

SSMRF MRC Grant program

Guidelines for Applicants by Expression of Interest (EOI)

A. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE MRC GRANTS PROGRAM

What is the Microbiome Research Centre (MRC)?

The MRC will be a multidisciplinary research centre of excellence of national and international significance embedded in St George & Sutherland Clinical School (SGSCS), with newly refurbished physical laboratories located in St George Hospital. This ambitious goal has been accelerated by receipt of a Federal Government Establishment and Start Up Grant of \$4 M. This award was secured late 2016 following a sustained joint initiative by the St George and Sutherland Medical Research Foundation (SSMRF) and our (then) local member Mr Nickolas Varvaris MP.

The MRC will act as a hub of internationally competitive research rallying together multidisciplinary research groups at St George and Sutherland hospitals and the entire UNSW campus with its affiliated clinical schools across Sydney. In addition, the MRC will establish collaborations with research groups and clinical campuses across NSW, other states within Australia and with international groups across the world. The research agenda of the MRC will focus on the role of the microbiome in clinically relevant health problems that affect the Australian population. State of the art science will be employed to answer clinically relevant questions and the translational outcomes will be applied to our population in the first instance though the impact will be global.

What is the Purpose of the MRC Grants Program?

A proportion of the Federal Grant funding (2017 – 2020), has been earmarked for targeted MRC Grants aiming to establish outstanding research collaborations with and within the MRC. The purpose of the MRC Grants Program is to support high quality collaborative research that will facilitate the development of the MRC to enable it to achieve its objective in becoming the leading national centre of excellence focusing on the role of the human microbiome in a wide range of diseases. This will be achieved by establishing outstanding research collaborations that both complement existing strengths and directions of the MRC while paving the way for diversification into a wider range of research initiatives under the aegis of the MRC.

The MRC will target **FIVE broad priority initiatives** aligned with core MRC divisions. These divisions align with existing strengths within our hospitals, as well as with priority research themes identified by both the Australian Government and UNSW:

- 1) Maternal/foetal health
- 2) Cancer
- 3) Critical Care
- 4) The Three I's: Infection, Immunity and Inflammation
- 5) Mental Health/Neuroscience

Specific Objectives of MRC Grants

To strengthen and grow teams of quality researchers, within or closely allied with the MRC, who will:

- Fulfill the MRC's overall objectives
- Align with at least one of the five priority initiatives (see above)
- Enhance the capability of these collaborations with the expectation that they will springboard off these MRC Grants to secure external Category I grant funding to further this work by 2020*.

Applicants will be expected to submit an NHMRC (or equivalent Cat I) Project Grant, preferably in the 2019 grant round.

- Enhance the overall capacity and capability of the MRC to secure a major Program Grant by late 2020*.
- Enhance the quantity and quality of innovative and nationally competitive research at St George & Sutherland Hospitals
- Through their work, assist in achieving the core purpose of the St George & Sutherland Research Foundation; namely to increase the number and strength of vigorous research programs at St George & Sutherland hospitals which will ultimately translate into better health care for our community.

**These dates are based on the Commonwealth Govt stipulation that MRC must reach its specific KPI's no later than Apr 2020.*

B. AMOUNTS AND DURATION OF FUNDING?

The amounts awardable for any one MRC Grant will be contingent upon the quality of the team, the scope of the project, and justification of their budget to achieve the MRCs aims. The maximum award for a MRC Grant in this round will be \$200,000 over 2 years.

C. PROCESS OF APPLICATION

The process will involve an initial submission of an expression of interest (EOI*). The EOI will be limited to a maximum of THREE A4 pages (excluding supportive listing of track record grant history, publications etc). Applicants are encouraged to discuss their plans with the MRC Steering Committee (e.el-omar@unsw.edu.au) or the SSMRF Scientific Advisory Committee (i.cook@unsw.edu.au or m.grimm@unsw.edu.au). It is believed this prior consultation will avoid misdirection of or misunderstandings by applicants and ensure alignment of expectations.

**Prior submission of an EOI serves several important purposes:*

- *Facilitates informal preliminary dialogue among prospective applicants, MRC & SAC to ensure that applicants' plans align with the MRC objectives*
- *Avoids wasting the time of non-contenders and review panels*
- *Avoids the tendency to recycle existing grant applications which makes distinction difficult between existing plans a truly collaborative initiative central to MRC's core objectives*
- *Ensures that applicants mount cogent arguments as to precisely how their proposal aligns with the MRC's core objectives without distracting the review panels with the minutiae of experimental methodology.*

Following review of all **EOIs** by Foundation's Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) and MRC Review Panel, the competitive EOI's will be invited to submit a full application. The review process of the **full applications** will be in THREE steps. 1) Full applications will be reviewed in the first instance by the SSMRF SAC. The SAC will then make recommendations on matters of scientific merit and feasibility to the MRC Review Panel. 2) The MRC Review Panel will first consider SAC recommendations before assigning priorities based on a range of factors including the probability that the proposal will meet the strategic objectives of the MRC. 3) The MRC Review Panel will then make its recommendations to the SSMRF Board for final approval of priorities and budgetary allocation.

D. TIMELINE & KEY DATES

22 June: EOI advertised

20 July: EOI submission deadline

27 July: Completion of review of EOIs & invitations to submit full applications

24 Aug: Full application - submission deadline

7 Sept: Completion of SAC Reviews & recommendations to MRC Review Panel

21 Sept: Completion of MRC Review Panel deliberations & Notification of awards

FORMAT FOR SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI):

1. Project Title:

2. Project Category:

Which of the 5 MRC priority initiatives (see above) does this proposal best fit. (Note that many projects may fall under several of the 5 categories, in which case indicate which category BEST fits with the proposal.

3. The Research Team:

- List the Chief Investigator and include:
 - Academic qualifications
 - Current appointment to St George or Sutherland Hospital
 - Any other (or additional) appointments at other institutions
 - University and other relevant affiliations
 - Contact details (email and mobile phone contact of Chief Investigator)
- List all Co-Investigators and their:
 - Academic qualifications
 - Current appointment at St George or Sutherland Hospital
 - Any other (or additional) appointments at other institutions
 - University and other relevant affiliations
- The Department(s) (and their location) in which the work will be conducted

4. Project Outline:

The body of the EOI should:

- Be no more than THREE A4 pages in length (ie **max 2,000 words**; not including Team details, credentials, affiliations (see above) and track record metrics as well as a brief budget outline (see below)
- Clearly state the background, the significance and the aims of the proposal
- Describe research methodology (include who is doing what and where)
- Argue how the research team's proposal will meet the MRC objectives (above)
- Argue how the team's existing expertise & track record will achieve these objectives

The EOI should NOT be:

- A "recycled" current or proposed project grant application. While such material may be important to components of the proposal, the relevance of such content needs to be argued very clearly in the context of the human microbiome and the MRC's core objectives.
- A detailed description(s) of scientific methodology or techniques. While these are clearly important in the conduct of the research and can of course be referred to, such material should be discussed in a conceptual manner and only in the context of mounting your argument

5. Track Record Metrics

Provide for each of the CI's and for each co-investigator within the team

- Current and past Category I grant support* (past 6 years. ie Jan 2012 - present).
 - Source
 - Principal Investigators
 - Project Title
 - Total awarded; years funded (eg \$800,000; 2013-2015)

(***Only** include Nationally Competitive Grants such as NHMRC, ARC, National Heart Foundation etc. For full list of Category I grants. Category I grants are those listed on the Australian Competitive Grant Register (ACGR) (<http://education.gov.au/australian-competitive-grants-register>). Include a grant if it was funded in part or whole within the years 2012 – 2017)

- Category I grants applied for in 2017 (for funding to commence 2018)
 - Source
 - Principal Investigators
 - Project Title
 - Total requested & years funded (eg \$800,000; 2018-2022)
- Original Peer-Reviewed Publications (past 6 yrs; 2012 - present)
(Do **NOT** include non-peer reviewed material. Do **NOT** include invited reviews nor book chapters, reports, case reports, abstracts, nor conference proceedings. Do **NOT** include works submitted for publication but not yet in press or published).
- Other significant scientific achievements (**Max 600 words**):
You may provide a brief summary of any additional achievements over the last 10yrs which has not been provided already in other sections of this application. This is at the discretion of the applicants but might include: evidence of international recognition in medical research, awards and prizes, other indicators of recognition for academic leadership or achievement.

6. Brief Budget Outline:

Simply provide a break up of the proposed budget and estimated timeline for expenditure. A detailed budget and its justification won't be required unless the applicants are shortlisted for submission of a full application.

7. Possible referral of your application to other potential sources of funding.

From time to time the Foundation seeks external funding from potential corporate or private donors. It proposes that it may from time to time, use the high quality grants fielded by the CBG program to solicit such donor support. IF YOU WISH, and ONLY IF YOU ARE AGREEABLE, do you grant permission for the Foundation to use your application to seek alternative funding from potential corporate or private donors? If you are agreeable, you must make a statement to this effect to "opt into" this process. Referral of applications in such a manner is at the discretion of the Foundation and will only occur if the application is considered to be of very high scientific merit.

ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST (EOI):

EOIs should be submitted electronically in a single document in pdf format to:

Prof Ian Cook, Chair of SAC at: i.cook@unsw.edu.au

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: NO LATER THAN 5PM THURSDAY 20TH JULY, 2017.