

COMPASS Program: Frequently Addressed Questions

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Institutional Eligibility

- 1. My institution does not have its own bachelor's degrees program. Or, my institution has limited or no research infrastructure in regenerative medicine related disciplines. How can we be involved in a COMPASS program?**

There are several different ways your institution may be able to partner with a COMPASS program, depending on the assets and value that can be provided. A few examples include:

- *A research institute or biotechnology company with appropriate laboratory personnel and facilities could host COMPASS scholars for research internships*
- *An institution could share curricula or other resources that would be included in a COMPASS Scholars foundational or elective coursework, or mentored activities*
- *Partnering with a COMPASS program for outreach and recruitment activities*
- *Providing specialized training courses or other activities on site for COMPASS Scholars (for example, a course on GMP, patient engagement activities, community outreach activities)*
- *Providing personnel who can serve as mentors for students, or advisors for the Program Leadership*

- 2. Can community colleges apply for/participate in a COMPASS program? Can community college students be supported through a COMPASS Award?**

Unless a community college has a bachelor's degree program in a STEM discipline, it is not possible for a community college to apply for a COMPASS award as the primary grantee nor directly support students as COMPASS Scholars. However, community and junior colleges may become collaborators within a COMPASS program and receive grant support indirectly through a subcontract. A few examples of ways that community colleges can partner with COMPASS Awardee include:

- *Providing specialized courses or training as part of a COMPASS Scholar's curriculum, including courses that may be taught on site through the community college (e.g., GMP, process development, Quality Control, patient engagement activities, community outreach activities, etc.)*

- *Providing personnel who can serve as mentors for students, or advisors for the Program Leadership*
- *Working with the Diversity and Outreach Coordinator to identify and recruit promising community colleges students and track them directly into a COMPASS program via transfer (i.e., acting as a feeder program/partner)*

3. My institution has a Bridges program. Can the personnel that manage the Bridges program be involved with a COMPASS program as well?

Yes, provided the personnel involved can commit the requisite effort to each program without negatively impacting the other; and as long as the activities performed in each program do not have financial overlap

4. The RFA says that a COMPASS Program must be integrated within a trainee's bachelor's degree program. Can this be multiple relevant bachelor's degree programs (e.g., bioengineering, biology, chemistry, etc.) or does it need to be a single bachelor's degree program?

The trainee should be pursuing a bachelor's degree in a STEM discipline with relevance to regenerative medicine, which may draw from a variety of relevant programs such molecular biology, engineering, computational biology, chemistry, etc.) What defines a COMPASS Scholar is the unique combination of foundational and specialized coursework, ancillary activities and research internships they experience- which is independent of the specific degree program in which they may be enrolled. COMPASS programs are encouraged to leverage unique strength of the institution towards creating a valuable experience for their trainees.

Program Leadership (Director, Mentorship Facilitator, Diversity and Outreach Coordinator)

5. Does the Program Director need to have a PhD or MD?

It is not necessary to hold a PhD or MD to serve as program director (PD). However, the credentials and experience of the PD are important for ensuring a COMPASS program can deliver on its goals, and thus previous experience in managing training programs and/or serving in a similar capacity will be important to demonstrate in the application.

6. Do the Program Director, Mentorship Facilitator, and Diversity and Outreach Coordinator need to be faculty members?

*No, not necessarily. The Program Director must be either an employee of the applicant organization **OR** someone who is authorized by applicant institution to assume this role through a formal contract. Similarly, the program allows for individuals who are outside of the applicant organization to serve in the Mentorship Facilitator and Diversity and Outreach Coordinator roles-*

provide those individuals commit the requisite effort and possess the necessary qualifications to serve the program.

7. Are Co-Program Directors allowed?

Although there may be overlapping responsibilities between the key personnel, CIRM allows only a single individual to be formally named as Program Director, and this individual must commit at least 5% effort in this role. The Program Director will be accountable to CIRM for managing the award and reporting to CIRM.

8. Can the Mentorship Facilitator, Diversity and Outreach Coordinator and Program Director responsibilities roles be assumed by the same person?

Yes, if the minimum effort requirements for all three roles can be met.

9. Can two or more people serve as the Mentorship Facilitator, Diversity and Outreach Coordinator and Program Director?

Only one individual can be named as the Program Director. However, it is possible for one or more individuals to combine their efforts to fulfil the role of Mentorship Facilitator or Diversity and Outreach Coordinator, if the combined effort meets the minimum requirement. Please note that Reviewers may take into consideration the feasibility of having these roles dispersed amongst multiple individuals.

Mentors and Research Advisors

10. Who can serve as mentors in my COMPASS program, and what are their responsibilities?

For the purposes of the COMPASS program, “mentor” is applied generally to individuals who will work directly with students throughout their time as COMPASS scholars, individually or in groups, to guide their personal and professional development. The terms “internship mentor” or “research advisor” are applied specifically to the subset of mentors who will supervise students during the laboratory research internship period of their appointment. For further details, see below.

***Mentors** can be any individual with appropriate qualifications to support trainees throughout their time as COMPASS Scholars, by providing support, advice, and guidance. CIRM encourages programs to identify individuals from outside their academic institutions, for example, employees of biotechnology companies, entrepreneurs, teachers, community organizers, etc., that can serve as mentors and provide perspectives that are not present within the institutional staff, with awareness of diverse career paths that build off a foundation of knowledge and skills related to regenerative medicine related science.*

***Research advisors/Internship mentors** should be principal investigators or senior laboratory personnel (postdoctoral fellows, clinical fellows, senior graduate students, etc.) with the appropriate level of scientific expertise and experience to supervise undergraduate students and*

help them develop and conduct an individual research project. Any research advisor that is not the principal investigator, i.e., not responsible for the overall conduct of the host laboratory, must have the permission and support of the responsible individual in order to be allowed to serve as mentor.

Trainee Selection and Recruitment

11. Are we limited to recruiting students who are “undecided”, or is it ok include to trainees who have expressed interest in PhD programs or medical school?

The COMPASS program is designed to support students who are open to a variety of career possibilities in the regenerative medicine field and should provide opportunities for them to learn about and explore different ways their research skills may be applied in the workforce, whether that means the private sector, academia, or furthering their education after graduation. The program is not intended to exclude those who may aspire to higher education or any specific career. It is important to note, however, that COMPASS programs should create new ways of identifying and selecting talented trainees that do not rely on the standard methods used in other training programs (highest SAT scores, class rank or most established educational pedigree). This program is about identifying and fostering untapped talent and bringing diverse and needed perspectives into the regenerative medicine community- at all levels of career. The mentoring is intended is to help both students that are undecided as well as those that believe they know what they want. The COMPASS program may help someone grow more confident in their decision or it might help them discover something they had never considered before. The goal is to provide opportunities and choice that make sense for an individual rather than push all students down the same path.

12. Does CIRM prefer we recruit students from Community Colleges or from within our institution

CIRM does not dictate specific strategies to recruit students, as it is the purview of the Grants Working Group to evaluate the merits of any proposed approaches for achieving the goals of the COMPASS Program. However, we wish to emphasize that a major objective of the COMPASS program is to diversify the regenerative medicine talent pool by increasing representation of populations that are historically under-represented in the sciences, as well as socioeconomically disadvantaged students, first in family attend college, etc. Partnering with Community Colleges could be a valuable tool for identifying and recruiting talented students from populations that are under-represented within your institution’s undergraduate pool.

Internship Questions

13. Does a COMPASS Scholar have to take an internship every year or summer of their appointment?

This is dependent on program design. All COMPASS scholars are required to do at least one laboratory internship overall, regardless of whether their appointment is for a two-year or three-year term. However, the program budget allows for each trainee to be supported for one internship/year while appointed as COMPASS Scholars, thus it is possible for students to take internships for > 1 summer term or equivalent period, in >1 host lab if desired.

14. Is there a minimum duration (weeks) for research internships?

The grant will support one internship per year for up to 12 weeks full-time equivalent, dispersed over a summer or at some other time throughout the academic year. Although the RFA does not define a minimum duration, reviewers will evaluate the number and duration of internships as part of the overall quality and value of the COMPASS program. CIRM recommends that a summer internship should not be less than 6-8 weeks if >1 internship period is required for each trainee. If a program proposes only a single internship per trainee overall, then the duration should be as close to the 12 weeks as possible.

15. My institution does not offer PhDs in STEM disciplines. Are we allowed to host laboratory internships internally or must we find a partner?

This depends on your institution's faculty and facilities. To host internships on site, an institution should have at least some research faculty with federally or CIRM supported research programs in regenerative medicine-related disciplines. Institutions with limited capacity in this respect, if not partnering with external laboratory hosts, should only propose a COMPASS program and budget that supports the number of students that can be feasibly trained with the available resources. To support a larger number of trainees, such institutions may consider partnering with external organizations (such as appropriate biotechnology companies, PhD granting research institutions, etc.) to host interns for their research training. Such partnerships should be secured through letters of support prior to application submission.

16. What sites are suitable to host internships COMPASS Scholars?

Internship host sites can include California non-profit doctorate granting research universities, research institutes, and California laboratories of for-profit biotech or pharmaceutical companies, including CROs and CDMOs. To be responsive, research opportunities at host site should involve stem cells, gene therapy and/or other critical research relevant to understanding or treating a human condition or disease.

17. Can students do internships outside of California?

No- host sites must be in California. See question above.

18. Are student's internships projects limited to those using human stem cells? Are projects using model systems, nonhuman stem cells allowed?

Laboratory internships are not strictly required to utilize human stem cells/systems per se; however any proposed internship project must meet the definition from the RFA of "hands-on, regenerative medicine-related research involving stem cells, gene therapy and/or other critical research relevant to understanding or treating a human condition or disease" For an internship using nonhuman models only, there must be a justification for how that research is relevant to regenerative medicine and/or human disease.

- 19. Do the research internships have to occur at the same time each year (e.g., summer), or can the timing vary from year to year? Can the timing vary from student to student?**

The COMPASS Program does not mandate that research internships take place during the summer, although that may be the preference for many students. Depending on how you design your program, an internship(s) can take place during the summer or during another part of the year; it can be full time for up to three months, or part time spread over a longer duration. The EDUC5 RFA offers flexibility to design a program that can meet the needs and interests of individual students.

Budget and Award Administration Questions

- 20. How many COMPASS trainees can I propose to support?**

This depends on the capacity of your program. The total award amount for a COMPASS Award will be capped at about \$2.91M, which is sufficient to support about 25 students for two-year terms (or about 15 students with three-year terms). However, institutions should propose a program that is “right-sized” for their institutions and capabilities, taking into consideration any partnerships. The Grants Working Group will be asked to review the feasibility of each program for meeting not only their internal targets of recruitment, but whether doing so meets the COMPASS program objectives of identifying and fostering talent that is currently untapped and creating new paths and opportunities for supporting and retaining that talent in the future regenerative medicine workforce.

- 21. Can a COMPASS Scholar hold another type of Training appointment concurrently (e.g., federal grant, Bridges program)?**

From CIRM’s Grants Administration Policy: A trainee may not be concurrently supported with another fellowship or similar Award that provides a Stipend or otherwise duplicates provisions of the training grant Award; however, CIRM trainees may accept supplemental funding from other (non-CIRM) sources to increase funds available to the individual trainee

- 22. If our grant is funded, do we need to appoint trainees right away or is their time allowed to build up the program?**

Although the EDUC5 RFA mandates that all COMPASS Awards must begin within 90 days of board approval, it is expected that some programs will need a period of build up before any trainees can be appointed. When you submit your COMPASS Award application, you will be asked to provide a timeline of activities to reflect build up, recruitment, appointment timing, etc. Funding from the administrative budget will begin upon grant initiation whereas Trainee-associated funds will be only awarded upon trainee appointment.

- 23. Do salary caps include fringe benefits?**

No, salary caps are not inclusive of fringe benefits.

24. What does “tuition and fees” cover? Can “tuition and fees” include health insurance?

“Tuition and Fees” means costs charged by the Grantee for the enrollment and instruction of a student and may include costs of health insurance for the student.

25. Do all trainees have to be appointed at the same time?

No, not necessarily, this will depend on program design. Some programs may envision appointment of single cohort, whereas others may propose staggered cohorts, periodic appointment based on an academic calendar, or something that is ad hoc. As mentioned above, you will be asked in the application for a timeline of activities to reflect build up, recruitment, appointment, etc.

26. Do all COMPASS students in my program have to be appointed for the same number of years (all for two years; or all for three years) or can this vary from student to student?

The RFA affords flexibility in how you design your program- only requiring that each student be supported for a minimum of two years. Your program may envision that all students receive the same support, or that the duration of support may vary between students. Three years is the maximum period of CIRM support that can be offered per trainee.

27. What happens if I appoint a cohort of trainees in Year 4?

Since appointments are two years or three years in duration and the overall program is built on 5 years of administrative support, it will be necessary to request a no cost extension to enable students appointed in later years to complete their full terms. A no cost extension can only be approved if there are sufficient administrative funds remaining to carry forward into the extended period and provide students with their full training experience.

28. Can my partner/subcontractor claim indirect costs?

Subcontractors can request up to 10% indirect costs for the activities/services they provide.

29. How can I use research-related funds?

Research-related funds are intended to offset the cost of supplies and time for the laboratory that is hosting a trainee for their research internship. One set of research-related costs can be requested per internship period (one per year).

30. What is considered program-related travel?

COMPASS Scholars will be expected to attend a CIRM-sponsored event to network and present their research or capstone projects. Any unused travel funds beyond that which is required to

attend this conference may be used to support attendance at other relevant conferences or meetings.

31. How do we allocate trainee funds to COMPASS students who are already receiving financial aid or scholarships that cover tuition?

Certain line items in the budget (the academic year stipend, tuition, and fees) are intended to financially support students while they are completing their required COMPASS courses and activities. If a given student is already receiving tuition support, financial aid or scholarship from another source, your program should determine how much, if any, of these allocations should go to that student, as CIRM funds cannot be used to duplicate financial support that a student is already receiving. CIRM's intent in providing these funds is to enable recruitment of promising students who might not have had the same access or connections to avail themselves of financial resources, or those that require additional financial support to participate and excel in the COMPASS program.

32. Are we allowed to compensate advisors, mentors, etc. with honoraria?

While it may be appropriate and reasonable to provide compensation for individuals who contribute to the COMPASS program in various ways, this cannot be done via honoraria, which are categorized as "gifts" by CIRM are not allowed by our regulations. Instead, compensation for such individuals could be provided through a payroll mechanism, a fee for service arrangement, or other agreements that may be acceptable to the parties involved. If using a payroll mechanism, Awardees cannot use CIRM funds towards costs that would be associated with employee benefits (e.g., FICA, workman's compensation, and unemployment insurance). Please see CIRM's [Grants Administration Policy](#) for additional information.

33. What is the Accessibility Fund and how does it work?

The Accessibility Fund is a special allocation within the overall award budget that may only be utilized on a case-by-case basis to address a unique hardship that may arise, to enable a student to join or remain in the COMPASS program who might otherwise be forced to leave. The size of this fund is calculated based on the number of COMPASS trainees to be supported, but it is not tied to any individual trainee. Use of the Accessibility Fund will be dependent on Prior Approval from CIRM. CIRM will establish guidelines for the use of this fund upon Award initiation.

Other Application Questions

34. The application asks for a description of any prior experience with undergraduate training programs, if applicable. What about prior experience with a master's level program, if we have not previously offered undergraduate training?

Yes, it may be appropriate to describe experience with a master's level training program if there are similar elements that could support the applicant's ability to carry out the proposed COMPASS program, for example experience with recruiting students, developing and delivering regenerative medicine related courses, placing students in laboratories for internships, etc.