2027 Innovative/Translational Cancer Research Grant

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS + APPLICANT FAQ

APPLICATION WINDOW | November 1, 2026, 12:00 a.m. CT - February 1, 2027, 11:59 p.m. CT

Application Overview

Purpose	Support innovative, translational cancer research with strong potential to advance the understanding, prevention, diagnosis, or treatment of cancers predominantly affecting women (e.g. breast, uterine, ovarian, cervical, endometrial, or a combination among others).
Award	$100,000 total over two years ($50,000 per year).
Who may apply	Invitation only: NCI-designated cancer centers and accredited schools of medicine or universities invited by MKAF.
Institutional limit	One application per invited institution or eligible campus with a unique EIN. Internal selection is required.
PI eligibility	Full-time appointment as Assistant Professor or higher at submission; minimum 5% effort.
Submission	Submit electronically through the GrantsConnect portal. All required attachments must be PDFs.

Eligibility Checklist

☐ Institution received an invitation from MKAF.
☐ Institution will submit only one application under its eligible EIN.
☐ PI holds a full-time appointment at Assistant Professor level or higher by the submission deadline.
☐ PI and one permitted co-PI, if applicable, will each commit minimum 5% effort.
☐ Applicant institution is U.S.-based; all grant funds will remain with the U.S. institution.
☐ Current MKAF grant recipients are not eligible to apply for a new award while actively funded.

Required Application Materials

Required attachment	Guideline
Research Description	6 pages max (including charts, etc.)
Literature References	*Recommended template* – NIH Common Form
Letters of Collaboration/Support	3 pages max
Current and Pending (Other) Support	*Recommended template* – NIH Common Form
Budget and Budget Justification	NIH-style, two-year budget
PI Biographical Sketch	*Recommended template* – NIH BioSketch Common Form/BioSketch Supplement
Co-PI/collaborator résumés	Combine into one PDF, if applicable

Applicant FAQ

Quick-reference guidance for institutions, principal investigators, and research administrators.

1 | Program Scope and Eligibility

Who is eligible to apply?

This invitation-only program is open to eligible PIs at invited NCI-designated cancer centers and accredited schools of medicine or universities. The PI must hold a full-time appointment at the rank of Assistant Professor or higher at the time of submission.

Are staff scientists, postdoctoral trainees, or instructors eligible to serve as PI?

No. The PI must be full-time faculty at the Assistant Professor level or higher.

Are co-PIs allowed?

Yes. One co-PI is permitted and must meet the same eligibility requirements as the PI, including the minimum effort requirement. Postdoctoral contributors should be listed as co-investigators, not co-PIs.

Is U.S. citizenship required?

No. However, the applicant and grantee institution must be U.S.-based, and all grant funds must remain with the U.S. institution. International collaborators or co-PIs may participate.

Must the PI be appointed within a medical school?

No. The PI may hold an appointment in any school within the invited university, provided the proposed research aligns with cancers affecting women.

Are pending appointments eligible?

No. The qualifying appointment must be in place by the application deadline.

What is the minimum effort requirement?

The PI and co-PI, if applicable, must each commit at least 5% effort to the proposed project.

Are previous MKAF grant recipients eligible?

Yes, provided they are not actively receiving MKAF funding at the time of application.

2 | Institutional Submission Rules

How many applications may an invited institution submit?

One. Each invited institution is responsible for conducting an internal selection process and designating its single applicant. No exceptions will be made, and multiple submissions from a single institution may result in disqualification of all applications.

What if a university system has multiple campuses?

A campus with a unique EIN may submit one application if that campus is an invited institution.

What if multiple schools, departments, or centers share the same EIN?

They must coordinate and submit one application under that EIN. The institution should use its internal review process to select the strongest proposal that best aligns with the above guidelines.

Is a nomination or letter of intent required?

No. MKAF assumes the institution conducted its internal selection process; nomination or letter of intent is not required.

We did not receive or cannot locate the invitation. What should we do?

First check junk, spam, and institutional filtering folders for email sender: Mary Kay Ash Foundation (GrantsConnect). Then contact julia.santosuosso@mkcorp.com to verify the invitation and current distribution contacts are correct.

3 | Application and Formatting

How must applications be submitted?

Applications must be submitted electronically through GrantsConnect by the deadline. Pending any unforeseen system outages, applications sent by email will not be accepted.

Who should create the GrantsConnect account?

The User Profile must be created in the PI's first and last name, even if an administrator submits on the PI's behalf. Additional administrative contacts may be added for notifications and institutional coordination.

What formatting standards apply?

It is strongly recommended that you follow all NIH-standard formatting guidelines. However, minor formatting differences will not result in disqualification.

Are NIH Common Forms recommended for the biographical sketch and Current and Pending (Other) Support?

Yes. Submit the NIH Biographical Sketch Common Form together with the NIH Biographical Sketch Supplement and submit the Current and Pending (Other) Support Common Form. If these forms cannot be accessed for any reason, please adhere as closely as possible to the original template and upload the completed PDFs in the corresponding GrantsConnect fields.

Unless this guide states otherwise, narrative attachments should follow current NIH-style standards for page layout, font, and spacing. For biographical sketches and Current and Pending (Other) Support, applicants must use the applicable NIH Common Forms generated in SciENcv. MKAF-specific page limits and submission requirements control where they differ from NIH requirements.

Are the page limits required?

Page limits should be adhered to as closely as possible. Applicants will not be penalized for exceeding the limit within a reasonable threshold at the Research Review Committee's discretion.

How should files be named?

Use clear, consistent filenames that identify the document and PI, such as BudgetJustification_Smith.pdf.

Is preliminary data required?

No, but relevant preliminary data are encouraged when available.

Are animal studies allowed?

Yes. The application must explain the project's pathway to clinical relevance and comply with applicable NIH animal-care guidelines and institutional IACUC or equivalent oversight requirements.

May the application be submitted under a 501(c)(3) or institutional EIN?

Yes. Either is acceptable, consistent with institutional policy and the one-application-per-eligible-EIN rule.

Can an application be changed after it is submitted?

Applicants should review all materials carefully before submission. Contact MKAF promptly if a correction is essential; changes after the deadline are not guaranteed.

4 | Budget and Allowable Costs

What is the total award?

$100,000 over two years, distributed as $50,000 per year.

What are the primary budget restrictions?

Total direct and indirect costs may not exceed $100,000. Indirect costs are capped at 15% of direct costs. Equipment and travel must be fully justified.

Is there flexibility in the allocation between budget categories?

Yes, within the total award and indirect-cost limits, provided all expenses are reasonable, well justified, and aligned with project goals.

Does a salary cap apply?

Yes. Salary requested from MKAF funds may not be calculated using an annual institutional base salary above the NIH Executive Level II salary cap in effect at the time of application. As of January 11, 2026, the cap is $228,000. If NIH issues a new cap before submission, applicants must use the updated amount. The cap limits the salary rate used in the calculation, not the amount of compensation an institution may pay from non-MKAF sources.

How should salary be calculated when the institutional base salary exceeds the cap?

Calculate the requested salary using the lower of the individual's institutional base salary or the NIH salary cap, multiplied by the proposed level of effort. Fringe benefits may be requested in accordance with institutional policy and should be shown separately from salary.

5 | Review, Decisions, and Award Administration

How are applications reviewed?

Applications are evaluated by the MKAF Research Review Committee (RRC) for scientific merit and innovation, relevance to cancers affecting women, translational potential, feasibility, and anticipated impact.

Will every applicant be notified of the decision?

Yes. Applicants not advancing to the Top 20 will be notified in May, tentatively. Applicants not advancing beyond the Top 20 will be notified in June, tentatively. Following each review round, MKAF will notify the PI and institutional contact listed in the application.

Will reviewer comments, scores, or individualized feedback be provided?

No. MKAF does not provide reviewer comments, scores, rankings, or individualized feedback after funding decisions are made, even upon request.

May an unsuccessful application be resubmitted in a future cycle?

Yes, if the institution is invited in a future cycle and selects the proposal through its internal process. A substantially unchanged resubmission is not guaranteed different consideration.

When will the grant begin?

The final start date and two-year grant period will be stated in the grant agreement. Funds are not released until the agreement is fully executed. Assistance to expedite the legal review process is greatly appreciated for timely receipt of funds.

What is required before funds are released?

Selected recipients must complete MKAF's award documentation and execute the grant agreement. First-year payment is contingent upon a fully executed agreement.

Is the award confidential before public announcement?

Selected recipients may be asked to keep the award confidential outside necessary institutional personnel until MKAF's public announcement (typically in October). Specific instructions will be included with the award notice or shortly thereafter.

6 | During the Grant Period

When is the second-year payment released?

The second installment is released after MKAF approves the required one-year progress report and any other documentation specified in the grant agreement.

What happens to unspent funds at the end of the grant?

Unspent funds must be returned unless MKAF approves an no-cost extension or provides written permission for another disposition.

Can a no-cost extension be requested?

Yes. Requests must be submitted in writing before the project end date and are subject to MKAF approval. An amendment may be required.

What if the project aims, PI, institution, or budget must change?

Contact MKAF before making a material change. Written approval and a formal amendment may be required.

7 | Technical Support and Contacts

Where can I find submission instructions?

Review this RFP/FAQ and the Application Creation User Guide before beginning the online application.

Who should I contact about GrantsConnect technical issues?

Contact YourCause Support at MaryKay-support@yourcause.com.

Who should I contact about eligibility, application content, or program questions?

Contact Julia Santosuosso at Julia.Santosuosso@mkcorp.com.

Submission Readiness Check

- ☐ Institutional applicant selected
- ☐ PI eligibility confirmed
- ☐ PI profile created in GrantsConnect
- ☐ All required PDFs uploaded and correctly labeled
- ☐ Budget totals and indirect-cost cap verified
- ☐ Administrative contact added
- ☐ Final application reviewed before February 1, 2027, at 11:59 p.m. CT