VEuPathDB: A bioinformatics resource for facilitating data exploration, analysis and integration for vectors and eukaryotic pathogens

Guided workshop BioMalPar XXI: biology and pathology of the malaria parasite May 22, 2025 12-13:30 PM

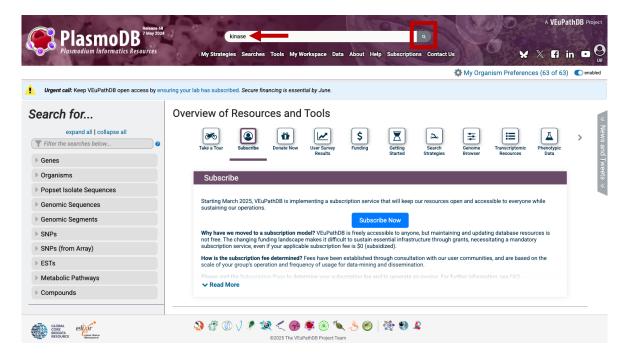
Workshop objectives:

- Introduction to VEuPathDB resources focusing on PlasmoDB and VectorBase.org
- Use site search
- Build a search strategy
- Explore gene pages (optional)

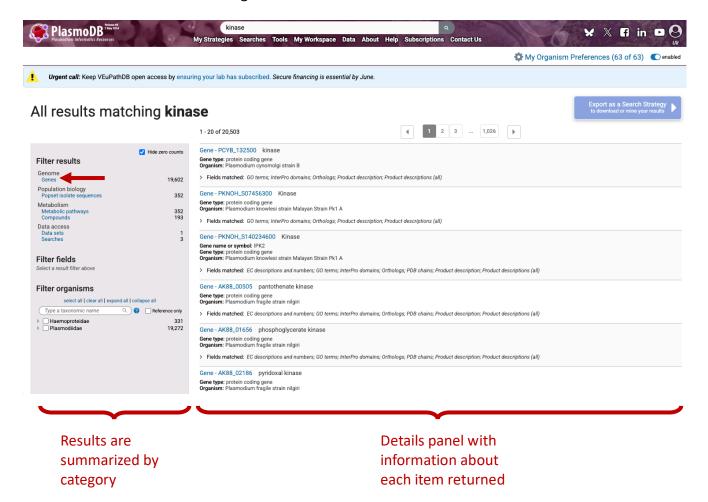
Site Search

The site search is located in the header of any VEuPathDB site and is available from every page. The site search queries the databases for your term or ID and returns a list of pages and documents that contain your query term.

 Search for a keyword. Enter the word kinase in the site search window (arrow in the image below). Then click enter on your keyboard or click on the search icon (square in the image below).

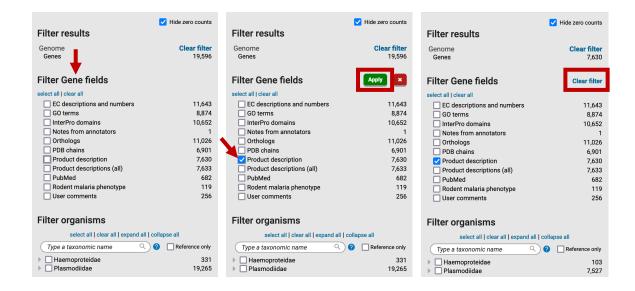


2. Site Search result format: The site search returns a categorized list of pages and documents that contain your term. Site search results are summarized on the left with a details panel on the right. Changing the panel on the left will populate the details panel with that result. What is the total number of results with the word kinase? Are all the results genes?

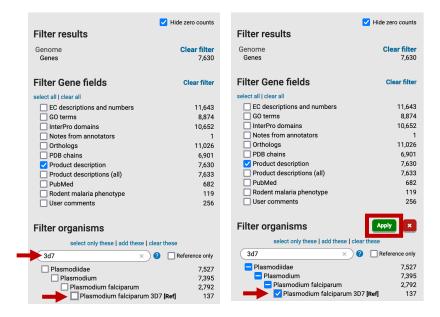


3. **Filter the site search result by category:** How many of the genes included the word kinase in their product descriptions?

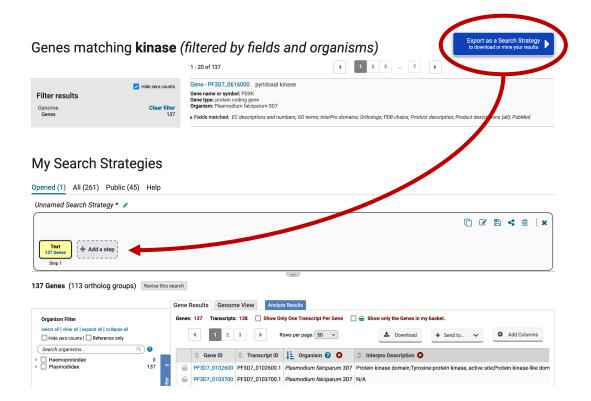
Filter the results so that you only view gene results (hint: click on the word *genes* in the *Filter results* section; arrow in image above) and the Filter Fields section expands to reveal additional filtering options. Select the *Product description* field and choose *Apply* (middle panel below). Once a filter is applied it can be removed by clicking on *Clear filter* (right panel below).



4. **Filter the site search result by organism:** How many of the above genes are found in *Plasmodium falciparum* 3D7? Explore the *Filter organisms* section of the results filter and use the search filter to navigate the tree.



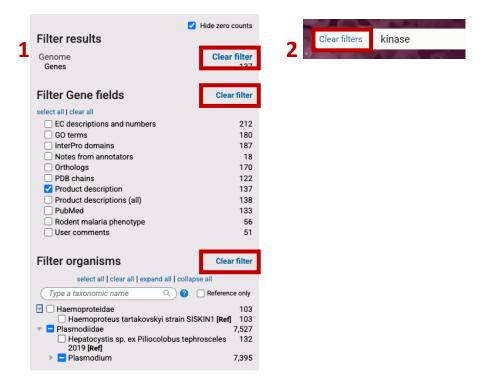
5. **Export the results to a search strategy**. Use the blue *Export as a search strategy* button at the top right-hand side of the results. Once exported you will be able to take advantage of over 100 specialized searches using the Add Step button. We will learn more about this in the next exercise/demo.



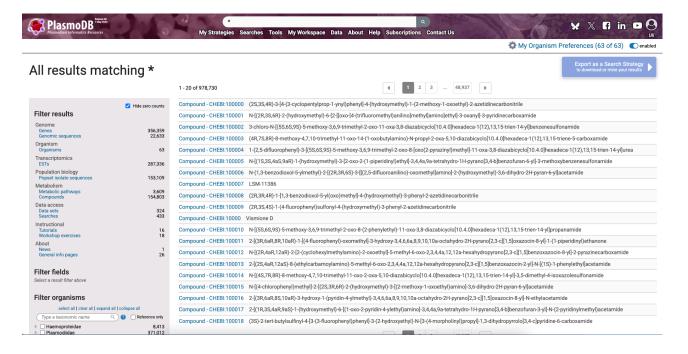
6. Return to the site search results page. You can achieve this in two ways: 1. Your previous results and filter settings were preserved and can be accessed by clicking on the 'back to results' arrow in the site search window. 2. Click on your browser's back arrow.

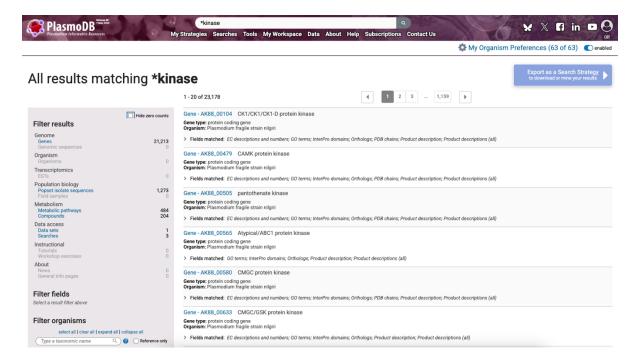


7. **Clear all filters**. You can achieve this in two ways: 1. You can click on each of the clear filter options in the filter results panel (boxes below). 2. You can click on the *clear filters option* in the site search window, which serves to Clear All filters.

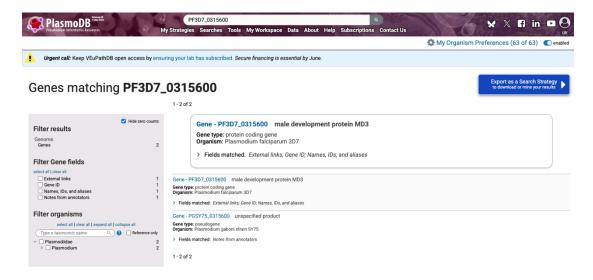


8. **Run a wild card search**. The wild card (denoted by an asterisk *) can be used alone to retrieve all site search results or combined with a word such as *kinase to retrieve compound words ending with the word kinase like phosphofructokinase. As usual results can then be explored using the filters in the Results filter on the left side of the website.



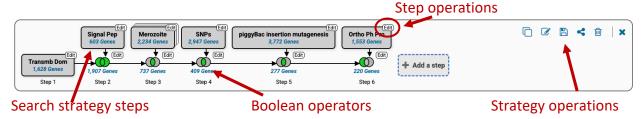


9. **Search for a specific gene ID**. Enter the gene ID in the site search window: *PF3D7_0315600*. When there is an exact match for an ID in the database, the site search offers a card in the details panel to draw attention to the direct link to the gene page.



Search Strategies

Search strategies in VEuPathDB resources allow you to combine results from different datatype searches using Boolean operators (e.g. intersect, union, minus). Search strategies enable you to develop in silico experiments based on data from the species of interest or from other species (or strains) by leveraging orthology.



Getting started with your first search strategy

There are a few things to consider before developing a search strategy:

- 1. What is your question? Or what are you trying to find out? (overall strategy)
- 2. Can you break down your question into smaller components? (strategy steps)
- 3. What data or analyses can be used to answer the various components of your main question?
- 4. How will you combine the different components of your question? Ie. Which Boolean operators.

Example question

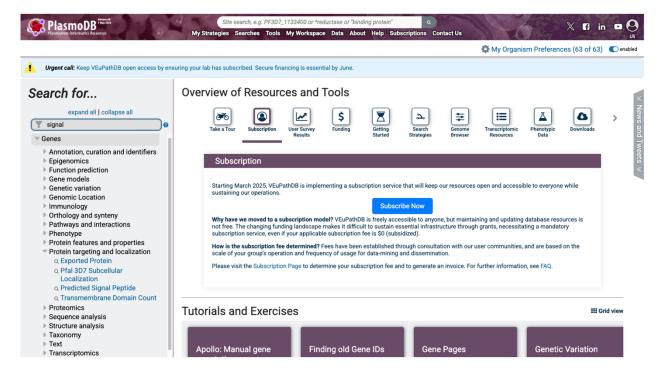
Big question: I would like to identify possible *Plasmodium* vaccine candidates.

Let's break it down:

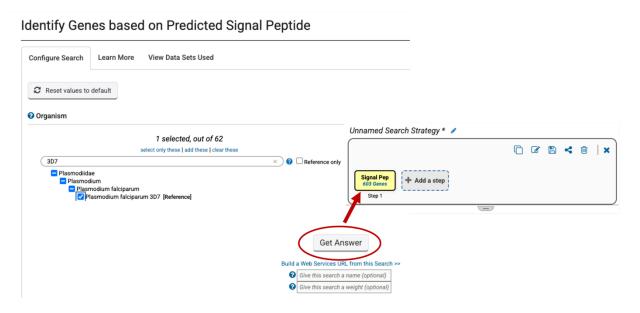
- 1. What are the characteristics of a *Plasmodium* protein that might be a good vaccine candidate?
 - a. Secreted protein (proteins with a predicted secretory signal peptide).
 - b. Membrane proteins (proteins with transmembrane domains).
 - c. Expressed at a specific developmental stage (transcriptomics and/or proteomics).
 - d. What about homology with host proteins? (proteins with specific phyletic patterns).

Let's break it down:

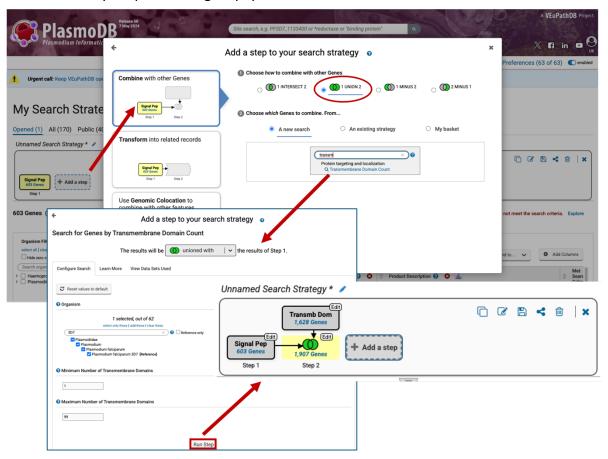
1. Explore the types of searches available in PlasmoDB. What searches can identify genes that are secreted or membrane-bound? Expand the menu on the left-hand side of the home page and look at the available searches. Hint: try filtering the searches with a keyword like "signal peptide," "secreted," or "transmembrane."



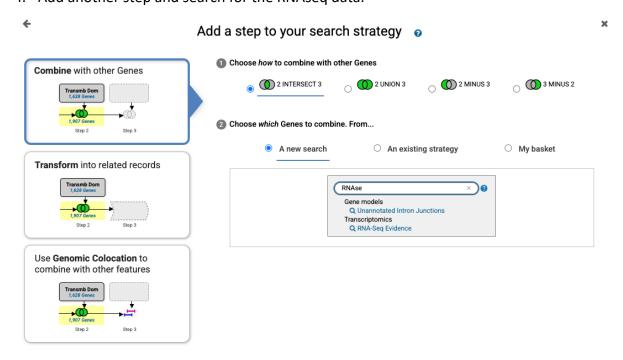
2. Start by searching for all genes in *P. falciparum* 3D7 with a predicted secretory signal peptide.



3. Expand your strategy by adding a step of all genes with at least one transmembrane domain. Think about how you will combine the results of the transmembrane domain search and your previous signal peptide results.



4. Add another step and search for the RNAseq data.



Notice that there are different data sets and different types of searches for each dataset:

FC: Fold change search allows you to find genes with expression profiles by comparing experimental samples.

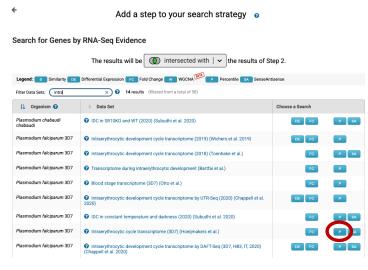
DE: Differential expression is available for experiments with biological replicates, enabling comparisons with statistical power.

P: Percentile search allows you to identify genes expressed at the desired expression level compared to all other genes in the genome.

SA: Sense anti-sense searches are available for strand-specific data, enabling exploration of antisense expression compared to sense expression.

For this step, select the percentile search for the *P. falciparum* experiment: "Intraerythrocytic cycle transcriptome (3D7)".

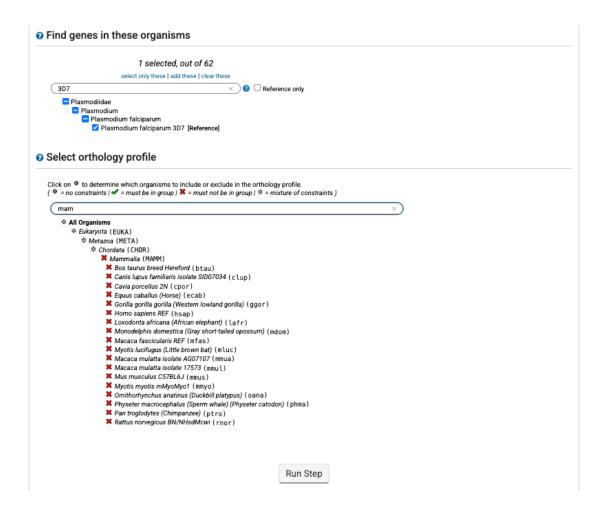
Configure this search to find all genes highly expressed in the merozoite stages (40-5 hours post-invasion.



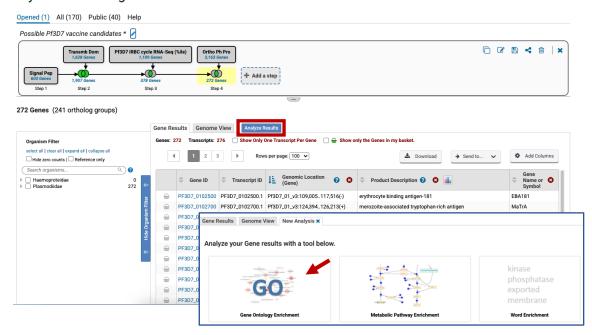




5. How many of your genes do not have orthologs in mammals? To find out, add a step, then run the "Orthology Phylogenetic Profile" search. Configure this search to find all genes in PlasmoDB that do not have orthologs in mammals.

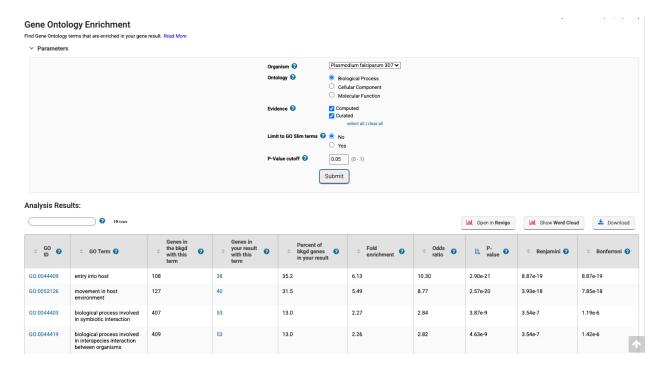


My Search Strategies



Explore these results – do these make sense? Are any functions enriched in these results? You can find this out by running a GO enrichment analysis:

- Click on the Analyze Results tab.
- Click on the GO enrichment op1on.
- Select a GO category to enrich for (e.g., Biological process, cellular component, or molecular function).



The strategy developed in this exercise may be accessed using this link: https://plasmodb.org/plasmo/app/workspace/strategies/import/df16787b3f9044db

A variation of the above strategy that leverages additional data may be accessed using this link:

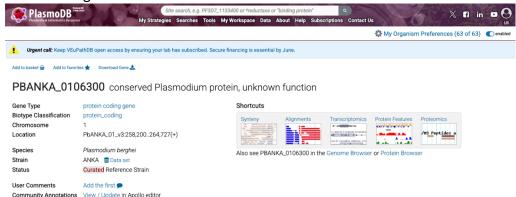
https://plasmodb.org/plasmo/app/workspace/strategies/import/66b5340817f0b0ed

Gene Pages

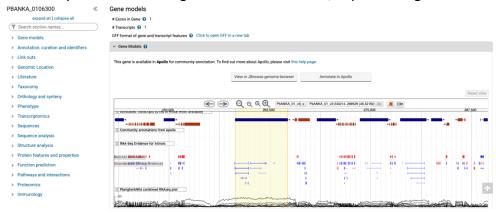
Gene pages provide an encyclopedic view of all the information available in the database on a gene-by-gene basis.

1. Visit the gene page for PBANKA_0106300: https://plasmodb.org/plasmo/app/record/gene/PBANKA_0106300

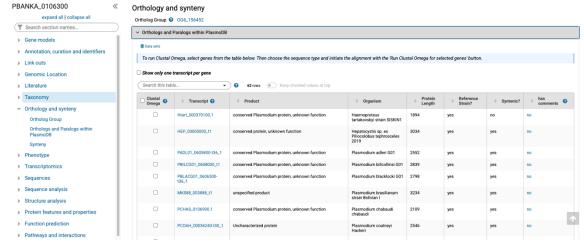
2. What is the gene called?



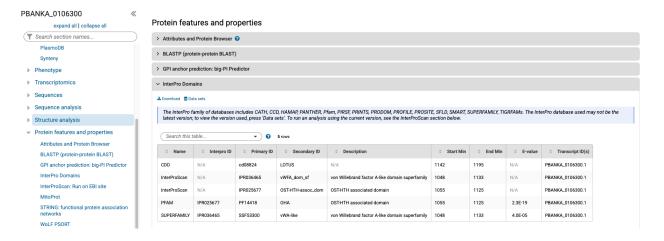
3. How many exons does this gene have? To find out, explore the gene model section.



4. Does this gene have orthologs across organisms in PlasmoDB? What is it called in other organisms? To find out, explore the orthology section of the gene page.



5. Explore the protein features and properties section of the gene page. Does this gene have any InterPro domains? Do you think the product description of this gene should be changed?



6. Explore the transcriptomics section of the gene page. Notice there are two types of transcriptomic data sets available: bulk and single-cell RNASeq.

