| | |
|---|---|
| **ANNOUNCEMENT TITLE** | **ASTRO-AstraZeneca SCLC Therapy Challenge** |
| **PROGRAM YEAR** | 2025 |
| **MECHANISM** | Advancing Medicine Together Scientific Challenges |
| **PA NUMBER** | SC-2025-SCLC-01 |
| **GRANTOR** | AstraZeneca (Externally Sponsored Research) |
| **POSTED DATE** | January 10, 2025 |
| **PURPOSE** | To support and promote new collaborative research opportunities, and to facilitate radiation oncology leadership in scientific discovery with AstraZeneca in the space of multimodality combination therapy. |
| **TERM OF POTENTIAL ASTRAZENECA ESR SUPPORT** | Recommended term is up to three years. Entries requesting more than three years of performance periods must be supported by strong justification and plan(s) for intermediate read outs/outcome measures for progress tracking. |
| **NUMBER OF ASTRAZENECA ESR GRANTS** | Two to four awards as selected by an expert review panel (ERP), also known as the Challenge Judging Panel. |
| **BUDGET** | The target budget for each individual project grant is between $175,000 and $375,000 (total costs, which include both direct and indirect costs). However, individual projects requesting higher amounts may be considered based on scientific merit and funding availability. Overhead (indirect cost) rates of up to 25% of the total proposed project budget are allowed; however, it must be accounted for within the total proposed budgets.<br><br>The amount of the grant AstraZeneca funds for any project will depend upon the ERP's evaluation of the proposal. The award pool for the 2025 ASTRO-AstraZeneca New Combination Therapy Challenge is at least $750,000. We anticipate multiple (2-4) Challenge awardees. |
| **OPEN DATE (EARLIEST SUBMISSION DATE)** | February 14, 2025 |
| **ENTRY DUE DATE** | April 30, 2025, 11:59 p.m. Eastern time |
| **EARLIEST START DATE** | September 30, 2025 |
| **CHALLENGE STATEMENT/RESEARCH AREAS OF INTEREST** | How can limited-stage (LS) small cell lung cancer (SCLC) treatment and outcomes be improved with the addition of immunotherapy (IO; durvalumab) and emerging radiation techniques and treatments?<br>Examples may include but are not limited to:<br>1. Patterns of care utilization analysis for multi-modality concurrent chemo-radiation (cCRT)→ IO for LS-SCLC to improve outcomes in the real world<br>2. Optimal multi-disciplinary workflow to optimize receipt of cCRT → IO in LS-SCLC to improve outcomes in the real world<br>3. Evaluation of prognostic or predictive biomarkers in patients with LS-SCLC who most benefit from cCRT → IO for those who are treatment refractory<br>4. Patterns of disease relapse for patients with LS-SCLC who receive cCRT → IO vs. cCRT alone |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 5. Best practices/workflows to manage toxicities in patients with LS-SCLC with cCRT → IO<br>6. Small pilot/feasibility studies combining novel radiation approach (SBRT, hypofractionation) in LS-SCLC with chemoradiotherapy + IO<br>7. Leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) and RT to detect SCLC<br>8. Leveraging AI and RT to predict pneumonitis<br>9. Role of prophylactic cranial irradiation (PCI) in the era of cCRT →IO for LS-SCLC<br><br>Studies of interest may include evaluating the following endpoints:<br>• Clinical outcomes (i.e., PFS, MFS, local control, etc.)<br>• Biomarker studies predictive of response to chemo/RT followed by durvalumab<br>• Patient-Reported Outcomes (PROs)<br>• Selective large, high quality-retrospective studies<br>• Safety/Adverse Events (AEs)<br>• Compliance/adherence<br>• Translational research such as exploratory biomarkers and mechanistic studies may be considered as part of a clinical trial.<br><br>Areas out-of-scope include:<br>• Extensive-stage SCLC<br>• All other tumor sites<br>• Non-United States studies |
| **GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE** | United States |
| **ELIGIBILITY** | The general eligibility criteria for this PA are listed in this section.<br><br>To be eligible:<br>• The institution and principal investigator (PI) must be based in the United States.<br>• Only organizations are eligible to receive grants, not individuals<br>• Applicant must be affiliated with a host institution<br><br><u>Eligible Organizations</u><br>• Higher Education Institutions<br>• Nonprofits Other Than Institutions of Higher Education<br>• Community Cancer Centers<br><br><u>Non-Eligible Organizations:</u> Foreign Institutions<br>• Non-Domestic (non-U.S.) Entities (Foreign Institutions) are ***not*** eligible to apply.<br>• Non-domestic (non-U.S.) components of U.S. Organizations are ***not*** eligible to apply.<br><br><u>Eligible Individuals (Principal Investigators (PIs))</u> |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Multiple PIs are allowed. Both early career and experienced investigators are encouraged to apply, and consideration will be given to all proposals meeting the selection criteria.<br><br>Degree Requirements and Faculty Appointment<br>At the time of entry, the applicant (PI) must have a medical or postdoctoral degree (MD, PhD, or equivalent) and be an ASTRO member. Generally, residents, postdoctoral fellows, or other trainees are ***not*** eligible to apply. However, if at the time of entry submission, a trainee has secured an independent faculty position and provided supporting evidence and endorsement from an Eligible Organization that offered the independent faculty position, ASTRO can choose to accept the Challenge entry from such a trainee for review, if all other eligibility criteria for such an entry have been satisfied. |
| **COMMITMENT FROM THE CHALLENGE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS (PIs)** | • Collaborators: Multidisciplinary collaborations are encouraged, but the proposed project team must include at least one radiation oncologist.<br>• Progress Report. At a date specified in the agreed upon Terms, the PI is expected to provide a progress report to document progress on the project as well as early successes and unexpected challenges.<br>• ASTRO Meetings: If selected for this challenge, the PI will be asked to attend at least one ASTRO Annual Meeting and present their research findings at the meeting. |
| **COMMITMENT FROM THE PI'S AFFILIATED ELIGIBLE ORGANIZATION** | • If awarded, the host institution will act as the fiscal intermediary to interact directly with AstraZeneca. The Institution will administer the funds to the PI and be responsible for satisfying tax withholding, deposit and/or reporting requirements applicable to the payment of the award.<br>• Only 1 grant can support the proposed research project. If independent funding is obtained for the same scope of work selected by the challenge, the recipient must refuse either this or the competing award(s). |
| **CHALLENGE ENTRY SUBMISSION GUIDELINES** | Submission<br>All entries are due by 11:59 pm Eastern time on April 30, 2025. Proposals will not be considered after the deadline. Entries must be submitted online using ASTRO's Proposal Central Portal (CLICK THIS LINK).<br><br>Please note that no letter of intent (LOI) will be accepted. PIs will submit a full proposal directly in a single step to be evaluated by the scientific review/judging panel. Prospective researchers who are interested in receiving preliminary and non-decisive feedback on the alignment of any research idea with the Challenge's research areas of interest can contact the program staff at the ASTRO Department of Scientific Affairs (science@astro.org) before the Entry Due Date.<br><br>Entry Content |

| | |
|---|---|
| | It is critical that applicants follow the instructions. Conformance to the requirements in this PA are required and strictly enforced. Entries that are out of compliance with these instructions may be delayed or not accepted for review.<br><br>All materials must be prepared in English, single spaced, using a font size of 11 or 12 points. Smaller text in figures and charts is acceptable, once it is legible when the page is viewed at 100%. Arial or Times New Roman fonts are recommended. A minimum of one-half inch margins must be used on all page borders.<br><br>1. **Title Page:** Enter the Project Title and Discipline of Research.<br>2. **Templates and Instructions:** Download PA and templates.<br>3. **Enable Other Users to Access this Proposal:** Allow others (e.g., Institutional administrators or collaborators) to view, edit, or submit the proposal.<br>4. **PI:** Complete all required fields that include PI's name and contact information, and level of effort (%) that will be allocated to the proposed research project.<br>5. **PI Demographics:** Providing this information is optional.<br>6. **Institution and Contacts:** Provide the Institution name, address and type of organization and requested contact information of the signing official.<br>7. **Key Personnel:** List and provide contact information for key persons.<br>8. **Scientific Abstracts and Impact Statement**:<br>• Provide a general audience abstract (non-technical) (up to 300 words) and a technical abstract (up to 400 words) that describe the background, rationale/hypothesis, specific aims, research strategy including: significance, innovation, and approach, including model system and statistical approach, anticipated outcomes and impact of the project. Note these abstracts may become public if the award is selected for funding, therefore, it should not include any proprietary information.<br>• Impact Statement: Statement of Proposal's Benefit to answering the Challenge question (1,000 characters including spaces max).<br>9. **Other Support:** List any additional research support that the PI currently holds. Include Project Title, Funding Source, Project Status, Award Number, Start and End Dates, Person Months, and Overlap.<br>10. **Research Assurances:** Indicate status of IRB/IACUC approvals as applicable, use of recombinant DNA, biohazardous materials, genetically engineered organisms, or fetal tissue.<br>11. **Entry Documents:** Upload the below required entry documents.<br>• **Research Plan (6-page limit)**: Project description to fit within the proposed project period and should include:<br>○ Background<br>○ Preliminary data and figures (if applicable, but not required)<br>○ Hypothesis/Rationale |

| | |
|---|---|
| | ○ Specific aims<br>○ Research strategy (significance, innovation, approach)<br>○ Experimental design/methods<br>○ Statistical analysis plan<br>○ Anticipated outcomes<br>○ Potential pitfalls and alternatives<br>○ Future directions<br>References should be included but do not count towards the 10-page limit.<br>• **Biosketches (5-page limit)**: The applicant and each key personnel must each submit a biosketch including a description of support for the proposed project, a list of relevant publications and currently funded research projects. Either DoD or NIH format will be accepted.<br>• **Budget and Budget Justification**: Submit a detailed budget (can be prepared using the NIH budget form e.g. PHS 398) and Budget Justification with a breakdown and description of annual estimated costs. Funding for technical support is acceptable. Costs for attending at least one ASTRO Annual Meeting to present the project's research findings can be included in the budget.<br>• **Letters of support:** An Institutional letter of support is required to indicate the level of commitment from the Institution to this award, and the Institution's acknowledgement that the allowable indirect cost rate is up to 25%.<br>Optional letters of support from collaborators can be appended but are not required. Institutional and/or collaborators' commitment(s) to supplement funding for distinctive components of an overall research proposal is allowable but not required. Any key personnel's support should be included in the biosketches, not the support letters.<br>12. **Validate:** Review entire proposal for missing required information<br>13. **Signature Page:** Before submitting the entry, complete all fields within the signature page. An electronic signature is required from the Applicant/PI, and a Signing Official from the applicant's institution. **Entries will not be considered for review if required signatures are missing.** |
| **APPLICATION REVIEW** | All proposals will undergo a rigorous peer review by the Challenge Judging Panel. The Challenge Judging Panel is comprised of researchers with expertise in thoracic oncology who will review the applications for merit and appropriateness for funding. If no suitable candidates are found, no awards may be issued.<br>• Each proposal will be scored by at least three qualified reviewers.<br>• Individuals who submit an application in response to this Challenge or are designated as key personnel may not review applications for this RFP. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Challenge Judging Panel members will not score or discuss applications from their own institution or organization. |
| **MERIT REVIEW** | **Scored Review Criteria**<br>Challenge Judging Panel members will score (rate 1-9) Factor 1 and 2 and will determine whether Factor 3 is sufficient or insufficient.<br><br>***Factor 1: Importance of the Research***<br>*Significance*<br>• Evaluate the importance of the proposed research in the context of current scientific challenges and opportunities, either for advancing knowledge within the field, or more broadly. Assess whether the application addresses an important gap in knowledge in the field, would solve a critical problem, or create a valuable conceptual or technical advance.<br>• Evaluate the rationale for undertaking the study, the rigor of the scientific background for the work (e.g., prior literature and/or preliminary data) and whether the scientific background justifies the proposed study.<br>•<br>*Innovation*<br>• Evaluate the extent to which innovation influences the importance of undertaking the proposed research. Note that while technical or conceptual innovation can influence the importance of the proposed research, a project that is not applying novel concepts or approaches may be of critical importance for the field.<br>• Evaluate whether the proposed work applies novel concepts, methods or technologies or uses existing concepts, methods, technologies in novel ways, to enhance the overall impact of the project.<br><br>***Factor 2. Rigor and Feasibility***<br>*Approach*<br>• Evaluate the scientific quality of the proposed work. Evaluate the likelihood that compelling, reproducible findings will result (rigor) and assess whether the proposed studies can be done well and within the timeframes proposed (feasibility).<br><br>*Rigor*<br>• Evaluate the potential to produce unbiased, reproducible, robust data.<br>• Evaluate the rigor of experimental design and whether appropriate controls are in place.<br>• Evaluate whether the sample size is sufficient and well-justified.<br>• Assess the quality of the plans for analysis, interpretation, and reporting of results. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Evaluate whether the investigators presented adequate plans to address relevant biological variables, such as sex or age, in the design, analysis, and reporting.<br>• For applications involving human subjects or vertebrate animals, also evaluate:<br>▪ the rigor of the intervention or study manipulation (if applicable to the study design).<br>▪ whether outcome variables are justified.<br>▪ whether the results will be generalizable or, in the case of a rare disease/special group, relevant to the particular subgroup.<br>▪ whether the sample is appropriate and sufficiently diverse to address the proposed question(s).<br><br>For applications involving human subjects, including clinical trials, assess the adequacy of inclusion plans as appropriate for the scientific goals of the research. Considerations of appropriateness may include disease/condition/behavior incidence, prevalence, or population burden, population representation, and/or current state of the science.<br><br>*Feasibility*<br>• Evaluate whether the proposed approach is sound and achievable, including plans to address problems or new challenges that emerge in the work. For proposed studies in which feasibility may be less certain, evaluate whether the uncertainty is balanced by the potential for major advances.<br>• For applications involving human subjects, including clinical trials, evaluate the adequacy and feasibility of the plan to recruit and retain an appropriately diverse population of participants. Additionally, evaluate the likelihood of successfully achieving the proposed enrollment based on age, racial, ethnic, and sex/gender categories.<br>• For clinical trial applications, evaluate whether the study timeline and milestones are feasible.<br><br>***Factor 3: Expertise and Resources.***<br>*Investigator*<br>• Evaluate whether the investigator(s) have demonstrated background, training, and expertise, as appropriate for their career stage, to conduct the proposed work.<br><br>*Environment*<br>• Evaluate whether the institutional resources are appropriate to ensure the successful execution of the proposed work.<br><br>***Budget and Period of Support*** |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Reviewers will consider whether the budget and the requested period of support are fully justified and reasonable in relation to the proposed research.<br><br>Additional Review Criteria:<br>As applicable for the project proposed, reviewers will consider the following additional items while determining scientific and technical merit and in providing an overall impact score, but will not give scores for these items:<br><br>*Protections for Human Subjects*<br>• For research that involves human subjects but does not involve one of the categories of research that are exempt under 45 CFR Part 46, the committee will evaluate the justification for involvement of human subjects and the proposed protections from research risk relating to their participation according to the following five review criteria: (1) risk to subjects, (2) adequacy of protection against risks, (3) potential benefits to the subjects and others, (4) importance of the knowledge to be gained, and (5) data and safety monitoring for clinical trials.<br>• For research that involves human subjects and meets the criteria for one or more of the categories of research that are exempt under 45 CFR Part 46, the committee will evaluate: (1) the justification for the exemption, (2) human subjects involvement and characteristics, and (3) sources of materials. For additional information on review of the Human Subjects section, please refer to the NIH Guidelines for the Review of Human Subjects.<br>• When the proposed project involves human subjects and/or NIH-defined clinical research, the committee will evaluate the proposed plans for the inclusion (or exclusion) of individuals on the basis of sex/gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as the inclusion (or exclusion) of individuals across the lifespan (including children and older adults) to determine if it is justified in terms of the scientific goals and research strategy proposed. For additional information on review of the Inclusion section, please refer to the NIH Guidelines for the Review of Inclusion in Clinical Research.<br><br>*Vertebrate Animals*<br>• The committee will evaluate the involvement of live vertebrate animals as part of the scientific assessment according to the following criteria: (1) description of proposed procedures involving animals, including species, strains, ages, sex, and total number to be used; (2) justifications for the use of animals versus alternative models and for the appropriateness of the species proposed; (3) interventions to minimize discomfort, distress, pain and injury; and (4) justification for euthanasia method if NOT |

| | |
|---|---|
| | consistent with the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals. Reviewers will assess the use of chimpanzees as they would any other application proposing the use of vertebrate animals. For additional information on review of the Vertebrate Animals section, please refer to the NIH Worksheet for Review of the Vertebrate Animal Section.<br><br>*Biohazards*<br>• Reviewers will assess whether materials or procedures proposed are potentially hazardous to research personnel and/or the environment, and if needed, determine whether adequate protection is proposed. |
| **PROGRAM CONTACT** | • Email questions about this PA to the Department of Scientific Affairs at science@astro.org.<br>• Technical questions about the ProposalCentral submission system should be directed to their customer support at 1-800-875-2562 (Tollfree U.S. and Canada) or by email pcsupport@altum.com. Support is available during normal business hours: 8:30 am - 5:00 pm Eastern Time (Monday through Friday). |
| **GRANT AGREEMENT REQUIREMENTS** | • If your entry is recommended by the ASTRO Challenge Judging Panel, your institution will be required to use AZ Externally Sponsored Research Program Agreement template.<br>• **AstraZeneca is not willing to negotiate grant agreements, so please ensure that your institution is able and willing to abide by these terms before proceeding with your application.**<br>• All proposals recommended for funding by the ERP will be considered as conditional accepted and must be subsequently submitted into the AstraZeneca portal for final global review, approval and contracting through their externally sponsored scientific research partner portal. |