University of Illinois Cancer Center 2023 Pilot Project Program

Request for Applications

University of Illinois Cancer Center Pilot Project Program offers funding for projects proposed by its members to encourage new collaborative cancer research projects. The purpose of these pilot project grants is to stimulate NEW inter-programmatic research initiatives that lead to competitive grant applications to external peer reviewed funding organizations, specifically organizations on the National Cancer Institute (NCI) peer review list available at: https://cancercenters.cancer.gov/documents/PRFundingOrgs508.pdf .

Special Emphasis for this RFA:

The pilot project submitted for consideration for this RFA are required to be focused on project development for a new multi-PI grant submission to NCI.

Most highly desirable topics for 2023 RFA include:

- Cancer Health Disparities focused research
- Projects relevant to the Cancer Center catchment area (catchment link). For data/information related to the catchment area, please contact Dr. Margaret Wright at mewright@uic.edu.
- Intersection of Microbiome and Cancer (including, but not limited to: food insecurity, nutrition, diet, impact on immunotherapy, etc.)
- Liver disease/Hepatocellular Cancer
- Prostate Cancer
- Women's Cancers

Investigator Eligibility
- The project must involve two or more independent principal investigators (PIs), each of whom substantively contribute to the research. PIs should be full or associate members of the cancer center and belong to at least two different Cancer Center programs (Cancer Prevention and Control, Cancer Biology, Translational Oncology). Projects involving a PI from the Cancer Prevention and Control (CPC) program will be given preference.
- An investigator can be PI (or co-PI) on only one project during a funding cycle. Other scientific or clinical advisory roles are allowed on more than one application.
- Applications from investigators with active pilot projects will be administratively disqualified unless the active projects are ending before awards are issued for the new round. (Anticipated award date is May 1, 2022)
- Projects with Cancer Center leaders (Associate Directors and Program Leaders) as PIs/co-PIs will be accepted, but only one project can be awarded with a Cancer Center leader as a PI.
- Investigators who belong to populations that are underrepresented in science are encouraged to apply. For definitions, please follow the link: https://diversity.nih.gov/about-us/population-underrepresented

Research Project Eligibility
It is essential that proposed projects have a strong cancer focus. This pilot funding is meant to support the pursuit of specific experiments needed as preliminary data for extramural funding applications to NIH or similar peer review bodies. Reviewers are NOT looking for broad multiyear projects that read like a complete 5 year grant, or a condensed form of an already submitted NIH grant. The most successful applications are those that explain the concept of the research, give the preliminary data available to date, explain where the project is going in broad terms, and then explain the specific experiments needed to support the hypotheses to an NIH/peer review body. Projects seeking pilot data for resubmission applications should discuss how the project

would address peer review critique received from the funding organization.

- Pilot project funds are <u>not</u> meant to be bridge funding nor to extend the funding available for an established study.
- Proposed projects must not fall within the specific aims of a currently funded project of any of the collaborating investigators.
- Projects should be responsive to any "special emphasis" instructions discussed earlier.
- Investigators are encouraged to utilize Cancer Center Shared Resources including Biostatistics (Leader: Zhengjia (Nelson) Chen), Bioinformatics (Leader: Xiaowei Wang), Oncology Data Sciences (Leaders: Margaret Wright & Sandeep Kataria). The Cancer Center provides a 10% cost share to its members for Shared Resources that include: Cancer Genomics; Translational/Tissue Pathology; and Flow cytometry. Link to Cancer Center shared resources: https://cancer.uillinois.edu/researchers-clinicians/shared-resources/

Submission Process & Guidelines

All interested investigators are required to follow a 2-step process and submit a <u>Letter of Intent</u> (LOI) prior to submission of the Full Application. Applications that fit the purpose of this program will be invited to submit a Full Application by the due date.

STEP 1 - Letter of Intent (LOI) <u>Due Monday, February 20, 2023</u>: The LOI should have 0.5" margins and no smaller than Arial 11-point font**.** The following information should be included:

- Page 1 -Preliminary title and complete listing of the investigative team, academic titles, primary departments, and their roles on the project. Please describe the contribution of each key person
- Page 2 -1-page brief outline of the study plan (goal, hypothesis, specific aims, study methods to be utilized.
- Biosketches and Other Support documentation for Principal Investigators and key personnel.
- LOI should be submitted via email to Farah Mirza at fmirza@uic.edu. Please submit one PDF file with all requested information. Put "UICC Pilot Project LOI" in the subject line.
- Successful receipt of LOI will be acknowledged via email.
- Notifications inviting full applications will be sent within 10 days of the LOI due date.

STEP 2 - Full Application (by invitation) <u>Due Monday, March 27, 2023</u>: The full application should include a detailed description of your proposed project in *a single PDF file, following the correct order and format listed below*:

1. Title Page – Provide information and Lay language abstract of the proposed project - In the event of funding, the abstract will be provided to donors to demonstrate the use of funds. The departmental signatures represent a written commitment to support faculty effort on the project. (https://cancer.uillinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/final-2023-Pilot-RFA-Face-Page.pdf)

2. Introduction (if applicable, 1 page maximum) - If the project was previously submitted for pilot funding but was not awarded, provide a *one page* overview of how it has been revised to address the reviewers' critique. In the case where investigators have previously received Cancer Center pilot project support, include a brief summary of the publications and externally funded projects that resulted from previous pilot funding.

3. Budget *(use PHS 398 Form Page 4)* - Submit a 12-month budget and brief justification. The total budget should not exceed $50,000. Smaller budgets are also acceptable. (http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html)

4. Project Team – (1 page maximum) Describe the contribution of each PI and any other key persons on the project. Provide a description as to why the multi-PI team will have a competitive advantage for an NCI R01 or programmatic project submission (e.g., synergy among PIs, track record of collaborations, joint publications, etc.). Reviewers are instructed to asses this description.

5. Specific Aims – (1 page maximum) State concisely the hypothesis to be tested and the specific aim(s) to be achieved during the one year.

6. Research Plan - *(not to exceed 4 pages, excluding references)* Provide sufficient detail for reviewers to judge the potential of the project. To ensure appropriate consideration of your application, address in your research plan, the role and specific individual responsibilities of each of the project investigators, how this project differs from any similar ongoing, funded research of the investigators, including grants on which they may be co-investigators, and <u>specific plans</u> for applying for and obtaining future support as a result of this project. <u>Include a link to the NCI RFA(s) you plan to target</u>. Applicants are strongly encouraged to incorporate Cancer Center shared resources into their research plan. Applicants are strongly encouraged to include a statement about how their project is relevant to the Cancer Center catchment area.

7. Biographical Sketch (use PHS 398 suggested format) - Submit biosketches for all project investigators. https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm

8. Other Support - Document other support for each project investigator, using NIH format, including a statement of the specific aims for all funded projects. https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/othersupport.htm

Review Criteria

Ranking will be by peer review, based on novelty and scientific merit. A major criterion will be the perceived probability that the pilot project will lead to the submission of a fundable cancer focused research grant application in obesity and cancer. **An ideal pilot project will be designed to conduct preliminary studies needed before submitting a full grant application to NCI**. Other factors considered in the review will be areas of expertise of the collaborating investigators, synergism between and among the collaborating investigators, and value of the project to the cancer research priorities of the UI Cancer Center.
Reviewers are instructed to look for:
- innovation and novelty, first and foremost
- two or more investigators on a project, each of whom <u>substantively</u> contributes to the research
- evidence that the multi-PI team will have a competitive advantage for an NCI R01 or programmatic project submission
- interactive projects that bridge disciplines and/or expertise
- R01 readiness - projects that ARE going to result in cancer focused grant applications
- projects that are likely to be funded when submitted to peer reviewed organizations after (and because of) the utilization of the pilot project funds
- projects that are relevant to the Cancer Center catchment area
- applicability to the areas of emphasis for the RFA

*All applicants will receive reviewers' comments at the end of the review process regardless of whether they receive funding.

Funding Limits

The UI Cancer Center Pilot Project awards are for up to $50,000 for a one-year project period. (In cases of exceptional progress, a second year of support may be considered after a review of progress is conducted.)