UNM Health Sciences Pilot Funding Program

Request for Applications – Fall 2026

The UNM Health Sciences Center (HSC) Pilot Funding Program provides HSC faculty from all colleges and schools with funding to conduct feasibility studies and obtain the preliminary data needed to be competitive for extramural funding.

Pilot funding is also available for proposals that have been reviewed by an external funding agency and received a strong recommendation but were not funded (i.e. NIH proposals that were peer reviewed and received positive and actionable feedback). In this case, HSC pilot funding can provide support for developing a crucial aspect of the project in response to reviewers' comments, such as a need for more preliminary data or analysis.

The UNM Health Sciences Pilot Funding Program provides support for projects spanning the full translational spectrum, from basic science to health services and community-based research. Funding is available for research in a wide range of health-related areas, including **but not limited to**:

- Brain and Behavioral Health
- Cardiovascular and Metabolic Health
- Child Health Research
- Data Science & AI
- Dissemination & Implementation Science
- Environmental Health Sciences
- Infectious Diseases & Immunity
- Substance Use Disorders
- Women's Health

Important Dates

RFA Release:
June 29, 2026

Information Session:
August 6, 2026

Required LOI Due:
August 31, 2026

Full Application Due:
October 5, 2026

Project Period: January 1, 2027 – December 31, 2027

Upcoming Cycle:
RFA Release: 1/4/27
LOI Due: 3/1/27
Application Due: 4/12/27
Project Period: 7/1/27 – 6/30/28

We will award pilot funds up to **$25,000** to be spent from January 1, 2027 – December 31, 2027. ***All funds must be spent during the one-year budget period***. Although the application requirements are similar to an NIH grant, the scope of the proposed project should be reasonably completed within a one-year project period.

The number of awards per cycle is dependent upon the availability of funds. We anticipate continuing to offer two funding cycles per year.

Information Session

The HSC Research Development Office is hosting an Information Session on **Thursday, August 6, 2026, 1 – 2 pm**. Please join us to learn more about the program and how to prepare your application.

Information Session Zoom Link

https://hsc-unm.zoom.us/j/99717489759?pwd=Hd6R2Zz9sfJ79lfe7mmYSrnWxnhFVr.1
Passcode: Pilots!

Eligibility and Project Requirements

- **The Principal Investigator (PI) must have a *primary* appointment as UNM Health Sciences faculty.** The PI must be regular faculty at UNM HSC who has at least a 0.5 FTE position. Staff who hold a Letter of Academic Title are eligible to be PI for this opportunity.
- **Investigators with an active HSC Pilot Program award are not eligible to apply.**
- **Investigators must submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) Form.** The LOI is not binding and is not part of the application review. The LOI will assist us to begin planning for the review of your application. (See below for instructions on submitting the LOI.)
- **Multiple Principal Investigators (MPIs) are not permitted**. We encourage including co-investigators, as applicable.
- **Investigators may submit only one application per cycle as PI.** A PI can serve as a Co-I on a different application and Co-I on multiple applications.
- **Approvals.** To ensure the project can be completed within the 12-month funding period, ***all required approvals (i.e. IRB, IACUC, etc.) must be in place at the time of the full application submission***. Additionally:
    - The PI of the pilot application must also be the PI of the IRB or IACUC protocol.
    - The pilot project title must match the IRB or IACUC protocol title. Any differences in project tile must be clearly justified in the application.

Please contact the HSC Research Development Office with any questions related to eligibility and approval requirements.

How to Apply

Letter of Intent: To be eligible to submit, faculty must complete the Letter of Intent (LOI) form by Monday, **August 31, 2026, 5 pm MST**. The LOI form includes a 250-word summary of your proposal. The LOI is used for administrative purposes; it is not binding and is not reviewed.

LOI Form: https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/019ea8dd9c087f9092688360ed0cf168

Full Application: Full applications are due on Monday, **October 5, 2026, by 5 pm MDT**, and must be submitted through the Smartsheet form linked below. The link will become available the day after the LOI submission due date.

Full Application Form: https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/019ea8dcb565793c894e0b3b61841fb3

Formatting guidelines – All submitted documents should adhere to the standard NIH formatting specifications:

- 11-point Arial font

- Single-spaced
- ½'' margins on all sides
- 8 ½'' by 11'' (i.e. standard size) paper

Additionally, **please number all pages and include the PI's name in the right-hand header**.

The following documents are required with your submission and must be uploaded as a **single PDF** to the Smartsheet application form:

1. **Project Summary/Abstract (30 lines of text)** – *Provide a concise description of the project, including the project's broad long-term objectives, specific aims, research design and methods, and anticipated outcomes.* **Please note: If funded, this abstract will be posted on the Office of Research website.**
2. **Research Strategy (5 pages total)** – include the following sections:
   - **Specific Aims (1 page)** – *State concisely the goals of the proposed research and summarize the expected outcome(s), including the impact that the results of the proposed research will have on the research field(s) involved.*

     List succinctly the specific objectives of the research proposed (e.g., to test a stated hypothesis, create a novel design, solve a specific problem, challenge an existing paradigm or clinical practice, address a critical barrier to progress in the field, or develop new technology).
   - **Significance –** *Explain the importance of the problem or critical barrier to progress that the proposed project addresses.*

     Describe the strengths and weaknesses in the rigor of the prior research (both published and unpublished) that serves as the key support for the proposed project.

     Explain how the proposed project will improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice in one or more broad fields.
   - **Innovation** – *Explain how the application challenges and seeks to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms.*

     Describe any novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation or interventions to be developed or used, and any advantage over existing methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.

     Explain any refinements, improvements, or new applications of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.
   - **Preliminary Studies** – *Describe preliminary studies, data and/or experience pertinent to this application.*
   - **Approach –** *Describe the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project.*

     Describe the experimental design and methods proposed and how they will achieve robust and unbiased results.

     Include how the data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted.
     Discuss potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success anticipated to achieve the aims.
3. **References (not included in 5 pages)**

4. **Timeline** – Include a timeline with major research activities that demonstrates how you will complete the project during the 12-month period.
5. **Plan for Extramural Funding (up to 1 page) –** Describe your plans for pursuing extramural funding to continue the work of the project after the project period, including specific agencies and/or funding opportunities that you will target and planned submission dates.
6. **Other Support –** Use the NIH format to list any other current or pending funding (intramural and extramural). For each project, include the project title, major goals, status of support (active or pending), name of PD/PI, source of support, project period (start and end date), and your FTE on the project (if applicable). Include explanation of any overlap with the current pilot proposal.
7. **HSC Pilot Resubmission Documentation (if applicable)** – If this application is a resubmission of a prior HSC Pilot Funding Program submission, please include your prior summary statement with reviewer comments and brief narrative of how you have addressed the reviewers' comments and revised your project for the current submission.
8. **External Peer-Reviewed Proposal Documentation (if applicable)** – If this application is for a peer-reviewed proposal that received a strong recommendation from an external agency but was not funded, include the reviewer comments, score (if applicable), and a description (up to 1 page) of how the pilot funding will be used to address the reviewer comments in preparation for a resubmission. In your description, include the original sponsor, RFA, submission date, and expected resubmission date.
9. **Biosketch(s) for PI and Co-Investigators –** Use the NIH Biographical Sketch Common Form/Bio Sketch Supplement format.
10. **Budget / Budget Justification –** Include a table of all costs and brief narrative description of each cost. See Budget Guidelines below and attached Budget Template.
11. **Approval Letter (IRB/IACUC) –** To ensure the project can be completed within the 12-month funding period, ***all required approvals (i.e. IRB, IACUC approval, etc.) must be in place at the time of the application submission***. Additionally:
    - The PI of the pilot application must be the same PI who is listed on the study protocol and approval letter.
    - The title of both pilot application and protocol should also be the same; if the titles are different, you must include with your application a brief justification explaining why the titles are different.
12. **Letters of Support** – **A letter from the PI's Department Chair or Division Chief is required**, including a clear statement of departmental commitment regarding protected time for research and, if applicable, departmental funding for cost sharing of the proposed research. Other letters of support may be included to demonstrate support as needed, such as from core facilities, external (non-UNM HSC) collaborators and consultants.

Budget Guidelines

Investigators should work with the appropriate departmental research administration and core facility and center managers for developing a budget. Applicants are highly encouraged to use UNM HSC core facilities and resources where applicable. Please visit the HSC Office of Research website to learn more about core facilities and shared resources. You may also contact the Research Development Office for assistance with navigating facilities and resources for your project.

All funds must be spent during the one-year project period. Any unspent funds at the close of the award period will revert back to the HSC Pilot Funding Program for allocation to future pilot projects. Once awarded, major budget changes must be approved in advance by the Office of Research.

All costs must be project specific and described in your budget justification. See attached Budget Template.

Banner Tax: The budget must include a Banner Tax (1% tax on all non-salary expenses) – this is a university-wide service charge applied to all indices in the Banner financial information system.

***Unallowable costs include*:**

- Faculty salaries
- Postdoctoral salaries
- Administrative or office supply costs (office supplies, paper, ink, telephone, etc.)
- Computers/Software
- Student tuitions or stipends (including graduate students)
- Telephone
- Business meals or hospitality (no food, beverages or alcohol)
- Travel
- Publication costs
- Other items typically supported by indirect costs

Evaluation Criteria

Successful projects will align with the mission of the UNM Health Sciences to improve the health of people in New Mexico through innovative research, from basic science to clinical and community-based research. The following criteria, based on NIH's simplified review criteria factors, will be used to evaluate proposals:

Factor 1: Importance of the Research (Significance, Innovation)

Factor 2: Rigor and Feasibility (Approach)

Factor 3: Expertise and Resources (Investigators, Environment)

Additional review considerations include:

- Plan for and probability of obtaining extramural funding, based on the Research Strategy and Plan for Extramural Funding (see above)
- Previously peer-reviewed by external agency and received strong recommendation. The proposal must demonstrate how the pilot project will address the reviewer comments and enhance potential for extramural funding.
- Early-stage investigator (ESI) status, per NIH's definition
- Interprofessional and/or interdisciplinary collaborations
- Alignment with HSC strategic priority areas
- Utilization of UNM shared cores, facilities and resources

Due to the wide range of projects supported, the HSC Pilot Funding Program relies on a multidisciplinary review panel. Although we prioritize assigning reviewers who have sufficient expertise in the applicant's research area, to ensure each proposal receives a fair evaluation, panel members from other disciplines

may also participate in discussion and the scoring process. This approach provides diverse perspectives and ensures consistency across applications. Accordingly, as typically required for extramural funding, applicants should prepare proposals that clearly communicate the significance, innovation, and feasibility of the proposed work to subject matter experts as well as experts from other scientific disciplines.

Award Requirements

- Reporting requirements: The PI must submit a 6-months progress report, including progress on study activities, budget review, and any barriers to progress.
- A Final Progress Report is due within 45 days of project end date.
- Pilot awardees are expected to join the HSC Pilot Funding Review Committee for at least one term (two years, with two cycles per year).
- Pilot awardees are highly encouraged to use existing resources for research development and grant-writing support to maximize potential for obtaining extramural funding.

Questions/Consultation Requests

Please contact the HSC Research Development Office (RDO) with any questions about the program or application process. You may also request a consultation to discuss your project and needed resources; please contact us at least two weeks prior to the due date.

HSC Pilot Program Budget Template

Budget Category	Cost
PERSONNEL *Note*: Faculty salaries, student tuition and stipends, and postdoctoral salaries are not allowable. Costs for staff FTE (salary/fringe) and hourly student employees are allowable.	
Total Personnel:	
EQUIPMENT (itemize)	
SUPPLIES (itemize)	
OTHER COSTS (i.e. core facility/service fees, participant incentives, etc.) (itemize)	
BANNER TAX (1% charge on all non-personnel costs)	
TOTAL:	

BUDGET JUSTIFICATION: (*Provide a detailed description and justification of all the costs above, clearly indicating how each cost is aligned with the project's specific aims.*)