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## **State stem cell fund receives 122 requests for \$62 million**

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The Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund received 122 applications for the \$23 million in grant money it is offering in its second year.

That's nearly 44 percent more than the 85 applications the commission received for its \$15 million first-year budget.

The 122 applications request a total of \$62 million. Last year, the 85 requests totaled more than \$80.8 million.

The commission meets April 17 to make its final decision on the grants, based on the recommendations of a scientific peer review committee.

The numbers are exciting for several reasons, according to Linda Powers, chair of the 15-member commission and a managing director at Toucan Capital Corp. in Bethesda.

The submissions include 65 applications for exploratory grants for scientists new to the stem cell field or those seeking to test an entirely new idea. That's up from 44 exploratory grant requests last year.

Those grants, which fill a void left by limited federal funding, give "us more bang for the buck in the essential role of the Maryland program," said Powers.

The exploratory awards pay for the kinds of science the National Institutes of Health is unlikely to fund, Powers explained.

The NIH money already is limited by federal law, and the NIH budget has remained static for years, though it now supports a growing number of initiatives, Powers said.

That means less money to go around, and little of it is going to the risky prospect of entirely new ideas or scientists, according to Powers.

The commission also has succeeded in getting more translational scientists — that is, clinicians and others who work on translating basic science into treatments — on its scientific peer review board, according to Dan Gincel, the stem cell fund's director.

More of the state's stem cell money should go to translational research, Powers said.

"This fund was created every bit as much to get new treatments to patients as it was to support good science," she said.

Twenty-four applicants this year submitted requests for a new type of grant available for the first time: fellowships for pre-doctoral students and post-doctoral fellows. Those are worth as much as \$55,000 annually for as long as two years.

And in the coming weeks, the commission will begin gathering information on what types of equipment or facilities the state's stem cell scientists would like to share. The group is preparing to launch a new grant next year to pay for core equipment or facilities that researchers in Maryland could share.

Also in the next few weeks, the stem cell fund will launch its own Web site and logo. It now shares the site and logo of TEDCO, the Maryland Technology Development Corp., which administers the fund.