North Carolina TraCS Institute Pilot Grant Program
$2K Program Guidelines

Purpose

The North Carolina Translational and Clinical Sciences Institute (NC TraCS) is the academic home of the National Institutes of Health Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA). NC TraCS provides small grants of up to $2,000 to assist clinical and translational researchers in implementing a proposed study or moving a research project forward by providing rapid access to funds that will support almost any aspect of promising and innovative research.

Eligible studies must directly involve human subjects, including clinical trials, epidemiological studies, community-based research, and cross-disciplinary basic science research addressing the development of therapies and diagnostics applicable to human disease. Basic science projects must be translational in nature. Priority will be focused on projects done in North Carolina, particularly research focused on one of the 10 health priority areas identified by NC TraCS through a series of meeting with community groups (cancer, cardiovascular disease/hypertension, chronic disease management, diabetes, healthcare access, mental health, nutrition, obesity, physical activity, and substance abuse).

NC TraCS is especially interested in proposals with a focus on one of three areas:
- **Transformative Technologies** – investigators using genomic, proteomic or metabolomics platforms to accelerate a translational discovery toward clinical medicine.
- **Drugs, Devices and Diagnostics development** – investigators that have identified a novel and promising drug target; with priority to proposals that address rare or orphan diseases.
- **Comparative Effectiveness Research** – investigators focused on the study of and dissemination of clinical and translational research in broad populations.

The mission of NC TraCS is to transform all activities relating to clinical and translational research by creating new programs and pathways that make it easier for research to be conducted. While it is understood that projects will include all kinds of expenses, it is important to note that preference will be given to projects that utilize TraCS Cores and Services for some of the work to be performed. A list of available research core facilities which can assist with your project can be found at [www.med.unc.edu/corefacilities](http://www.med.unc.edu/corefacilities). When preparing a proposal, it is highly recommended that applicant teams connect with TraCS experts to receive guidance on budgeting fees for the work to be done.

NC TraCS is no longer able to fund pilot grants where the research is conducted outside the United States. Proposals with a foreign component must be discussed with a TraCS Research Navigator prior to submission - [click here](#) to schedule a consultation.

Eligibility

Eligible to apply as principal investigators (PIs) are:
* UNC-Chapel Hill faculty, doctoral students, and postdoctoral trainees including clinical fellows
* Also eligible are UNC-CH researchers whose appointment allows them to serve as PI on externally sponsored research projects, for instance researchers holding EHRA non-faculty “research scientist” or “investigator” appointments at UNC’s research institutes and centers.
* Faculty members of external NC TraCS Institute-affiliated institutions are eligible if they collaborate with UNC-CH faculty. RTI International and NC A&T State University are now partners in the CTSA with UNC-CH. Applications submitted by investigators from RTI or A&T must also include an investigator from at least one of the other two partner organizations. Therefore, a proposal from an RTI / A&T team is not required to include a UNC-CH investigator, although this is still strongly encouraged.
* Members of community organizations and practice-based research networks who are NC TraCS research collaborators

Co-PIs are allowed, although one person must be identified as the main contact with primary responsibility for the research project and disposition of data obtained. SPA and EHRA non-faculty staff members are not eligible to apply.

*All PIs and Co-Investigators must be members of the NC TraCS Institute – there is no fee to join - see tracs.unc.edu for instructions on how to become a member.*

Non-faculty awardees are required to include a faculty mentor. Mentors must agree to: 1) Provide guidance, encouragement, support, and direction to the PI; 2) ensure that the project is completed on time; 3) Where appropriate, ensure the results are published and the data used for the submission of subsequent extramural grants. The mentor is expected to review interim and final progress reports prior to submission and participate in TraCS-scheduled meetings or conference calls. If a mentored PI leaves UNC **before** the grant ends, TraCS will ask the mentor to become PI and assume responsibility for completing the project and ensuring the funds are used appropriately. If a mentored PI leaves UNC **after** the grant has ended, the mentor accepts responsibility for reporting to TraCS any future results (publications, grants, etc.) that result from the NC TraCS-funded pilot.

**Funding**

Each award will provide up to $2,000 to investigators to perform translational and clinical studies. Grant budgets are to cover expenditures for a 12-month period. Expenditures may begin after IRB/IACUC documentation has been provided to TraCS and must be expended within 12 months. No extensions beyond the 12 months will be considered. It is expected that tangible progress toward achieving the goals of the award will be evident during this time. TraCS staff will work closely with you throughout the grant period to monitor progress and, where necessary, provide mentoring. A six-month interim progress report and a final progress report will be required. TraCS will expect the PI to report whether or not the pilot funding contributed to new external funding.

Budget requests for use of NC TraCS Institute core services and UNC suppliers and service providers, including UNC core research facilities are encouraged. See information about the NC TraCS Services and Resources [here](#).

Pilot grant funds may be budgeted for (1) research support personnel, (2) use of NC TraCS services, including salary support for NC TraCS core faculty such as biostatistics and biomedical informatics faculty, (3) travel necessary to perform the research, (4) equipment, research supplies and core lab costs, or (5) other purposes deemed necessary for the successful execution of the proposed project.

Pilot grant funds may **not be budgeted** for (1) salary support for the UNC-CH PI or UNC-CH faculty collaborators, (2) office supplies or communication costs, including printing, (3) meals or travel, including to conferences, except as required to collect data, (4) professional education or training, (5) computers or audiovisual equipment, (6) manuscript preparation and submission, or (7) indirect costs.
Principal Investigators and Co-Investigators are expected to have salary support from their organizations or other funding sources sufficient to allow them time to direct the project and conduct the research. However, requests for funds from academic partner institutions for faculty salary support or overhead will be considered.

Although a full protocol and IRB submission are not required at the time of this grant application, UNC Chapel Hill IRB approval will be required before funds can be released and research activities begin for projects involving human subjects. Applications to UNC’s IRB must list a UNC faculty member as PI.

**Review criteria**

A review committee will examine each proposal for significance, soundness of methods, translational attributes, and the potential for future external funding or commercialization. If re-submitting a proposal previously submitted to NC TraCS, please provide a summary detailing amendments and improvements to the original proposal. Applicants are limited to one resubmission per proposal, unless the investigator has utilized TraCS resources to substantially amend and improve the proposal as certified by a TraCS Research Navigator.

**New requirements for funded pilot grants**

The NC TraCS Institute is funded through a CTSA grant from NIH’s National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS). NCATS recently instituted a new policy requiring the review and approval of all TraCS pilot grants involving human subjects research prior to TraCS funds being released. Therefore, if your proposal is funded and involves human subjects research, TraCS will require additional documentation to send to NCATS. NCATS expects to complete their review in less than 30 days. The NCATS review can occur concurrently with the IRB review but final NCATS approval is contingent upon IRB approval.

**Application procedure**

Application deadlines are monthly. Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. on the due date. The application is available to complete online [here](#). Notification of awards will be made generally within 7 weeks of the due date. Every applicant will be notified by email whether or not their application is selected for funding.

**Tips for writing a successful application**

1. The “Research Methods” section (maximum 3,750 characters including spaces or about 500 words) corresponds to the Approach section of an NIH application. Describe, with as much detail as necessary, how you will perform your study. The reviewers are drawn from a wide range of scientific disciplines. Therefore, avoid (or define) technical jargon or specialized abbreviations or acronyms. Pitch your narrative toward a more general audience than you might for an NIH Study Section. Your first goal is clarity – if your reviewer doesn’t understand what you’re proposing to do, how are they supposed to get excited by your project?

Pay particular attention to the biostatistical aspects of your project, if statistical analysis is applicable – this is something that derails many applications. Describe and rationalize the number of subjects and the statistical analyses that you will apply to your data. If necessary, consult with the [TraCS Biostatistics service](#).
Address timelines and feasibility. You may be confident that you can complete your work in a year, but the reviewers don’t know that. For example, address how long it will take to recruit the study cohort. Cite numbers.

2. The maximum allowable budget is $2,000, to be expended over a maximum of 1 year. Rationalize your budget - don’t provide a 1-line budget, asking for $2,000 for any given resource. Provide a realistic estimates of costs. The overall project budget may exceed the $2,000 award limit, however the source for the extra required funds must be specified. If the overall project budget is substantially greater than the $2,000 award, explain how the TraCS pilot award is essential to the completion of this project, and why the other funding source is insufficient to complete the project.

3. Please remember that this is a Pilot award. It is very important to describe where this work is going. Assuming the work is successfully completed, what is the next step? An external grant application? Commercialization?