UNM Health Sciences Pilot Funding Program

Request for Applications

The UNM Health Sciences Center (HSC) Office of Research is pleased to announce a new pilot funding program available to all HSC faculty. The purpose of the Pilot Funding Program is to provide HSC faculty with funding to conduct feasibility studies and/or 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 scored close to the payline). In this case, the pilot award 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:
February 20, 2025

Required LOI Due:
March 10, 2025

Full Application Due:
April 14, 2025

Project Period: July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

Upcoming Cycle:
RFA Release: 7/1/25
LOI Due: 9/1/25
Application Due: 10/13/25
Project Period: 1/2/26 – 12/31/26

We will award pilot funds up to **$25,000** to be spent from July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026. ***All funds must be spent during the one-year budget period***. All awards are dependent upon the availability of funds. We anticipate offering two funding cycles per year.

Eligibility and Project Requirements

- **Principal Investigators must have a *primary* appointment as UNM Health Sciences faculty.** Funding is restricted to regular faculty at UNM HSC who have at least a 0.5 FTE position. Staff who hold a Letter of Academic Title are eligible to be PI for this opportunity.
- **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.
- **Approvals.** To ensure the project can be completed within the 12-month funding period, all required approvals (i.e. IRB, IACUC approval, etc.) should be in place at the time of the

application submission. Because this is a new program and RFA, the Office of Research will allow some leniency in this requirement for this first cycle. Projects must be *at least submitted* for IRB/IACUC approval by the full application due date. If awarded, disbursement of funding will be contingent upon receiving approval no later than July 31, 2025.

- **Reporting requirements:** PIs 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.

How to Apply

Letter of Intent: To be eligible to submit, faculty must complete the Letter of Intent (LOI) form **here** by **March 10, 2025, 5 pm MST**. The LOI form includes a 250-word summary of your proposal.

Full Application: Full applications are due on **April 14, 2025, by 5 pm MT**, and must be submitted through the Smartsheet form linked below.

Application Form: **Full application**

Formatting guidelines – All attached 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 name of the PI 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. **Research Strategy (5 pages total)** – include the following sections:
   - **Specific Aims** – *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 the PIs 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.

2. **References (not included in 5 pages)**
3. **Timeline** – Include a timeline with major research activities that demonstrates how you will complete the project during the 12-month period.
4. **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.
5. **Other Support –** Include a list of 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). See NIH's format as a guide.
6. **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.
7. **Biosketch(s) for PI and Co-Investigators (NIH 5-page biosketch)***
8. **Budget / Budget Justification –** Include a table of all costs and brief narrative description of each cost. See Budget Guidelines below.
9. **Approval Letter (IRB/IACUC) –** Because this is a new program and RFA, the Office of Research will allow some leniency in this requirement for this first cycle. Projects must be *at least submitted* for IRB/IAUC approval by the full application due date. If awarded, disbursement of funding will be contingent upon receiving approval no later than July 31, 2025.
10. **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.

* *Please note*: NIH is moving to a new Biosketch format that must be prepared using SciENcv for submissions on or after **May 25, 2025**. For this HSC Pilot Program cycle, either the current or new format is acceptable. The new NIH format will be required in future Pilot Program cycles.

Budget Guidelines

Investigators should work with the appropriate core facility and center managers for developing a budget. *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 Office of Research for allocation to future pilot projects. Once awarded, major budget changes must be approved in advance by the Office of Research.

***Unallowable costs*:**

- Faculty salaries
- Postdoctoral salaries
- Administrative or office supply costs (office supplies, paper, ink, telephone, etc.)
- 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 UNM Health Sciences' mission to improve the health of people in New Mexico through innovative research, from basic science to clinical and community-based studies. 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 (Investigator, 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
- Early-stage investigator (ESI) status
- Interprofessional and/or interdisciplinary collaborations
- Alignment with HSC strategic priority areas
- Utilization of UNM shared cores, facilities and resources

Questions/Consultation Requests

Please contact Kara McKinney, Associate Director for Research Development, 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.