

Looking Forward: NC A&T and UNC-CH Collaborative Research Request for Proposals

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Research is in an era of unprecedented discovery. Powerful new tools and technologies allow for deeper understandings of the world in which we live. As problems become more complex, researchers with divergent expertise need to collaborate to create new knowledge, generate new ideas, pursue groundbreaking research, solve difficult problems, and ensure outcomes are equitable for the broadest range of intended beneficiaries.

As part of the NC A&T and UNC-CH collaborative framework, the two universities are taking a new approach to the development of cross-disciplinary research by establishing pilot funding for collaborative teams that will think through emerging problems and develop innovative solutions. This pilot funding will nurture research innovation and risk-taking endeavors to build a culture between the two universities that promotes discovery and curiosity while recognizing and rewarding exceptional performance. The goal is to incentivize researchers to generate new ideas that address the following three areas:

- Data Science and Society
- Environment, Climate & Environmental Justice
- Health Disparities

Key Dates:

January 4, 2022: Stage 1 Expression of Interest due

January 28, 2022: Full proposal invitations released to EOI applicants

TBD: Full proposals due

Funding

The pilot funding will be awarded to one project in each area at \$100,000 per year for two years. The process is structured as a **two-phase application process**: a two-page Expression of Interest (EOI) followed by a full proposal. The EOIs will be reviewed and a maximum of 9 (up to 3 from each area) will be selected to submit final proposals.

Stage 1: Expressions of Interest

Two-page Expressions of Interest (EOI) will be submitted electronically to looking_forward@unc.edu on or before January 4, 2022. The Expressions of Interest should provide a title and description of the proposed research program, and describe the proposal team,

which should have one faculty member from each institution co-leading the project (dual PIs). Beyond the co-leads, and if other faculty are on the team, at least one faculty member should be from each institution. The research description should provide a compelling rationale for success of the proposed program.

This description should also provide a rationale for the inclusion of participating key personnel. There is no budget requirement for the EOI.

Please use 1-inch margins and a font size no smaller than 11 point and no less than 1.15 line spacing to ensure readability.

The EOIs will be reviewed by a team of researchers from each institution. On or around January 28, 2022, up to 9 EOIs (no more than 3 from each of the three areas) will be invited to submit a full proposal.

Stage 2: Full Proposals (upon invitation only)

Three full proposals will be awarded: one from each area. The proposer may request up to \$100,000/year over a 2-year period. Cost-sharing/cost-matching of funds from units within the two universities and other institutions, if offered, will become a term and condition of the award, but it will not be a review criterion. Details of alternative sources of support should be outlined in the proposal as well as in Letters of Support from the entity providing the funds.

Please note that these funds are governed by the applicable university policies on research expenditures and compliance. This includes, but is not limited to, the Research Code of Conduct and Standards as well as the policies pertaining to human subjects and privacy, vertebrate animals, hazardous materials, export controls, and conflicts of interest. Overhead costs are not required except for fringe benefits on salaries.

Full proposals will consist of the following components:

1. Cover Page
2. Project Description
3. References
4. Budget
5. Budget Justification
6. Biosketch
7. Other current support
8. Letters of Support

Detailed instructions for each component are as follows:

(1) Proposal Cover Page

- Title of Project
- List of 5 Key Words
- Dual PIs' names, institutions, email and phone, departments, and colleges/schools/centers. Place an * beside the name of the PI who will serve as the point-of-contact for all communications related to this RFP.

- List of Other Key Personnel (Names, Affiliations and Project Effort)
- Total Amount of Funding Requested

(2) Project Description (6 pages):

Please use 1-inch margins and use a font size no smaller than 11 point to ensure readability. The Project Description should be written with a broad scholarly audience in mind.

The Project Description should include sufficient detail such that reviewers can evaluate all review criteria (selected to address the appropriateness and feasibility of the proposed plans). The project description must articulate a clear set of goals that are aspirational yet attainable. Preliminary data are not required but teams must demonstrate that they can successfully advance the project.

The project description should include the following sections (suggested page allocation):

- *Research Plan (~4 pages)*: This section should address how the proposed investigation/research activities are consistent with the Key Review Criteria. It should include a discussion of the major challenges in the field, a description of innovativeness of the proposed research, how it would solve these challenges, and the impact it would have on the challenge. This section should also include a description of convergence: how the project will leverage expertise from the two universities—i.e., how the different parts will form a greater whole and contribute to the project’s success.
- *Sustainability Plan (~0.5 pages)*: This is a detailed plan for sustainability of the proposed research program by attracting extramural support. It includes a description of specific sources of extramural funding that will be targeted for future proposals. Plans for extramural funding should be as specific as possible, including the name of the private or public sponsor, agency or source names, agency programs that would be the source of funding, timelines for proposal submissions, and potential amounts of funding.
- *Management Plan, Timeline, and Measures of Success (~1.5 pages)*: This section includes a description of the PIs’ leadership experience, how each member of the key personnel contributes to the team, and how the interdisciplinary team will function as a unit and form a greater whole that promote new ways of thinking to push disciplinary boundaries. This section should also include an outline, chart, or timeline of the project activities, with milestones to be achieved in the first year of funding and metrics to gauge success throughout the two years of funding.

(3) References Cited (Does not count toward the 6-page limit)

Include a comprehensive list of any references cited in the project description. Any format appropriate for your field of work is acceptable; formats with full titles and journal names are preferred.

(4) Budget

Please use either the NIH PHS 398 or the NSF 1030 budget template to provide a single two-year budget with justification. Funds may be used for any legitimate research-related expense. Please note the following:

- Minimal faculty salary may be included. However, if teams choose to include paid effort for faculty in the budget (as opposed to cost-shared effort), they must discuss these plans

with representatives from the Vice Chancellors for Research at their respective institutions.

- Funds may be used to arrange for course buyouts for those with large teaching expectations.
- Funds **cannot** be used for administrative support, support of workshops/symposia, or F&A costs.
- Additionally, funds should not be used to develop small grants program or sub-awards.
- Use of funds for equipment purchase is discouraged, but if new equipment is required to meet the goals and milestones of the project, a detailed justification will need to be included.
- Travel for conference-related expenses should be limited to no more than \$5,000 per year, and detailed justification must be provided about how the travel will increase the chances of extramural funding for the project.
- Please note that the requested funds for Year 1 should specifically address how the milestones outlined in the Research Plan for Year 1 will be achieved.

(5) *Please provide a Budget Justification limited to no more than 2 pages.*

(6) *Biosketches*

Biosketches in NIH or NSF standard format are required for the PI(s) and all senior personnel (co-Investigators, collaborators, or those providing significant contributions to the intellectual development of the project). Please use a current or recent NIH/NSF format and appropriate instructions for NIH or NSF format, below:

- NIH Biosketch. Section A should provide a statement that describes how the included faculty's contribution and expertise are both required and sufficient to accomplish the proposal's stated goals.
- NSF Biosketch. In addition to the 2-page Biosketch, include a ~0.5-page narrative statement (comparable to the NIH Section A) that describes how the included faculty's contribution and expertise are both required and sufficient to accomplish the proposal's stated goals.

(7) *Other Support*

Information about current research funding is required for the PI(s) and all senior personnel (co-Investigators, collaborators, or those providing significant contributions to the intellectual development of the project). This information may be provided in *any* reviewer-friendly format including standard NIH Biosketch section D (from forms D-F instructions), NIH Other Support, and NSF Current and Pending Support formats.

We recommend a simple document with the following information for each relevant research funding source:

- Project Title
- Status of Support (current, pending)
- Name of PD/PI
- Role in the Project
- Source of Support

- Primary Place of Performance:
- Project/Proposal Start and End Date (MM/YYYY):
- Total Award Amount (including Indirect Costs)
- Person Months (Calendar/Academic/Summer) per budget period

(8) Letters of Support

Applications including any cost-share/match should include a no more than one-page letter of support from the entity providing these funds. Additionally, one-page letters of support from non-funded collaborators may be included but should not exceed a total of three letters.

Review

Full proposals will be reviewed and ranked by a panel that includes university research Associate/Vice Deans, center/institute Directors from both universities, and faculty from both universities with relevant expertise. The Vice Chancellor for Research from each institution will provide guidance and oversight of the review process.

Rankings for full proposals will be based on the following criteria:

- All criteria listed for the EOI **AND**
- Innovation and originality of the proposed research program as a solution to the stated challenge in the field.
- Clear articulation of the importance of the challenge and the impact that the ideas for the solution can provide to benefit society, culture, community, the environment, or the economy, including the State of North Carolina.
- Clear description and feasibility of the milestones and metrics.
- A coherent management and collaborative work plan that clearly describes feasibility of the milestones and metrics.
- Reasonableness of the budget.

Key Review Criteria

- *Innovation and Impact* – Ability to provide solutions to important challenges and/or generate new fundamental knowledge.
- *Convergence* – Demonstration that the project takes advantage of expertise from the two universities.
- *Sustainability* – Likelihood that the project will lead to support of larger and sustained extramural funding from federal agencies, industry, venture groups, or non-profit organizations.
- *Program Management and Collaboration Plan* – Clearly articulated plan with description of feasibility, work-plan, milestones, project deliverables, evidence of alignment with large-scale extramural support and timeline for soliciting external support.