co-PI on one other proposal, provided there is no overlap between the work proposed in the two projects.

How many Seed Grants will be awarded this year?

HSCI intends to award up to five seed grants in the 2020 cycle, contingent upon the number and quality of the proposals received, as well as the availability of HSCI funds.

Do I need to have all applicable research approvals (IACUC, IRB, ESCRO, etc.) in place prior to submitting my application?

No. You must indicate on the application form whether or not your work requires approvals, and also whether or not any such approvals have already been received. This information is used only to allow the HSCI to follow up, should your proposal be awarded a seed grant, to insure that the approvals are in place prior to April 1, 2020 (the grant start date). Failure to provide the HSCI with evidence of active approvals prior to April 1 will result in a delay of funding or annulment of award, so applicants are urged to pursue required approvals prior to the HSCI's final decision regarding funding.

Seed Grant Application Formatting

Do my references count against the three-page research proposal limit?

No.

Are figures and tables counted against the three-page research proposal limit?

Yes.

Are there font size and/or margin specifications, or other format requirements?

Please use at least 11-point font with at least 0.5" margins.

Seed Grant Review Process

Who will be reviewing the proposals?

The members of the HSCI Executive Committee will be responsible for reviewing all proposals. Should the number of proposals received make it difficult for the committee to complete its review in a timely manner, it reserves the right to deputize additional members for the purposes of proposal review.

Each application receives multiple reviews. Care is taken to avoid assigning applications to reviewers from the same home institution as the applicant. Reviewers are also asked to recuse themselves from reviews of applications with which they may have a conflict of interest or bias.

Once all committee members have turned in reviews of the proposals which they were assigned, the HSCI Executive Committee will meet to discuss assessments and make the final determination of seed grant recipients.

When will my application be reviewed?

Applications will be reviewed in March 2020, with notification emails regarding funding decisions going out by April 2020.

What are the review criteria?

The HSCI Executive Committee will base their review on the following criteria:

1. Scientific quality

This is the primary criterion for the review committee. Key questions include:

- Is it collaborative in nature?
- Does it have a translational aspect to it?
- Is the research plan well-conceived, original, and important?
- If it research succeeds, what would be the impact?
- Is the investigator well-qualified to do the project?
- Is the preliminary data presented (if any) compelling?
- Does the research have access to necessary resources (facilities, reagents, etc)?
- Can the proposed research be accomplished given the budget? (budget dollar amount pre-set by HSCI)

In addition, reviewers are asked to comment specifically on the following criteria, which are kept distinct from the scientific merit but which are also considered in the final decision on funding:

2. Relevance to the HSCI mission

The mission of HSCI is to bring stem cell-based treatments to patients as quickly as possible. While HSCI continues to be invested in supporting basic science, it is particularly interested in supporting research that is aimed at developing treatments for diseases of aging, the blood, metabolism, and neurological disorders.

The reviewers are asked to comment specifically on how the proposed research connects to this mission.

3. Career development and recruitment/retention

Although HSCI seed grants are not intended to serve as “career development” grants, HSCI hopes that they will encourage talented new investigators to enter the stem cell field. While HSCI would also like to encourage senior investigators from other fields to engage in stem cell research, preference for junior investigators will be given if the situation requires it.

We do this because HSCI wants to make Harvard both an attractive environment for stem cell researchers to develop their careers and be seen as “the place to be.” We need to ensure that Harvard remains competitive for recruitment and retention of the most talented junior faculty. Therefore, although we do not impose a quota, we do hope to fund a number of applications from untenured faculty members. In general, senior investigators have an advantage in writing grant proposals (more writing experience, prior data, etc.), and we want to ensure that strong applications from more junior investigators receive sympathetic consideration. Reviewers are asked to identify applications that may fall into this category and that deserve special consideration.

4. Value for money

HSCI hopes to maximize its impact by supporting projects that are not readily fundable by other means. This could be because a project seems high risk/high payoff, or because the investigator has no prior track record in the field, or, in the case of human ES cells, because the work is not eligible for federal funding.

The reviewers are therefore asked to comment specifically on the following:

- If HSCI does not fund this proposal, is it likely that the applicant could find alternative support for it?
- If the project is successful, how likely is it to leverage other funding in the future (e.g., by producing preliminary data for a larger NIH or foundation grant proposal)?

5. Potential to promote collaboration

One of HSCI’s goals is to cultivate and support a stem cell community among researchers within the Harvard system. We are keen to encourage collaborative projects involving investigators from different disciplines or different institutions, as well as projects that will generate valuable community resources (new cell lines, reagents, datasets, model organisms, etc).

The reviewers are asked to comment specifically on the following questions:

- Does this proposal involve researchers from more than one lab, department and/or institution?
- Does this proposal utilize any of the HSCI-funded core facilities?
- Does this proposal build on other HSCI projects?
- Will the successful outcome of this project result in work that other HSCI programs can use or build on?

6. Regulatory issues

Reviewers are asked to note any special regulatory issues/concerns that need to be addressed before the work can be done. This will not prejudice consideration by the HSCI for funding, but final funding will be contingent on obtaining all necessary regulatory approvals. This will include local IACUC, IRB, and ESCRO approval, and, where necessary, ethical approval by the Harvard Stem Cell Research Committee, plus an assurance that the work will not violate federal restrictions on funding for hESC research.

How do I know if my project should be classified as “translational”?

HSCI Seed grants are intended to foster the discovery phase of translational research. In this phase the following aspects may be addressed:

- Proof of concept related to cellular product as a therapy
- Therapeutic mechanism(s) and pathway(s)
- Selection of appropriate animal model and/or in vitro model.

The next phase of translational research, i.e. preclinical research, involves manufacturing and animal studies, which are designed to fulfill all FDA/Regulatory requirements.

Outcome Notification

When/how will I be contacted?

You will receive an email by April 2020, notifying you of a decision regarding your seed grant proposal.

Can I receive feedback if I am not awarded a Seed Grant?

HSCI will not distribute reviewer comments, but, upon request, will summarize some key points for the benefit of applicants. Email requests may be sent to Robert Perez, Grants Officer, at robert_perez@harvard.edu.