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## Sister Institution Network Fund (SINF) Program Guidelines

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### Background

The Sister Institution (SI) Network consists of approximately 32 Sister Institutions (2016), with additional Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) and Educational Agreements. The SI relationships are characterized by active, if limited, collaboration in research and education with some collaborative grants emerging, as well as a lively exchange of people, with visits in both directions of leaders and faculty champions, incoming observers and outgoing faculty presenting at conferences. In addition, many relationships have regular videoconferences, including consults, tumor boards and organizational meetings. There are strong bonds of loyalty and trust towards MD Anderson.

In order to spark additional collaborative research between MD Anderson and our partners, and amongst the network in general, Global Academic Programs (GAP) launched the Sister Institution Network Fund (SINF) Program in 2010, with the first round of funding occurring in 2011. The mission of the SINF program is to seed collaborative research between investigators at MD Anderson and our partner institutions, including Sister Institutions, extensions and other global collaborators with a goal of improving the competitiveness of such grant proposals submitted to external agencies. In 2015, after several years of successful awarding of grants, the goal of the SINF was refined to focus on seeding research with new members of the GAP network and faculty not already engaged in collaborative research with the network.

### Fund Principles

The following principles govern the management of the Sister Institution Network Fund:

- Funding decisions are based on peer review
- Programmatic preference given to efforts that involve multiple Sister Institutions
- Research investments do not leave MD Anderson – think global, act local
- Sister Institutions are requested to invest matching funds at their own institution
- Metrics and follow-up will be used to track investment, gauge success and refine strategy over time
- Early emphasis on translational and clinical research in personalized cancer care

### Eligibility

All MD Anderson faculty at the ranks of Assistant, Associate and full Professor are eligible, including tenure track/tenured faculty, and faculty with Research Faculty Appointments or Clinical Faculty Appointments. Funds awarded may not be used as a bridge for interim funding of ongoing work. **Faculty members who currently receive funding from the SINF cannot apply for a second grant.**

External partners can be Sister Institutions, Extensions or be affiliated with MD Anderson via Memoranda of Understanding. The participating partners are listed in the Request for Application that is published when a call for submissions is made.

### **Resubmitted Applications.**

A grant application that was not funded by the SINP may be resubmitted **a second time** provided the PI is still eligible, and critiques of the prior application are addressed comprehensively, point by point.

### **Funding Amount and Duration.**

The awards are limited to \$100,000, which may be spent over 1 or 2 years. Whether 1 or 2 years is desired must be stated at the top of the budget page, and if 2 years of support are requested, each year must be budgeted separately.

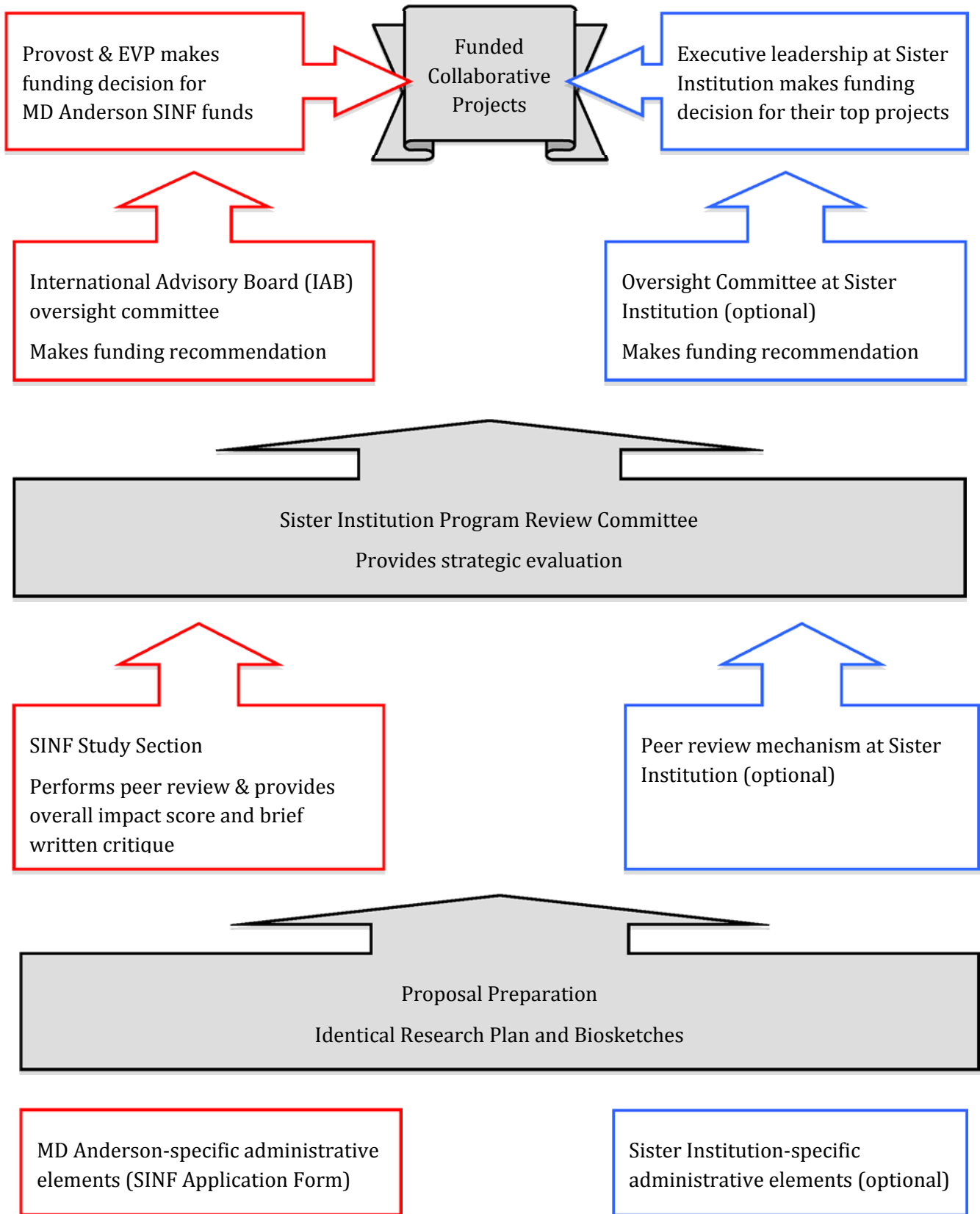
### **Progress reports from Awardees.**

A progress report on the use of the funds must be completed and submitted to [SINF@mdanderson.org](mailto:SINF@mdanderson.org) after year one, and before year two funds can be released. A final progress report on the outcome of the research must be submitted within **3 months** after the end of the award period. A SINP progress report form/template can be requested by sending an email to [SINF@mdanderson.org](mailto:SINF@mdanderson.org).

### **Residual Funds.**

Any funds remaining beyond the 2-year award period must be returned to the funding pool.

## Review Mechanism and Criteria



Proposals will be reviewed at MD Anderson by the SINF Study Section. Members of the SINF study section reads the proposals and evaluates them as proposals sent to an agency of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) are reviewed. After discussion, each member of the study section scores the proposals. The scores are then averaged. The Sister Institution Program Review Committee provides input on strategic priorities. The International Advisory Board (IAB) determines the funding payline based on available funds. Final funding decisions are made by the Provost & Executive Vice President and by the President of MD Anderson.

Scoring is based on the following NIH review criteria (for more detail, please visit NIH's Definitions of Criteria and Considerations for Research Project Grant (RPG/R01/R03/R15/R21/R34) Critiques: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/critiques/rpg.htm>):

- Significance
- Investigator(s)
- Innovation
- Approach
- Environment

Peer review will result in an overall impact score, and brief written critiques that will be communicated to the investigators.

### **SINF Study Section Bylaws**

**A. PURPOSE AND FUNCTION:** The SINF Study Section reviews and evaluates internal requests for research support up to \$100,000, which may be used over one or two years, and is required to include a collaboration with an external partner of MD Anderson, such as a Sister Institution or Extension. Amounts available and awarded are dictated by the financial state of the institution and is subject to change.

**B. STUDY SECTION COMPOSITION:** The Study Section has a Chair and a Vice Chair. Members serve for a three year period, and may volunteer to serve a second 3-year term with approval of the Provost. New members are nominated by Division Heads, Department Chairs and the Faculty Senate, with an emphasis given to faculty with study section or review experience or a history of peer-reviewed funding. The study section committee chair and vice chair will review nominated candidates and select those that will be offered committee membership. External scientists and other faculty may be called upon to review proposals on an ad hoc basis.

The Chair and Vice Chair, who serve for one year in these capacities, are elected by the voting committee membership with the Vice Chair usually succeeding to the Chairmanship to provide continuity. Successive chairs cannot be from the same department. A majority of votes is required to be elected as Vice Chair, unless there are more than two members under consideration. That being the case, a plurality is required for election. A current membership list is available in the Global Academic Programs office, posted on the Office of Research Administration's (ORA) internal website, and can be distributed upon request.

**C. STUDY SECTION MEETINGS:** The Study Section meets once a year, shortly after the application deadline. The specific date, time, and location are included on an agenda sent to each member at least five working days in advance of the meeting. Meeting schedules are subject to change.

## Conditions Associated with Use of Funds

**A. RESTRICTIONS ON USE OF FUNDS:** Funds may be requested by the investigator for the purchase of supplies, experimental animals, equipment, computer time, and salary support for research personnel. Unexpected equipment needs will be considered when it is shown that ongoing research would be impaired if equipment costing in excess of \$1,000 is not purchased. All unencumbered funds remaining in a project account after the one- to two-year period will be returned to the allotment account for award to other investigators. If an investigator requires additional time to use these funds, he or she must submit a justification for this extension to the VP of Global Academic Programs, through the SINF mailbox, [SINF@mdanderson.org](mailto:SINF@mdanderson.org), who will determine whether such an extension will be granted.

General guidelines for awarding funds have been established by the Director of Research Administration Operations. These guidelines may require periodic adjustment depending on institutional policy changes. The Office of Research Administration maintains, on behalf of the committees, the current guidelines, which are available to the research faculty.

### Allowable expenditures include:

- Research supplies and animal maintenance
- Technical assistance - research nurses, data managers, protocol coordinators, research assistants, research associates, postdoctoral fellows, graduate students, and laboratory technicians (salary plus 28% fringe benefits)
- Tuition, if thorough budget justification is provided
- Costs of computer time
- Special fees (pathology, photography, etc.)
- Stipends for graduate students and postdoctoral assistants if their role is to promote and sustain the project presented
- Travel by personnel directly involved in the project, to collaborating institutions as part of the work
- Publication costs (journal charges) limited to \$500 per year

### Unallowable expenditures include:

- Faculty/Secretarial/Administrative salaries
- Books and periodicals
- Membership dues
- Office and laboratory furniture
- Office equipment and supplies
- Rental of office or laboratory space
- Recruiting and relocation expenses
- Patient care costs
- Construction, renovation, or maintenance of building/laboratories
- Honoraria and travel expenses for visiting lecturers
- Travel - general business travel not related to the project
- Consortium/Contractual Costs

**B. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:** Progress reports on the use of the funds must be completed and emailed to [SINF@mdanderson.org](mailto:SINF@mdanderson.org) after year one, and before year two funds can be released. A final progress report on the outcome of the research, describing the research accomplishments, publications, and/or presentations and extramural funding received as a result of the grant must be submitted within **3 months** after the end of the award period. An SINF progress report template can be requested by sending an email to [SINF@mdanderson.org](mailto:SINF@mdanderson.org).

If an investigator must request a no-cost extension, they should submit the request as a formal memo to the VP of Global Academic Programs through the Office of Research Administration, via email to

[SINF@mdanderson.org](mailto:SINF@mdanderson.org). The request should include an explanation for why the extension is needed, the duration of the extension, along with a report of the progress made on the project thus far.

**C. REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS:** If human subjects or specimens from humans are involved, and are not exempt from the regulations, a current (within 12 months) approval from the Surveillance Committee (IRB) will be required. Likewise, research involving experimental animals should have clearance from the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) prior to funding. The Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) must approve research involving bio hazardous material or recombinant DNA. All regulatory approvals must be obtained from the Office of Research Administration prior to funding.

### **Procedure for Preparing the Application**

In order to insure a consistent and systematic approach to the application process, an application packet has been developed. This packet includes the forms that need to be completed, guidelines for preparing the application and important deadlines, which need to be observed. As the Study Sections act as the primary review and evaluating committee for all internal funding, this packet and the procedures included are to be followed regardless of the amount of financial support being requested.

Packets, as well as additional blank forms, are available in the Office of Research Administration, along with assistance in understanding the policy and procedures of these Committees. An electronic version of the application packet may be downloaded from the Office of Research Administration site on MD Anderson's intranet, as well as from Global Academic Programs' SINF web page [www.mdanderson.org/SINF](http://www.mdanderson.org/SINF). These forms are not to be altered in any way.

### **Notice of Awards, Committee Decisions, Evaluations**

During the Committee deliberations, members, members with joint appointments and collaborators from the same department as the applicant, will be absent during discussions and scoring. All reviews are confidential and anonymous outside of the committee. Communications concerning reviews are done through the committee chair. The reviewers will be selected from outside the applicant's department.

Committee actions, which may be reported, include: approved-funded or disapproved. Committee and reviewers' individual ratings and their evaluations are available in the Office of Research Administration. Applicants disapproved are formally advised along with a copy of the reviews. With the Chair's approval, a full review of the votes pertinent to the application may also be possible.

Each of the Study Section's recommendations is presented to the Sister Institution Program Review Committee and the International Advisory Board (IAB). The Provost, EVP and President make a final decision on awardees and amounts of funding. Following the final decision, successful applicants will be advised by the Office of Research Administration of the amount of the award and the source of funding. Research Finance will also be notified of the award and a company center will be established. Refer to the SINF Application Guidelines for specific notification procedures.

### **Administrative Support**

The Office of Research Administration acts as the administrative support arm to the Study Section. In this role, it is responsible for preparing agendas, attending all meetings, recording recommended changes to the budget and tabulating voting results by the members and preparing recommendations to the Research Council. All of the above, as well as records of applications, notices to investigators, and reviewers' evaluations are retained on file in the office.