UMCCTS SPARK Program

The **UMass Center for Clinical and Translational Science SPARK (Small Pilot and Research Knowledge) Program** provides pilot funding for hypothesis-driven clinical and translational research, as well as access to the Clinical Research Center and other UMCCTS cores. The UMCCTS's priorities are to support studies that impact clinical care and research methodologies, support students and trainees, and provide access to funds to generate pilot and preliminary data for external grant submissions.

UMCCTS Resource Requests may be submitted for the following support:
1. Pilot funding for clinical and translational hypothesis driven projects that have application to human health.
2. Access to the UMCCTS-supported research cores, such as the Clinical Research Center, Conquering Diseases Biorepository and Volunteer Recruitment Service, Quantitative Methods Core, Investigational Pharmacy, Bioinformatics Core, and Small Molecule Screening Core, for Industry, NIH, and foundation funded studies. **Special emphasis will be given** for use of the Conquering Diseases Biorepository and Volunteer Recruitment Service.
3. **Special emphasis will be given** for informatics support to create patient cohorts/registries or to contribute to national registries that enable outcomes research projects.
4. **Special emphasis will be given** to data driven projects that involve analysis/mining of data in the UMMS Data Lake, or that leverages the new informatics tools with an overall objective of improving delivery of health care, precision medicine, improved access to clinical trials, patient recruitment, and quality of life of patients.

Who is Eligible?
UMass Medical School investigators, including students, residents, and fellows are eligible for funding. Collaborations with external collaborators, including those from other UMass campuses, are encouraged. Students and fellows may be designated as the PI on UMCCTS resource requests and should list the mentor on the application and upload a letter of support. Only one PI may be designated on a request.

What are the Review Criteria?
UMCCTS SPARK pilot studies must meet ALL of the following criteria:
- Clinical and translational research: ties findings to diagnosis or treatment of human disease and/or improves health
- Hypothesis driven with specific research question
- Pilot sized: smallest number of subjects or samples necessary to obtain preliminary data

Scientific Review Criteria
1. Significance
2. Approach
3. Innovation
4. Investigators
5. Environment
6. Projected impact of the work, including:
   - How will the proposed study lead to work that may change paradigms, improve health care delivery, and/or enhance community or public health?
   - Will the study advance the development of preliminary data for a significant external grant submission, e.g. NIH RO1, PO1, K23, R21, etc?
   - Will the study promote the training/career of a young investigator, particularly those supported by UMCCTS K or T awards?

Allowable Resources

UMCCTS awards specific resources for research studies rather than transferring funds. The following resources may be requested:

Allowable Resources:
- UMCCTS Core services
- Biostatistical consultations
- Clinical lab services
- Clinical Research Center facilities and nursing care
- Participant recruitment support
- Clinical Research Center Support for K and T awardees
- Informatics, including bioinformatics and biomedical informatics

Resources NOT Available Through UMCCTS Funding:
- Animal purchase, housing and food
- Salary support. This includes physician fees, 3rd party examiners, and non-mandatory clinical read fees
- PI and study team travel for meetings
- Expert speaker
- Publication fees
- Computer purchase (some examples include: iPads, iPods, laptops, desktop computers, servers, etc.)
- Petty cash (subject participation payments allowable with special consideration as gift cards and checks to participant)
- Professional development and training fees
- General lab supplies not specific to study or normally stored in lab and PI lab equipment upkeep
- Research supplies or analysis purchased from international companies. Shipping must originate from the United States
- Services previously rendered

Resources with Special Considerations:
- Software – only allowed if specialized and project specific/core infrastructure enhancement related
- Travel – participant related and required for study conduct
- Food – related to subject participation
- Sample analyses conducted in UMMS research space - if the sample analysis is not performed at UMMS, the review committee will consider external analysis within the United States
- International studies/collaborations. We can only provide support for research conducted domestically

What Do I Need To Apply?

Please email your application as a single document (Word or PDF) to: ccts@umassmed.edu
Applications are accepted on a rolling basis.

Applicants should include the following:
- Cover page with the name of the PI, other key personnel, contact information, title of project, and an executive summary that includes a clear and concise hypothesis/research question for this project and a brief scientific summary of the problem this study will address. (1 page)
- Research proposal – be sure to describe departmental support (funding or otherwise) and resource(s) that are requested (1 page)
- Budget (use PHS 398 form page 4 as a template, 1 page) and budget justification (1 page)
- Biosketch of PI (NIH format, 5 pages)
- Mentor letter (if applicable). Students and fellows may be designated as the PI on UMCCTS resource requests and should list the mentor on the application and include a letter of support.

All applicants must be UMCCTS members. Membership is free, easy, and entails completion of an on-line membership form on the UMCCTS website at: https://umassmed.edu/ccts/about/membership/

Oversight and Review Criteria

The SPARK program is overseen and administered by the UMCCTS Scientific Review Committee. The Review Committee will make funding decisions based upon the scientific merit and potential impact of the proposals.

Vouchers (Requests < $2,000)

Requests ≤ $2,000 qualify for administrative review. Vouchers have a 4 month funding period with a one-time extension of 2 months for a total award period of 6 months. A researcher is allowed 1 voucher request in a one year period. This time frame begins from the date of your last voucher approval. Each research project can only have 1 voucher. Since the time to approval is short, you should request a voucher only when you are ready to use the voucher. If no additional information is requested during the review, a funding decision will be emailed in 2-4 working days.

Expedited (Requests > $2,000 but ≤ $10,000)

Requests > $2,000 but ≤ $10,000 qualify for expedited review. Awards have a 4 month funding period with a one-time extension of 2 months for a total award period of 6 months. A researcher is allowed 1 request in a one year period. This time frame begins from the date of your last approval. Each research project can only have 1 expedited award. Additional documents may be required based on resources requested. If no additional information is requested during the course of the review, a funding decision will be emailed within 3 to 4 weeks.

Pre-Review Process

The pre-review process is an evaluation performed by UMCCTS staff to determine an application's suitability for UMCCTS support and as appropriate the following reviews: administration, biostatistics, budgetary, community engagement, core services, and participant safety. This review helps to refine the research proposal to a complete scientific package and permits the review committee to focus on the scientific merit of the study and consider more requests per meeting, therefore expediting the overall review process.

Partial List of CCTS Resources Available for Applicants

More information about these resources can be found at http://www.umassmed.edu/ccts or by contacting Nate Hafer at nathaniel.hafer@umassmed.edu

- Massachusetts Integrated Clinical Academic Research Database (MICARD)
- REDCap (Research Electronic Data Capture)
- Informatics Core
- Quantitative Methods Core
- Regulatory Consultation
- Clinical Research Center
- Investigational Drug Service (Pharmacy)
- Conquering Diseases Biorepository
- Conquering Diseases Volunteer Recruitment Core
- Community Engagement resources and consultation services
- Special Population Resource Center
- Small Molecule Screening Core