

## REQUEST FOR RESEARCH PROPOSALS

### Connors BWH-MGB Collaborative IGNITE Award

*Investigating female-specific and sex-differentiating effects in novel diagnostics and therapeutics*

Letters of Intent Due: <b>November 8, 2021</b>	Full Proposals Due: <b>January 15, 2022</b>	Award Announced: <b>March 16, 2022</b>
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*Sponsored by the Mary Horrigan Connors Center for Women's Health and Gender Biology at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) and Mass General Brigham (MGB)*

The Connors Center for Women's Health and Gender Biology is pleased to announce a request for research proposals (RFP) for the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Connors BWH-MGB Collaborative IGNITE Award. This award builds on the existing IGNITE Awards program that began in 2019. To view previous IGNITE Awardees, please visit: <https://connorscenter.bwh.harvard.edu/ignite/>.

Investigators from Brigham and Women's Hospital are expected to collaborate with an investigator from another MGB institution on a joint project. The BWH Principal Investigator (PI) will receive up to \$100,000 (\$50,000 maximum to the BWH PI and \$50,000 maximum to the co-PI at the partnering other MGB institution). The Connors BWH-MGB Collaborative IGNITE Award PI and co-PI will be integrated into the overall Connors Center IGNITE Awards program. Translational projects and/or projects combining different study methodologies are particularly welcome. This award is funded by our BWH Women's Health Advisory Board and other generous donors, and by Mass General Brigham.

#### **Background:**

The broad goal of the IGNITE Awards program is to ensure that medical advances are optimized for the health of women through scientific investigation. These awards aim to advance our understanding of the role of female-specific and sex-differentiating factors across different stages of the drug and device development process, from target identification to post-approval monitoring and uptake in the community, as well as in the development and optimization of novel diagnostics and digital strategies. Specifically, the IGNITE Awards program aims to promote and support research projects that focus on:

- 1) uncovering sex-specific and sex-differentiating factors that may affect the efficacy, tolerability, safety, acceptability, and uptake of novel therapeutics;
- 2) identifying female-specific and sex-differentiating factors that may represent novel therapeutic targets or disease biomarkers;
- 3) developing and/or optimizing diagnostics in a sex- and gender-informed fashion;
- 4) examining innovative and effective approaches to include and retain women in early-phase development of drugs, devices, and digital diagnostics and therapeutics.

IGNITE investigations are important components of the Connors Center's **First.In.Women Precision Medicine Platform**. First.In.Women is a translational research platform that is advancing the inclusion and specific investigation of women in studies of the development and utilization of new drugs, devices, digital diagnostics and therapeutics to produce sex-specific knowledge about treatments for both women and men. First.In.Women is a go-to hub for national efforts to advance our investigation of sex as a biological variable in relation to novel diagnostics and therapeutics.

### **IGNITE Awardees and First.In.Women Partnership:**

The Connors BWH-MGB Collaborative IGNITE Award PI and co-PI will benefit from the Connors Center First.In.Women program supports and activities, including having the opportunity to engage with scientific leaders and staff both individually and as a group through Work in Progress meetings (see below), mentoring meetings, and scientific meetings, such as the Connors Center Annual Research Symposium. The purpose of these meetings as a whole is to stimulate scientific exchanges, provide mentorship and sponsorship, integrate the First.In.Women translational framework, and facilitate networking and collaboration across the First.In.Women research community. These meetings will provide the opportunity to: 1) review project goals, milestones and deliverables to ensure progress on study aims; 2) evaluate alignment between the First.In.Women mission and the clinical translation of the proposed research project; an 3) connect with Connors Center and First.In.Women resources. These meetings will support and maintain the momentum of the studies in order to maximize each project's future growth and potential for impact.

### **Work in Progress Meetings:**

The Connors BWH-MGB Collaborative IGNITE Award PI and co-PI will be expected to attend and present their work at two Work in Progress (WiP) meetings hosted by the Connors Center during the year of funding. The purpose of WiP meetings is to support the growth of all IGNITE Awardees and maximize the impact of First.In.Women translational science by providing IGNITE investigators an opportunity to obtain feedback on their ongoing work by experts in sex- and gender-informed research, subject-matters experts, and First.In.Women Faculty.

### **Award Administration:**

The PI of the proposal must have a primary appointment at BWH. S/he will be responsible for reporting and communicating with the Connors Center Administrators who will be overseeing this award. The collaborating co-PI must have a primary affiliation at another MGB institution. The PI and co-PI will be granted up to \$50,000 each, inclusive of 15% indirect costs, with the grand total of the award up to \$100,000.

The initial funding period will run for 12 months. Competing renewals are allowable if first year progress shows promise for an expanded investigation. No-cost extensions are discouraged. Projects must be ready to commence upon receipt of award.

### **Timeline:**

Request for proposals announced:	September 15, 2021
Letter of Intent due:	November 8, 2021
Invitations to submit full proposals distributed:	November 19, 2022
Full proposals due:	January 15, 2022
Award recipients announced:	March 16, 2022
Earliest start date:	April 1, 2022

## **Eligibility:**

We welcome applications that meet the following criteria. Both US and non-US citizens are welcome to apply. Projects with a special focus on racial and ethnic disparities are also encouraged.

- The Principal Investigator's primary appointment is at Brigham and Women's Hospital.
- The co-Principal Investigator's primary appointment is at an MGB Institution other than BWH.
- Both investigators have a doctoral degree (MD and/or PhD or equivalent).
- Both investigators have an HMS appointment at the Instructor level or above.
  - *HMS Research Fellows whose promotion to Instructor is either pending or whose application is expected to be submitted during the period of the Award indicating an intended faculty position at HMS will be considered if a written letter from the Division Chief or Department Chair confirms the status of the faculty appointment consistent with these criteria.*
- Prior IGNITE award recipients may apply for funding, either to extend a previously funded IGNITE project or to support a new research study.
- PIs and co-PIs may be listed on only one application for this award.
- BWH Investigators may also apply to the other Connors Center IGNITE Award RFPs.

## **Application Process and Materials:**

### **Letter of Intent – Due November 08, 2021, at 12:00pm:**

1. Research Proposal Cover Sheet (Download here: <https://connorscenter.bwh.harvard.edu/funding-opportunities/>)
2. 1-page Letter of Intent, which addresses all the following:
  - a) What is the major problem in medicine that you plan to study, and how does your proposal address either a female-specific or sex-differentiating question?
  - b) How do you plan on using this IGNITE Award to support your work to advance our understanding of novel diagnostics or therapeutics in women?
  - c) How do your previous experiences and accomplishments inform the current project?
  - d) Briefly describe the nature of the proposed collaboration and distribution of work and expertise.

Letters of Intent will be reviewed by a panel of established researchers. Based on Letters of Intent, select applicants will be invited to submit full proposals for review. Decisions from the review panel will be communicated by November 19, 2021 and will be final. No written feedback will be provided.

### **Full Proposals - Due January 15, 2022, at 12:00pm (By Invitation Only):**

1. A 2-page research statement describing your scientific proposal that includes a timeline with planned milestones and deliverables. Figures, tables, and images may be included within the two pages. A maximum of 10 references may be included on an additional page.
2. Brief description of plans for future grant applications and investigations using these pilot data (150-word max).
3. A description of the proposed collaboration, including prior experience working together if applicable, distribution of responsibilities, and benefits of the collaboration to the proposed project (200-word max).
4. A 1-year budget for each investigator's institution (up to \$50,000/each, including indirect costs at 15%) using the provided template with a corresponding budget justification (200-word max for each site).
5. NIH biosketches for both the PI and co-PI.
6. A brief letter of support (up to 1 page) on letterhead for the PI and the co-PI from their Division Chief, Department Chair, Laboratory PI, or Mentor.

### **Proposal Review Criteria:**

- Application text must be in Arial, 11-point font. Single-spacing is allowed. All margins must be at least 0.5 inches. All items above must be compiled into a single PDF in the stated order. You may make reasonable edits to your Project Summary when re-submitting the application cover sheet with your full proposal. Incomplete applications, applications submitted in multiple files, and multiple applications submitted will not be considered.
- Applications will be judged based on scientific merit, feasibility, fit with the goals and objectives of the Connors Center First.In.Women Precision Medicine Platform, strengths of the proposed collaboration, and potential for obtaining independent funding to continue the study once the funding period has ceased.
- Interviews or clarifying information may be requested from applicants before final awards are determined.
- The final award decision will be made by Connors Center for Women's Health and Gender Biology leadership.

### **Terms of the IGNITE Program:**

- Recipients will be expected to meet with Connors Center leadership individually and to attend WiP research meetings as described above.
- Up to \$50,000 will be transferred from the Connors Center to PI at BWH, and up to \$50,000 will be transferred from Mass General Brigham to the co-PI at another MGB Institution.
- In addition to WiP meetings, recipients will be required to present their project at two or more Connors Center events (e.g. annual research symposium, donor events).
- Recipients will submit brief 6-month and final written reports (1 page each) of research activity.
- Recipients must maintain their primary appointment at BWH (for PI) and their MGB Institution (for co-PI) for the duration of the funding period. If an awardee leaves their home institution, the unspent funds will be returned to the funder.
- Recipients are expected to remain in touch with the Connors Center for at least 3 years post-award to report on publications, grants, and other outcomes from the award.
- Recipients must cite the funding source on all publications and presentations related to this project.

*Please submit all materials electronically to  
Kathleen Moloney, MPH, at [ConnorsCenter@bwh.harvard.edu](mailto:ConnorsCenter@bwh.harvard.edu)*