

NC TraCS/UNC Chapel Hill Advancing Collaborative Team Research (ACTeR) – Phase 1 Program Request for Applications (RFA)

The North Carolina Translational and Clinical Sciences Institute (NC TraCS) is the academic home of the NIH Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) at UNC Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). Our mission is to accelerate clinical and translational research from health science to discovery to dissemination to patients and communities.

I. Purpose

The overall goal of the **NC TraCS Team Science** program is to promote multidisciplinary translational research across the UNC campus, the NC TraCS partnership, and the larger Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) program network. Such broad-based research is intended to transcend the conventional ‘section- or division-based’ structure of research universities. Recognizing the logistical hurdles that such an approach can entail, the program for **Advancing Collaborative Team Research (ACTeR)** will support the formation and maintenance of multidisciplinary research teams that comprise investigators from across the campus, from NC TraCS partner institutions, and from other regional institutions with complementary expertise. Support is provided through a combination of competitively reviewed *graduated* direct funding and logistical support awarded in two phases: **Phase 1** (up to 0.25 FTE Project Manager support + \$5,000, for up to 12 months) and **Phase 2** (up to 0.5 FTE Project Manager support + \$50,000, for up to 12 months).

Phase 1	<i>up to 12 months</i>	Phase 2	<i>up to 12 months</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Team building ◇ Mini-symposium support ◇ Outline of a multi-disciplinary project to address an identified public health issue 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Generation of preliminary data ◇ Grant application preparation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Schedules team meetings ◇ Identifies potential funding sources ◇ Identifies potential collaborators 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Embeds in research team ◇ Assists in grant preparation ◇ Coordinates with NC TraCS to enlist other services (e.g. Proposal Development, Community Engagement, Biostats, FastTraCS commercialization)
up to 0.25 FTE Project Manager		up to 0.5 FTE Project Manager	

It can be challenging for teams to bring their idea from concept to completion, especially when there is limited bandwidth among team members. Support through the ACTeR program aims to reduce the organizational and administrative burden of grant preparation on Principal Investigators (PIs), freeing them to focus more on research and team-building. Support through the full ACTeR program enables (i) the recruitment of additional team members to augment the team’s existing expertise, (ii) the formulation and incubation of ideas and plans for a novel project that addresses a research issue in clinical or translational medicine, which (iii) may include the collection of preliminary data, and (iv) the development and management of a large multidisciplinary proposal, from concept to submission.

Applications to the ACTeR program are encouraged from **Teams** of investigators arising from different disciplines, institutions, and diverse communities, that must initially comprise **≥3 investigators** drawn from **≥2 schools or institutions**. We are interested in research that spans the full [Translational Science Spectrum](#), and in supporting Teams working to address as many of the following topics that apply:

- Research on a **clearly identified medical problem or knowledge gap** that lends itself to a **multidisciplinary approach**.
- Research that **generates initial or basic discoveries** relevant to human health or disease regardless of whether the context of the discovery is the laboratory or the field.
- Research that **applies or accelerates discovery into testing** in clinical or population settings.
- Development and/or evaluation of the evidence base that **changes practice**.
- Research that investigates how practice **improves health policy, health outcomes, and the health of populations**.

II. ACTeR Graduated Support Structure

The ACTeR program is designed to encourage and facilitate novel clinical and translational research in its many forms, by providing *graduated multi-phase support* to investigators:

1. **Phase 1 Support (team identification & idea generation)**. For up to *12 months*, ACTeR will provide the following:
 - (a) **Team Science Project Manager Support**. An NC TraCS grants management specialist (up to 0.25 FTE dedicated to the team) will provide logistical support for the nascent team, to ensure they have the opportunity to meet regularly and productively. In Phase 1, the Project Manager (PM) will schedule meetings and organize venues, identify and share upcoming funding opportunities appropriate to the team's goals, and provide support for workshops. The PM will liaise with TraCS services that are identified as beneficial to support the work, including proposal development, biostatistics, epidemiology and research design, and other services as appropriate. They will also provide assistance in preparing the final Phase 1 activities + expenditures report, which can be submitted as part of the Phase 2 application (*see also Section X, "Expected Deliverables"*).
 - (b) **Direct funding, up to \$5,000**. This fiscal support will enable the team to bring in potential collaborators or to convene mini-symposia to facilitate collaborative relationships and team-building.

Goal: By the end of Phase 1, applicants are expected to strengthen their team's existing expertise and convert their idea into a fleshed-out plan for obtaining extramural funding.

2. **Phase 2 Support (generation of preliminary data & preparation of grant application)**. For up to *12 months*, this phase includes support from a Team Science PM (up to 0.5 FTE dedicated to the team) plus up to \$50,000. *More details on the Phase 2 funding can be found in the ACTeR Phase 2 RFA.*

Goal: Submit a competitive large multidisciplinary grant application.

3. **Direct-to-Phase 2 Support (generation of preliminary data & preparation of grant application)**. Multidisciplinary teams having already independently fulfilled the goals of Phase 1 have the option to apply directly for Phase 2 funding, without having had Phase 1 ACTeR support. Investigators should [submit a request to NC TraCS](#) to apply directly for Phase 2 of the program, choosing 'Building Teams,' followed by 'Team Science' from the menu, to ensure they are eligible and competitive. Applications will not be accepted for Direct-to-Phase 2 support without prior approval from TraCS ACTeR administration. *More details can be found in the ACTeR Phase 2 RFA.*

Note: Advancement to Phase 2 is by competitive application only and is not guaranteed to all projects that received Phase 1 support. NC TraCS ACTeR awards are not meant to serve as bridge funds or as supplementary funding for existing grants.

III. Team and PI Eligibility

Eligible teams will comprise ≥ 3 investigators drawn from ≥ 2 schools or institutions. Such teams could include, *but are not limited to*, those that have already formed around a research idea, goal, or identified health problem (e.g., unsuccessful [Creativity Hub](#) applicants or School of Medicine (SOM) [Translational Team Science Award](#) awardees). We anticipate that most teams for Phase 2 support will come from those successfully established in Phase 1 of the ACTeR program.

Teams must identify one UNC-CH-affiliated PI as the main **Contact PI**, who will have primary responsibility for the administrative aspects of the ACTeR program award. Researchers whose appointments allow them to serve as PI on externally sponsored research projects are eligible to apply as **PIs**. This generally means permanent faculty (not adjunct appointments) and includes those with non-faculty appointments like “research scientist,” as well as investigators from research institutes and centers who are eligible to apply for investigator-initiated awards and NIH “R” funding. Applicants from NC A&T, RTI or NC State **are eligible to serve as co-PIs**. Please submit any questions regarding eligibility to the [ACTeR team at NC TraCS](#).

Note: The initial roles and team structure may be redefined/reorganized as the team evolves over the course of the Phase 1 support period.

IV. Use of NC TraCS Services

NC TraCS offers investigators a variety of research services and expertise, and applicants are encouraged to utilize those services in ACTeR applications where appropriate. A full list of NC TraCS services can be found [here](#). NC TraCS services that require the investigator to contribute to the cost of the service should be consulted prior to submission to ensure that the application budget includes accurate information. NC TraCS Research Navigators are available to offer general advice and assistance with applications prior to submission. [Click here](#) to schedule a consultation (choose “Team Science” from the menu).

V. Review Criteria

Applications should be presented in a clear and logical fashion, make a convincing case for the significance of the work, and describe the proposed plans in sufficient detail so an adequate evaluation can be made.

The following review criteria will be considered:

1. A multidisciplinary team and/or new collaboration initially comprising at least three investigators, drawn from at least two schools or institutions.
2. A clearly identified human health issue or knowledge gap that lends itself to a multidisciplinary approach that is novel and has the potential for high impact.
3. Relevance of the proposed study to translational research.
4. Commitment to regular team meetings, which will be organized and scheduled by the PM.
5. An established and feasible timeline for the first year of support. Strong timelines will include plans for a workshop or symposium for the team members to discuss plans, present ideas, bring in external collaborators or speakers, and/or recruit additional team members.
6. Potential for the project/topic to lead to future external funding or a commercialization opportunity.

VI. Application Procedure

Before submitting an application, it is **strongly encouraged** that teams first [consult with NC TraCS Team Science](#). Applications must be submitted using the [NC TraCS online grant portal](#). Teams will need to identify a UNC-affiliated Contact PI and provide the names and affiliations of all other team members and their roles, and a Project Title. The application sections are:

1. **Scientific Abstract:** A summary of the application. (*1,500-character limit, ~250 words*)
2. **Impact:** Summarize the likelihood for your project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on human health (*350-character limit, ~50 words*).
3. **Proposal Narrative:** In a single, combined PDF (*1.5 line spacing, font no smaller than Arial 11, and 1-inch margins, 5-page maximum*). Suggested page limits for each section of the Proposal Narrative are denoted in parentheses.
 - a. **What is the human health issue to be addressed?** Provide a brief description of the problem/challenge as it relates to human health. (*~0.5 page*)
 - b. **What is the project's relevance to translational research?** Describe how your project is relevant to translational research. (*~0.5 page*)
 - c. **What is the proposed solution to the human health issue and the overall objective of your project?** Provide a high-level overview and concise description of your project's solution and overall objectives. If they have already been established, you may include the Aims, Background/Significance, Innovation, and an overview of your Approach. (*~1.5 pages*)
 - d. **Team Overview and Structure:** List all personnel, including the contact PI. Describe the team's composition to-date, identifying all team members, their affiliations, and their roles (e.g., specific expertise, how they will contribute to the project). Describe why your assembled team is unique and required for this project, how the diverse expertise of the team will contribute to its success, and outline any plans for identifying future team members. Reviewers will seek to understand each person's contribution to the success of the grant. (*~1 page*)
 - e. **Timeline of Planned Activities:** Provide a feasible timeline and description of team activities for the Phase 1 support (12-month period). This may include, but is not limited to, i) commitment to routine meetings (e.g., frequency, type of meeting) and ii) plans to develop a workshop or symposium for the team members where they will discuss research, present their ideas, bring in external collaborators or speakers (e.g., when planning will begin, when the workshop will take place, workshop content). Include milestones and project deliverables. (*~1 page*)
 - f. **Funding Potential:** Address the potential fundability of this work by providing any preliminary evidence of topic alignment with *large-scale* extramural support (e.g., aligns with institute's mission, with cleared concepts, or current/past RFAs, any discussions with a program officer, etc). Describe any overarching plans for future multidisciplinary grant applications that could be pursued in Phase 2 (i.e., not just an R01). (*~0.5 page*)
4. **Cited References:** (*PDF, no page limit*)
5. **Budget:** Use [PHS 398 Form Page 4](#) (see also Section VII "Budget Guidelines"). The total budget should not exceed \$5,000. (*PDF, no page limit*)
6. **Budget Justification:** Include sufficient detail for reviewers to assess whether appropriate resources have been requested (see section VII "Budget Guidelines" below). (*PDF, no page limit*)
7. **NIH Biosketches:** Provide for all team members. (*single PDF, no page limit*)

VII. Budget Guidelines

1. Phase 1 ACTeR program support covers expenditures of up to \$5,000 for up to a 12-month period, in addition to up to 0.25 FTE of a dedicated PM. The budget period will begin when the PI indicates that everything is in place to begin. If the team is not ready to start within 2 months of notification of support, NC TraCS reserves the right to withdraw the award. The expectation is that all funds will be expended by the end of the project period, at which point any unexpended funds will be retained by NC TraCS.
2. For most projects, one budget for the total project should be submitted.
3. ACTeR funds may be budgeted for: 1) workshop/symposium costs, 2) associated travel and meals, 3) the use of NC TraCS services, if needed, and 4) other purposes deemed necessary for the successful execution of the proposed project.
4. Funds may **not** be budgeted for 1) salary support for PI or faculty collaborators, 2) professional education or training, 3) manuscript preparation and submission, or 4) indirect costs.

VIII. Other Guidelines

1. NC TraCS staff, and particularly the Team Science PM, will work closely with funded projects throughout the support period to monitor progress and provide assistance where necessary.
2. Teams will meet with ACTeR program staff and provide updates on their activities and progress 6 months after the project start-date.
3. NC TraCS expects the PI to report the outcomes achieved due to the award over the lifetime of the work (e.g., subsequent external funding, publications, presentations and patents, and to acknowledge NC TraCS research support where appropriate).
4. In the event of a major personnel change, the contact PI should notify NC TraCS TS staff.

IX. Submission Instructions and Review

Before submitting an application, it is **strongly encouraged** that teams first [consult with NC TraCS Team Science](#). Applications will be accepted only through the [NC TraCS online submission system](#). Applications are due by 5:00pm (ET) on the due date. See *the NC TraCS website for ACTeR application due dates*. After submitting the application, applicants will receive email confirmation that the application was received. Applications will be reviewed based on their responsiveness to review criteria by a small committee of TS program staff and content experts drawn from the TraCS Pilot Program study section. Applicants will be notified by email whether their application has been selected to receive support within 10 working days of the due date. Partner institutions may have internal submission approval processes that should be completed prior to the NC TraCS submission deadline.

X. Expected Phase 1 Deliverables

At the end of the Phase 1 support period, all teams are required to submit a detailed report of their Phase 1 activities and expenditures (*2-page maximum*).

1. If the team chooses **not** to pursue Phase 2 support, no other paperwork is required beyond this Phase 1 report.
2. If the team chooses to pursue Phase 2 support, the Phase 1 report will become one component of the Phase 2 application, which will include additional documentation such as an outline of the specific aims, the significance and innovation, and the approach. Teams may also work to develop plans for proposed preliminary data studies, detail the evolution/refinement of their team, and identify a variety of potential funding sources to pursue in Phase 2. See *Phase 2 RFA for specific instructions*.