



# News Releases

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

For Immediate Release

Department of Economic Development Announces Recipients of Life Sciences Impact Grant Awards

*Montgomery County awards \$185,000 in grants to eight Life Sciences companies to further business/product development goals*

February 23, 2015, Rockville, MD: The Montgomery County Department of Economic Development (MCDED) is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2015 Life Sciences Impact Grant Awards. The program, introduced in December of 2014, was created to provide financial assistance to life sciences employers to retain jobs and stimulate the organic growth of the life sciences industry in Montgomery County.

“The county is committed to supporting the innovation economy,” commented Sally Sternbach, Acting Director, Department of Economic Development. “The Life Sciences Impact Grant is just one example of the comprehensive portfolio of programs that make up the MC Squared initiative.”

Over twenty-five early to mid-stage biotech companies submitted applications covering sectors from medical devices to drug development. Each of these applications was carefully reviewed by a committee made up of individuals from the department, the private sector and regulatory agencies.

The criteria for selection included, scientific merit, potential for additional economic development within the county, existing financial resources and ability to leverage investment. “We were extremely pleased with the quality and scope of the projects,” said Valerie Fremont, Ph.D., Director of Life Sciences and Health IT for MCDDED. “There are many innovative and exciting developments in the biotech industry across the county which made selection especially difficult.”

After careful consideration, eight Montgomery County companies were selected to receive a total of \$185,000. The recipients of the 2015 Life Sciences Grant were: 20/20 GeneSystems, ConverGene, JMEA Corporation, MockV Solutions, Optical Diagnostics, Therabron Therapeutics, VLP Therapeutics and Zalgen Labs. The awards ranged from \$10,000 to \$25,000.

The effort to establish this initiative was led by Councilmembers Nancy Floreen, Nancy Navarro and Craig Rice.

“We are extremely proud of these Montgomery County companies,” said Councilmember Nancy Floreen, Chair of the Council’s Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee. “Our ability to support the innovative work they are doing by funding these grants reflects our commitment to our local biotech industry.”

“This program is another example of Montgomery County’s commitment to Life Sciences and to economic development,” added Ike Leggett, County Executive. “We were pleased with the interest in the program, proud of this year’s grant recipients and look forward to even more competition next year.”

"Therabron is honored to be selected for a Life Science Impact Grant from a very competitive field of innovative life science companies located in Montgomery County," stated Aprile L. Pilon, Ph.D., President & CEO, Therabron Therapeutics, Inc. "The grant will support manufacturing process development for our lead drug candidate, CG100, currently in a Phase 2 clinical trial in premature infants with respiratory distress."

#### 2015 Life Sciences Impact Grant Awards:

**20/20 GeneSystems** is a drug development biotech company focusing on early detection of lung cancer and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). 20/20 GeneSystems receives an IMPACT grant for evaluating their blood test “PAULA’s Test” in establishing the risk of a patient with COPD to develop lung cancer. The 5-year survival rate of patients diagnosed at an early stage of lung cancer is 80% but declines to less than 5% if the detection is late.

**ConverGene** is a drug development company targeting Acute Myeloid Leukemia. The only standard of care for this form of cancer consists of high-dose toxic chemotherapy. Currently, only 25% of adults affected by this cancer are expected to survive three or more years. ConverGene will use the IMPACT grant to further the drug’s development.

**JMEA Corporation**, an orthopedic medical device company is developing implants and instruments for ultra-minimally invasive spine surgery, reducing the cost of patient care and lessening the chance of post-surgical infections due to hospital stays. The company will apply the IMPACT grant toward a submission for FDA clearance approval of their medical device.

**MockV Solutions** is a biotechnology company providing solutions to the life science industry during the development of biopharmaceuticals. MockV Solutions technology will provide pharmaceutical companies a new, improved way to demonstrate that their manufacturing process is free of viral contamination. The IMPACT grant fund will enable MockV Solutions to conduct studies and generate intellectual property surrounding the company’s new product.

**Opticul Diagnostics** is a diagnostics device company targeting rapid and low cost identification methods of infections. Early diagnosis of diseases saves patients prolonged sickness and suffering, while offering significant savings to the healthcare industry, and obviates the need to prescribe unnecessary

antibiotics. The IMPACT grant awarded to Opticul Diagnostics will support the development of clinical studies needed for the device FDA regulatory clearance.

**Therabron Therapeutics** is a clinical stage drug development company addressing the respiratory illnesses of newborns. The company aims to change how respiratory diseases are managed with new drugs that provide both relief of symptoms and improve the long term health of babies. The IMPACT grant will be applied toward implementing Therabron Therapeutics development and manufacturing of its lead drug.

**VLP Therapeutics**, a vaccine company developing therapeutic and preventive versions of vaccines for infectious diseases and cancers will apply the IMPACT grant funding toward advancing VLP's malaria vaccine candidate into clinical trials. According to the latest WHO estimates, there were about 219 million cases of malaria in 2010 and an estimated 660 000 deaths, mainly children under 5 years of age in Africa.

**Zalgen Labs**, a vaccine and diagnostics company targeting Ebola receives an IMPACT grant for validating the rapid test recently approved by the World Health Organization. The 15 minute, specific and deployable test can mean the difference between containment of an outbreak and uncontrolled spread similar to unprecedented levels recently observed in West Africa.

#### **About the Montgomery County Department of Economic Development**

MCDED is charged with implementing the County's economic development vision of being a globally-competitive, highly-diversified and knowledge-based economy that provides for the retention and growth of existing companies, stimulates new job creation and enhances entrepreneurial opportunities for all businesses. The Department offers a broad range of programs, services, partnering opportunities and strategic financing resources to stimulate and expand the County's business, job and tax base. More information can be found at our website [www.choosemontgomerymd.com](http://www.choosemontgomerymd.com).

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