Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory
Lloyd C. Trotman, Ph.D.
Professor, Cancer Center

Decision on Cancer Center Postdoc Funding Monday, January 16, 2023

Dear John,

Your application to the Cancer Center CATCH-32 postdoc funding has been seen by 9 reviewers, including me. Unfortunately, your application was not selected for funding at this point. I would like to add that this round has seen the strongest set of applications and applicants in my memory.

Therefore, I would like to help you and your PI re-/apply for this and national cancer research funding through a short series of tailored training sessions designed to eradicate weaknesses and improve on the strengths of your next application.

Please discuss this with your PI as we will reach out to schedule hopefully with the entire domestic class of 10 eligible cancer center postdocs.

In the meantime, I am attaching reviewer comments and a summary by me that should help prepare for this training.

Sincerely,

Lloyd

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There is overall much enthusiasm for this innovative and interesting project. The research plan shows some well rounded combination of data and experiment driven approaches. Major weaknesses are however lowering the overall ranking of the application. Feasibility is not demonstrated for key aspects and there is a general concern about how focused the project is on cancer. More thought and depth on cancer type, cancer cell types and also stage should replace the rather vague concept of cancer relevance. This would significantly change the review of this application. Another major issue is the lack of a classic CV- 50% of the score.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Nice mix of wet lab and modeling of splicing regulation and negative impact of cancer on the system. Learning the application of CRISPR, use of human cell models, and single-cell long read sequencing will enhance ability for future independent studies.	Long term career goal does not mention cancer. Training plan does not include any specific courses and refers to "building my ability to fundraise". Research plan focuses on describing three experiments rather than stating research aims and describing how they will be addressed and what outcomes may be expected.
Strong track record. Clear presentation of work-flow for the project.	At concept stage. Fundamental research project with less obvious cancer relevance (this is not a research weakness, but relevant to the purpose of this exact application process)
The combination of dCas13 and long-read sequencing was an interesting idea to probe further into splice regulation via MAVE experiments.	Proposal mentions using risdaplam or branaplam but never describes what these drugs are, what they do, and why the candidate wants to use them. In addition, I would recommend organizing these kinds of proposals around 2-3 specific aims with a couple of section headings, as this helps those reading the proposal follow it better.
Innovative biological questions and methods.	The impact and significance for cancer research is not entirely clear to me.
Continuation of splicing MAVE work sounds useful, application to cancer interesting	Less direct relevance than some applications. Candidate is coming from very different areas of biology.
An innovative study is proposed to assess the regulation of PKM and KHK pre-mRNA splicing.	The applicant's long-term commitment to cancer research is unclear. The impact of this study on cancer will likely be realized more long-term.
Project with high potential impact to deeply interrogate splicing isoforms highly relevant for cancer progression	Several portions of the proposal too vague, independent research goals absent or weak; not very innovative (closely related to previous study)
Technology development project in splicing.	Cancer relevance not very high compared to other applications

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