Malignancies affecting the upper gastrointestinal (upper GI) tract are among the most lethal tumor types, contributing to over 1 million deaths worldwide in 2023 from the combined toll of gastric and esophageal cancers. These tumors present formidable challenges in diagnosis, treatment, and outcomes, underscoring the urgent need for innovative approaches to enhance patient care and survival.

The Mark Foundation for Cancer Research, the DeGregorio Family Foundation, and the Torrey Coast Foundation are committed to supporting high-impact research projects that will provide answers to critical scientific questions on the path to making a meaningful difference in the lives of patients affected by these diseases. We are holding a request for proposals through The Mark Foundation’s ASPIRE Award program for projects focused on tumors of the upper GI tract. Proposals should cover topics such as understanding the molecular mechanisms underlying tumor initiation and progression, resistance, and metastasis; identifying novel biomarkers for early detection; and developing innovative treatment strategies including identifying and characterizing novel targets. Proposals should aim to drive disruptive research, with the goal of advancing the field of gastric and esophageal cancer research and ultimately improving patient outcomes.

The application process will begin with a letter of intent stage consisting of a 2-page description of the project. The portal for the letter of intent is currently open, and letters are due on May 27, 2024 at 5pm Eastern Time. Invitations for full applications will be issued in July 2024.

There will be a live webinar describing the application process and award that will take place on May 1st, 2024 at 12 pm Eastern Time, USA. Attendance is optional, and a recording of this will be posted for those unable to attend. Click here to register for the webinar.

To Apply

Click here to access the application and instructions.

Eligibility

- Proposed projects must address gastric or esophageal cancers and focus on one of the following problem areas in the field:
  - Preclinical studies of new pathways, targets, and treatment approaches to improve patient outcomes. These could include the molecular mechanisms of cancer initiation or progression, overcoming resistance, or development of metastases.
  - Novel strategies for early detection and prevention
  - Technology development for studying upper GI cancers
- The following project types are not in scope for the award:
  - Direct funding for clinical trials; for relevant clinical trials that already have funding and approvals in place, an ASPIRE award could be appropriate for correlative analyses of samples from that trial.
Collection of new epidemiological data; previously gathered epidemiological data may be incorporated into proposed projects.
Projects designed to collect pre-clinical support for re-purposing of non-oncology drugs for treatment of upper GI cancers (alone or in combination).

- Applicants must be employed by a non-profit academic institution. Applications will be accepted from both U.S. and non-U.S. entities.
- Researchers are limited to one application as principal investigator but may be co-investigators on other proposals without limitation.
- Principal investigators must be independent researchers at their respective institutions
- We encourage interdisciplinary collaborations and welcome proposals from independent investigators at all career stages, especially those new to the field of upper GI cancers. To facilitate this, preclinical resources (cell lines, organoids, and mouse models) will be made available to researchers who request them (see below for details)

Key Dates

Thursday, April 18th, 2024: Letter of intent portal opens
Wednesday, May 1st, 2024, 12pm-1pm eastern time: Webinar (click here to register)
Tuesday, May 28th, 2024, 5pm eastern time: Letter of intent submission deadline
July 2024: Invitations for full application
January 2025: Anticipated award start dates

Terms of Award

- Applicants may request funding to support a total budget up to $250,000 for a period of up to 12 months.
- The budget and duration requested for the grant must match a realistic estimate of the cost and timeline for the proposed work.
- The budget limit includes both direct and indirect costs, with indirect costs not to exceed 10% of the direct costs.

Concept Letter Guidelines

The Project Concept Letter can be a maximum of 2 pages, including any references, figures, or tables. The PDF must contain the following information:

- Project title
- Brief abstract (less than 200 words)
- Problem statement describing unmet need and opportunity to enable substantial and differentiated impact for cancer research and cancer patients
- Synopsis of research plan, including key feasibility or proof-of-concept question(s) to be answered, methods overview, and list of specific aims
- Statement of innovation

Full applications will be accepted by invitation only, after review of the Project Concept Letter. Additional guidelines will be provided to invited applicants.
Preclinical Resources (Available with MTA)

_Gastric and esophageal (GE) cancer patient-derived organoids:_ Over 60 unique GE cancer patient-derived organoids (PDOs) with clinical annotation and bulk RNA sequencing are available. The GE PDOs span both diffuse and intestinal histologic subtypes and were generated from biopsies of both treatment naïve patients and from patients on treatment.

_Immune competent GE Cancer Mouse Model:_ Genetically engineered mouse models of GE cancer with different drivers, oncogenes and tumor suppressors are available.

ASPIRE Program Overview

The Mark Foundation for Cancer Research ASPIRE Awards are designed to enable innovative approaches to solving high-impact problems in cancer research that tend to fall outside the scope of other funding opportunities. These awards will be used to support high-risk, high-reward projects with research plans designed to answer key feasibility and proof-of-concept questions in an accelerated timeframe, typically one year. Projects that successfully demonstrate feasibility may be selected to apply for additional funding in a second phase to further develop their innovative concepts and increase the speed to impact for cancer patients.

Stay Informed
Sign up for periodic news updates, announcements, newsletters, updates, and event invitations.

First Name*

Last Name*

Your Email*

Affiliation

Submit

ABOUT US

Our Mission
Our Team