Early Detection Award

Solving the Early Detection and Early-Stage Diagnosis of Recalcitrant Cancers

Cancer mortality rates have been steadily declining in the United States for several decades; however, certain types of cancer remain stubbornly lethal, with the lowest five-year survival rates. Effective screening tests are not available for many of these cancers, resulting in the late detection and diagnosis of advanced-stage malignancies for which there is a lack of available therapies with curative potential. The ability to detect and diagnose aggressive precursor lesions or early-stage cancers will be critical to ensuring long-term survival outcomes. Unfortunately, significant advances in early cancer detection and disease interception remain elusive.

To encourage innovation in research that enables the detection of the deadliest cancers at earlier stages when they can be intercepted or effectively treated, the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR), the Lustgarten Foundation, and The Mark Foundation for Cancer Research announce this Request for Proposals for projects focused on accelerating the development of effective new approaches to the early detection of cancer.

The projects funded through this initiative will advance our understanding of the origins and risk stratification of recalcitrant cancers and accelerate the development of technological and methodological innovation in early cancer detection and interception. It is recognized that significant barriers to the development and clinical implementation of early detection biomarkers exist, partly due to the need for rigorous testing within randomized clinical trials. Ideas that are broadly applicable to early detection across multiple cancer types are encouraged, including the development of novel clinical trial statistical methodologies that aim to assess the validity of early detection biomarkers.

Eligible Cancer Types

- Pancreatic cancer
- Hepatobiliary cancers (hepatocellular carcinoma, gallbladder and bile duct cancers, cholangiocarcinoma)
- Ovarian cancer
- Glioblastoma
- Upper GI cancers (esophageal, gastric cancer)
- Cancers resulting from hereditary cancer predisposition syndromes

Grant Terms

- $2 million (US) total
- Two-year term
- Two to four investigators per project
- Grantees will be required to present the results of their research at a future event or special session to be held by one or more of the funding partners on the topic of early cancer detection.
- The research budget limit includes direct and indirect costs, with indirect costs not exceeding 10% of the direct costs.

Eligibility

- Proposed research projects must be designed to advance the discovery, technical development, and pre-clinical validation of effective approaches and methods for early cancer detection, or the early clinical evaluation of treatment for pre-malignant disease.
- One or more of the cancer types listed above must be the primary focus of the proposal.
- Applicants must have an independent faculty research appointment at a non-profit academic, research, or medical institution. There are no restrictions on citizenship or geography for investigators.
- Investigators may apply as a team of two to four investigators (one Principal Investigator and up to three co-investigators). Teams may comprise investigators from a single institution or multiple institutions. There is no requirement to include a US-based institution as part of the team.
- There is no limit to the number of applications that may be submitted by individuals at any institution.
- Individuals may be a co-investigator on more than one proposal but may only serve as Principal Investigator on one proposal.
- Projects focused on cancer prevention rather than early cancer detection and diagnosis are not in the scope of this RFP.
- Proposed projects must not be supported by overlapping funding sources. Grantees must disclose any potential overlap with other current or pending research funding.
- Teams are encouraged to consider diversity in terms of discipline, seniority, gender, race, ethnicity, and any other parameters that will enhance the team's ability to approach challenging problems from fresh perspectives.
- All funded research projects will be selected without bias to race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, or other legally protected characteristics.

Objectives and Success Criteria

- Applicants should propose an innovative idea that extends beyond incremental improvements to existing technologies. Successful applications should be clearly differentiated from existing methods or technologies and present a strong rationale supporting the proposed approach.
- Proposals involving animal modeling should incorporate plans for additional validation in patients. Similarly, proposals that rely heavily on cell lines and/or organoids should consider validation in more complex models.
- Additional criteria to be considered include scientific innovation, intellectual rigor, feasibility, and overall patient impact.

Key Dates

January 17: Letter of intent portal opens
March 10, 2025: Letter of intent submission deadline
June 17, 2025: Full application deadline
September 15, 2025: Notification of selected grantees
November 1, 2025: Anticipated grant start date

Letter of Intent

- Brief introduction and background
- Specific aims
- Problem statement (describing which aspect of early detection will be the focus of the proposed research and which of the eligible cancer types will be studied)
- Research synopsis (overview of key hypotheses, questions, approaches, and methods)
- Innovation statement (highlights of advantages of the proposed approach over existing methods, and potential impact on the field)
- Cited literature (does not count against the two-page limit)

Full Applications

Following the LOI review phase, selected applicants whose LOIs are deemed most meritorious will receive additional information and guidelines on how to submit full applications for funding consideration.

Upon submission, all full applications will be reviewed and considered by an international group of experts appointed by the American Association for Cancer Research, the Lustgarten Foundation, and The Mark Foundation for Cancer Research. Following all scientific review committee deliberations, successful grantees will be informed of their selection for funding.

How to Apply

The application process will begin with the submission of a letter of intent (LOI) consisting of a 2-page description of the proposed research project. The LOI submission portal will open on January 17th and will close to submissions on March 10, 2025.

APPLY HERE

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