Third Coast Center for AIDS Research in Chicago
Pilot Awards for HIV/AIDS Research

RFA Issued: January 15, 2016
Letter of Intent Due: February 8, 2016
Applications Due: February 29, 2016
Awards Announced: April 2016

Funding Opportunity Description

Third Coast Center for AIDS Research (TC-CFAR) pilot awards are intended for key preliminary studies in HIV/AIDS-related basic, clinical, or behavioral research that will enable new NIH grant submissions and to stimulate cross-institutional and/or cross-disciplinary collaborations. A proposal must be for a new project that is distinct from any currently funded project. Funding is targeted to new investigators and investigators new to AIDS/HIV research. Teams that include TC-CFAR members from across Chicago institutions and across disciplines are encouraged.

Funds Available

The budget for the Pilot Award is up to $50,000 in direct costs and smaller budgets may be awarded. Indirect costs will be determined at the time of award. We plan to award up to 4 grants in this cycle, depending upon the number of fundable applications and availability of funds. Awards are for one year of support with the possibility of extension. Pilot awards will not be given to projects already receiving funding.

Eligibility

The principal investigator (PI) on the application must be a TC-CFAR faculty member. TC-CFAR faculty membership is available to any faculty or staff person at Northwestern University, University of Chicago, and Lurie Children’s Hospital, who is allowed to apply for NIH grants as a principal investigator at their institution. Investigators at other academic and community organizations in the Chicago-area are encouraged to apply as a co-PI or co-Investigator (co-I) with a TC-CFAR faculty member as the PI or co-PI. All investigators on the application should go to the TC-CFAR membership page (http://www.thirdcoastfar.org/membership/) and register. Awards can be made to an individual investigator, a mentor-mentee pair, or an inter-disciplinary team. PIs should be new investigators (no prior substantial NIH independent research award) or established investigators new to HIV/AIDS research. New investigators must include a mentor on their team, though funded effort of the mentor is not required.

Project Information

Proposals must be related to HIV/AIDS and priority will be given to projects that align with the NIH Office of AIDS Research (OAR) research priorities as outlined in NOT-OD-15-137. This notice designates topics as high, medium, or low priority for AIDS funding. The high priority topics for research are:

1. Reducing incidence of HIV/AIDS
2. Next generation of HIV therapies
3. Cure for HIV/AIDS
4. HIV-associated co-morbidities and co-infections
5. Basic research and research to reduce health disparities that cross-cut the four topics above is also considered high priority.

Applications that fall into lower priority areas as described in NOT-OD-15-137 may still be considered for pilot funding as alignment with OAR research priorities is only one review criteria (see below).

Studies involving human subjects may be subject to additional NIH review prior to initiating the study, which may cause delays. If the project or any project-related activities will occur outside of the US, additional NIH review will be required, which may cause delays.
Review Criteria

The primary criteria for evaluation of the application are scientific merit and the concomitant likelihood that the pilot project will lead to an AIDS fundable grant submission to NIH.

Reviewers will use the NIH scoring system and a modified set of criteria listed below.

1. **Significance**: Does this study address an important problem? If the aims of the application are achieved, how will scientific knowledge be advanced? What will be the effect of these studies on the concepts or methods that drive this field?

2. **Approach**: Are the conceptual framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well-integrated, and appropriate to the aims of the project? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternative tactics?

3. **Innovation**: Does the project employ novel concepts, approaches or method? Are the aims original and innovative? Does the project challenge existing paradigms or develop new methodologies or technologies?

4. **Investigative team**: Is the PI or co-PI a new investigator or an established investigator new to HIV/AIDS research? Is an appropriate plan in place for collaborative work across disciplines and organizations? Is an appropriate plan in place to provide mentoring to junior investigators?

5. **Transdisciplinary nature of the research**: Proposals which successfully bring more than one scientific discipline to bear on research questions of interest will receive additional partial point scoring to encourage transdisciplinary research.

6. **Alignment with Office of AIDS Research Priorities**: Does the work align with areas of the research topics of high priority as designated by the OAR in NOT-OD-15-137?

7. **Competitiveness for NIH AIDS funding**: Is the pilot project targeted at development of an NIH grant proposal? Will completion of the pilot project increase the probability of obtaining AIDS funding from NIH?

Application and Submission Information

**Letter of intent due February 8, 2016:**

Email a succinct letter of intent to cfar@northwestern.edu. Include:

- Principal investigator(s): name, position, institution, email and telephone contacts
- Designate if the PI is a new investigator (no prior substantial NIH independent research award) or new to HIV/AIDS research
- Mentor (if needed): name, position, institution, email
- Other expected key personnel: name, position, institution, email
- Preliminary title of proposal
- Short description of project including alignment with NIH AIDS funding priorities

The letters of intent will be reviewed by the TC-CFAR Developmental Core for eligibility and alignment of the proposed study with OAR funding priorities. You will be contacted if additional information is needed.

**Content and form of application due February 29, 2016:**

The application is an abbreviated NIH R01-style format and NIH forms are used as indicated in the table below. Forms can be downloaded from [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/index.htm](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/index.htm). Applications are expected to use NIH formatting standards (single-spaced, 0.5 inch margin minimum, Arial, Helvetica, Palatino Linotype, or Georgia typeface in black in at least 11 pt size).

Applications will be submitted through the Northwestern University NITROCompetitions website that can be found at [https://grants.nubic.northwestern.edu/welcome](https://grants.nubic.northwestern.edu/welcome). The application site will open in mid-February and the link will be sent directly to the PI listed on the letter of intent (above).
The required components are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Format and Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project Summary</strong> <em>(Abstract)</em></td>
<td>Limited to 30 lines, No form</td>
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<tr>
<td>The <strong>Project Summary</strong> is meant to serve as a succinct and accurate description of the proposed work when separated from the application</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Research Strategy</strong></td>
<td>5 page limit, No form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Similar to an NIH R01-style application, include the following sections:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Specific Aims: State concisely the goals of the proposed research and summarize the expected outcome(s).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Significance: Explain the importance of the problem, the scientific premise, and gaps in current knowledge. You may include preliminary data, if available (not required), in this section or the approach section.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Innovation: Explain how the work will shift current paradigms, or the use of novel technologies/methods, approaches, and theoretical concepts.</td>
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<td>4. Approach: Describe the overall strategy to achieve the specific aims. Describe the experimental design and methods in sufficient detail to allow the reviewers to see how you will achieve robust and unbiased results. Discuss potential problems and alternative strategies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Bibliography: Include names of all authors and title in format.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Plans for future NIH proposal submission</strong></td>
<td>½ page limit, No form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Briefly explain how this pilot project will add value to plans for future NIH proposals. If a specific NIH submission date is planned, please include.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Detailed Budget for Project</strong></td>
<td>PHS 398 Form Page 4</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Budget Justification</strong></td>
<td>No limit, but expect ~1 page is sufficient, No form</td>
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<td>Provide a justification for each line item on the Budget.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Biosketch</strong></td>
<td>New NIH Biosketch, 5 page limit, Use NIH template</td>
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<td>Provide for PIs, co-Is or other key personnel</td>
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<td><strong>Mentor Letter</strong></td>
<td>No form</td>
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<tr>
<td>New investigators must have a mentor with HIV/AIDS research experience even if effort is not funded in the budget. The letter from the mentor should describe the relationship between the mentor-mentee and the mentoring plan. New investigators should contact TC-CFAR (see below) for assistance in identifying a mentor if needed.</td>
<td>1-2 pages is sufficient</td>
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*A note regarding Office of Sponsored Research*: This funding mechanism uses internal funding and does not require review or approval by an Office of Sponsored Research. Applications are submitted directly by investigators through the NITROCompetitions application site.

**Application Processing**

Applications must be received no later than 11:59 PM on the application receipt date(s) described above. Upon receipt, applications will be evaluated for completeness and responsiveness.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of human subjects and/or approved animal use protocols are not required prior to review of an application. However, all necessary or applicable regulatory reviews, will be required prior to commencement of research.
Funding Use and Restrictions

Funds can be requested to support the research endeavors of the investigative team including technical support, lab supplies, assays, computer time, and data analysis. Salary to support the applicant may be requested unless they are already supported on a mentored K award. Additionally, although graduate students and post-doctoral researchers may be involved in these pilot grants, it is not the purpose of these grants to provide support for training. Application budgets will be reviewed and the TC-CFAR may elect, on a case-by-case basis, to offer reduced funding, if the budget appears excessive for the proposed activities. Indirect costs will be added to the funding at the time of the award and you do not need to concern yourself with this at the time of application.

Obligations of the Pilot Award Recipient PI

1. Investigators awarded funding will be required to provide an interim report on the progress of their study and a final report detailing the outcome of their project. Specific due dates for reports will be provided in the Notice of Award and are chosen to support preparation of TC-CFAR reports to NIH and advisory boards.
2. In order to evaluate the long-term outcomes of the program, and in accordance with NIH reporting requirements for TC-CFAR, brief, non-narrative annual reports will be solicited from the PI for five years following the completion of their project indicating:
   - The number of subsequent grant applications
   - The funding outcome of these applications
   - Any publications or presentations that may have been based on the pilot grant
3. Awardees are expected to present their work at a TC-CFAR forum, upon invitation, at least once.
4. Awardees must agree to credit the Third Coast Center for AIDS Research in any publication or applications that result from awards. For example: “This [insert: abstract /publication/ presentation/ grant proposal] was made possible with help from the Third Coast Center for AIDS Research (CFAR), an NIH funded center (P30AI117943), which is supported by the following NIH Co-Funding and Participating Institutes and centers: NICHD, NIAID, NIMHD, NIA, NIGMS, NIDDK, NIDA, NCI, NHLBI, OAR. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.”
5. All publications that benefit from support provided by the TC-CFAR must comply with the NIH Public Access Policy.
6. Awardees must provide and agree to allow information about research awarded under this program, subsequent awards, and publications to be posted on the TC-CFAR website.

Additional Information and Questions

It is the mission of the Developmental Core of the Third Coast Center for AIDS Research to provide strong support for new investigators and established investigators new to HIV/AIDS research. Please contact us with questions or requests for assistance at any point in the application process.

Requests for additional information and questions may be directed to:
Fern E. Murdoch, Ph.D.
Assistant Director for University Interactions and Strategic Growth
Third Coast Center for AIDS Research
http://www.thirdcoastcfar.org/
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Rubloff Building – Room 9-917
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Email: cfar@northwestern.edu