

Southern California Clinical and Translational Science Institute
Spring 2026 Translational Science Accelerator Program
Description and Call for Applications

LOI SUBMISSION DEADLINE: June 12, 2026 | 11:59 PM (PDT)

Overview

This year, the Southern California Clinical and Translational Science Institute (SC CTSI) will offer pilot grants between \$25,000 - \$50,000 for projects focused on translational science initiatives. This announcement pertains to all Translational Science Accelerator (Trax) grant submissions.

Purpose: These awards will support projects that 1) contribute to the understanding and characterization of translational science challenges and/or 2) develop tools and approaches that will increase the speed, efficiency, and impact of translational research at large and/or 3) implement and disseminate approaches already found to be effective in improving the research process in a novel way.

Virtual Information Session

May 19, 2026

2:00 PM – 3:00 PM PDT

[CLICK HERE](#) to fill out the registration link to receive the Zoom link

May 22, 2026

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM PDT

[CLICK HERE](#) and fill out the registration link to receive the Zoom link

Scope of Proposals: Proposed initiatives must employ translational science in their approach and must address challenges and/or opportunities in translational research that aligns with SC CTSI priorities.

1. Translational science involves identifying a general challenge in the research process **and**:
 - a. Understanding and characterizing the challenge **and/or**
 - b. Developing and testing new strategies that are designed to improve the research process applicable to multiple projects/studies **and/or**
 - c. Implementing and disseminating strategies already found to be effective in improving the research process in a novel way.
2. Strategies should improve the speed, efficiency, quality, and/or impact of the research process. This may be demonstrated within a single study or stage.

Research eligible for this call includes:

- Development of new research methodology and/or new technologies/tools/resources that will advance Translational Science and thus increase the efficiency and effectiveness of translation
- Early-stage development of innovative therapy/technology with generalizable application to an identified translational challenge
- Demonstration of new methods or technologies to enhance outcomes for decentralized clinical research
- Dissemination of effective tools, methods, processes, and training paradigms in Translational Science
- Feasibility/proof of concept studies to support future Translational Science projects

Scientific Review Process

Multi-Step Collaborative Review Process:

- All interested applicants must submit a letter of intent (LOI) by June 12, 2026, which will be peer reviewed by the Translational Science (TrSci) Accelerator Management Committee. LOIs will be scored on alignment with SC CTSI priorities, approach and translational science impact potential. Up to 16 applicants will be invited to participate in the next stage of the application process: pitch sessions.
- During pitch sessions, each applicant will present a 5-minute “pitch” of their proposal, which will be peer reviewed by the TrSci Accelerator Management Committee. Applicants will receive immediate feedback regarding the design, feasibility, and translational science alignment of their project. Up to 10 pitches will be invited to participate in the next stage of the review process: development meetings. All projects advancing to development meetings will be connected with SC CTSI resources and services to help improve their proposal.
- In development meetings, applicants will work with the TrSci Accelerator Management Committee and the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) to refine proposal development, team science support, and project plans. All projects participating in a development meeting will submit a full proposal.

Full proposals will be reviewed by a panel of scientists & community members: Review panels will include scientific reviewers with relevant project-specific expertise, as well as community members who have undergone comprehensive reviewer training. Both scientific and community reviewers will read, score, and participate in a discussion of the applications. The purpose of this community-engaged review panel is to help meet the SC CTSI’s goal to integrate community perspectives in shaping our research agenda and to be able to communicate to the public about work funded at SC CTSI.

All reviewers will be instructed to maintain the confidentiality of proposal information. Use of AI for proposal review and scoring is not permitted.

If you have any questions regarding this RFA, please contact Kaelyn.Moses@med.usc.edu

Award

Applicants may request \$25,000 - \$50,000 for a 12-month period beginning April 1, 2027.

A. Priority

Preference and highest priority will be given to projects that support the understanding of translational challenges, development of tools and approaches that will increase the speed, efficiency, and impact of translational research, and/or the novel implementation of effective approaches. Commitment of the PI to a career in research will be considered a plus.

B. Eligibility

Full-time faculty members at USC and CHLA as of the date of the LOI submission are eligible to apply as a PI. Additionally, PIs must devote at least 30% of their professional effort to research.

C. Resubmissions

Resubmissions of previous SC CTSI Pilot applications will be accepted.

LOI/Pitch Session/Development Meeting Application Instructions

A. Letter of Intent

Letter of Intent Format: On one page (single spaced, 11pt Arial or similar font), briefly describe the proposed project using the following headers:

1. **Opportunity, Barrier and/or Challenge in Translational Research**
2. **Proposed Solution**
3. **Overview of the Translational Science Approach/Methodology**
4. **Areas of Expertise Needed** (from the CTSI or other partners)
5. **Projected Generalizable Product** that will enhance the efficiency, quality, and impact of Translational Research
6. **Approximate Time Required** to complete the project

LOIs will be evaluated on typical NIH criteria, but with greater emphasis on approach, priority alignment and translational science impact potential.

Before submitting an LOI, we strongly encourage applicants to review SC CTSI's Introduction to Translational Science video to ensure the proposed project aligns with SC CTSI's Translational Science definition and priorities. Applicants may submit their video certificate of completion with their LOI application.

Please visit the SC CTSI Learning Network to view the Introduction to Translational Science video.
[Translational Science Education and Resources](#)

B. Pitch Sessions

Pitch Format: 5-minute PowerPoint presentation outlining the six LOI points and the overall project design plan.

Pitch sessions will allow 5-minutes for presentations and 10 minutes for feedback from the TrSci Accelerator Management Committee. Feedback will pertain to design, feasibility, and alignment with translational science objectives.

C. Development Meetings

Development Session Format: 1-hour interactive planning session with the TrSci Accelerator Management Committee and a member of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee.

Sessions will specifically focus on project planning, proposal development, and team science support. Full proposal or protocol drafts can be brought to this meeting for review. **All projects that complete a development meeting will be invited to submit a full proposal.**

Full Application Content & Instructions

A complete application will include the following components arranged in the specified order. The applicant is responsible for the readability of the entire application.

Complete applications must be submitted by October 9, 2026 at 11:59 PM (PDT). Submission instructions will be provided upon an applicant's completion of their development meeting.

Format

- Arial font, 11pt
- Margins: minimum 0.5 inch
- Figure and Table legends may use smaller font, but no font smaller than 9pt is allowed to ensure readability.
- Please use appropriate headings to prepare your proposal.
- No appendices
- The application portal contains multiple upload fields for separate components of the application. Please upload only PDFs to the correct upload fields.

The application should include the following:

1. **Cover Letter** (See PI qualifications and commitment to a research career)
2. **Abstract** (max 1200 characters)

3. **Lay Summary** (written or visual) To aid our community reviewers, prepare a two-page summary of Sections A-D from the Research Proposal; in this summary, minimize jargon and promote readability at a nonscientific lay level. Alternatively, you may prepare a 5-minute video which explains your proposed project to a general (lay) audience. Please refer to the end of the RFA, section 'Lay Summary' for more information. Please contact Kaelyn.Moses@med.usc.edu to arrange file transfer.
4. **Research Proposal** (maximum 5 pages, including figures/tables, excluding literature cited)
 - a. **Specific Aims:**
 - i. State the specific aims to address the research question.
 - b. **Overall Impact and Significance**
 - i. What barrier is your project aiming to address?
 - ii. What is already known, what are the gaps, and what is the proposed solution?
 - iii. What is the generalizable product that will enhance efficiency, quality, and impact of translational research?
 - iv. Why would successful completion be important to our local environment, CTSA's, and research more broadly?
 - c. **Innovation:**
 - i. Describe novel theoretical concepts, approaches, or methodologies, as well as novel tools or interventions to be developed or applied in a novel way to enhance the efficiency, quality, and impact of translational research.
 - d. **Approach**
 - i. Describe the translational science approach used to accomplish the specific aims of the project, including the generalizable product.
 - ii. Describe the areas of expertise (from the SC CTSI or other partners) that will be used to accomplish the aims of the project.
 - e. **Dissemination Plan**
 - i. Describe how you will share your findings with the academic community, CTSI community and other relevant organizations.
5. **Next Steps** (max 1 page)
 - a. Describe plans for implementing the project findings more broadly, including disseminating and/or commercializing the findings. NOTE: Awardees may be invited to present their study results at a Keck School of Medicine and SC CTSI co-sponsored event.
 - b. Describe your specific plan for obtaining extramural funding, including the type of grant that will be targeted. Applicants are encouraged to name specific funding mechanisms if they have been identified.
6. **A timeline or project plan with defined milestones** (max 1 page)
 - a. Propose only what can be accomplished within ONE YEAR.
7. **Resources and Environment** (max ½ page)
 - a. Document access to any resources and environment that will be required for successful completion of the project.
8. **Literature Cited** (not included in page limit)
9. **Budget** (\$50,000 maximum) (*PI, co-PI and co-investigator salary support is not allowed*). Use the [Required PHS 398 Budget Form](#), Page 4 or download the [Budget Form HERE](#). Award

expenditures must comply with the [NIH Grants Policy Statement](#) and the [Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards \(2 CFR Part 200\)](#). Indirect costs will be applied at the USC's federally negotiated rate in effect at the time of award. Subawards are not allowed under SC CTSI pilot awards.

- a. Costs must be reasonable, allocable, and necessary for the completion of the pilot project
- b. Fringe benefits will be applied at the USC's federally negotiated rate in effect at the time of award
- c. Budget Allowable and Not Allowable Items

	Allowable	Not Allowable
PI/Co-PI/Co-Investigator Salary		X
Post Doc Salary	X	
Administrative Support		X
Supplies	X	
Equipment		X
Software	X	
Personal Computers	X*	
Mailing	X*	
Tuition		X
Travel	X**	
Research Staff Support	X	
Patient Care	X***	
Indirect costs at other institutions		X

* Computers and mailing costs are allowable only when they are necessary and allocable to the specific project; costs must be proportionally charged based on documented project use. General-purpose or personal-use items, including computers or routine mailing expenses that support multiple activities or projects, are not allowable as direct charges to the pilot award.

** Domestic travel costs are allowable up to \$2,500 when necessary for the dissemination of pilot project results, such as presenting findings at scientific meetings or conferences. Local travel, including mileage, is also allowable when necessary for the conduct of the project. All travel costs must be reasonable, justified, and directly related to the project.

*** Standard clinical care costs are not allowable. Costs directly related to research procedures on study participants are allowable when clearly justified and necessary for the project.

10. **Budget Justification** Provide justification for all requested costs and include sufficient detail for each item. Any individual cost exceeding \$1,000 must be itemized (e.g., travel to a conference should be broken down as \$XX for registration, \$XX for airfare, and \$XX for lodging). If consultants are included, please specify their hourly rate and the estimated number of hours to be worked.

11. **Regulatory Approvals** NIH requires that all CTSA-funded projects involving human subjects obtain approval from the local IRB and from NCATS. To facilitate this process, awardees of projects involving human subjects are asked to submit local IRB proposal within two weeks of award notification. No funds will be distributed until the local IRB application has been submitted and no funds will be released for direct human subjects components of a project until local IRB and NCATS approval has been granted.
12. **NIH SciENCv Biographical sketches** (max 5 pages for each biosketch)
 - a. Provided for each of the Principal Investigator and/or Co-Investigators
 - b. Specific roles of each PI and co-investigator must be defined
 - c. Please use latest NIH format found at [Biosketch Format Pages, Instructions, and Samples | Grants & Funding](#)
13. **Letter(s) of Support** Applicants must include a letter of commitment from the applicant's home department Chair confirming that the applicant has at least 30% effort commitment to research (not just for this project, but for research overall) for at least 18 months after the proposed award date. Other letters confirming access to crucial resources including necessary space, release time and environment may be included here.

Timeline for Spring 2026 Cycle

- RFA Released: April 30, 2026
- LOI Submission Deadline: June 12, 2026
- Notification of Invitation to participate in Pitch Sessions: July 8, 2026
- Pitch Sessions: July 20, 2026 – July 31, 2026
- Notification of Invitation to participate in Development Meetings: August 10, 2026
- Development Meetings: August 17, 2026 – September 4, 2026
- Full Proposal Deadline: October 9, 2026
- Review Period: October 12, 2026 – November 2026
- Final Selection Made: December 2026
- Submission of Regulatory approvals to NIH: December 2026 – April 2027
- Funding Period: April 1, 2027 – March 31, 2028

Award Conditions

1. **Regulatory Approvals:** NIH requires that all CTSA-funded projects involving human subjects obtain approval from the local IRB and from NCATS. To facilitate this process, awardees of projects involving human subjects are asked to submit local IRB proposal within two weeks of award notification. No funds will be distributed until the local IRB application has been submitted and no funds will be released for direct human subjects components of a project until local IRB and NCATS approval has been granted. Human Subjects (IRB) and other regulatory approvals should indicate that your research is/will be supported by SC CTSI.
2. **Trax Launch Support:** SC CTSI has developed a new Trax Launch Program intended to position awardees to successfully execute their studies. This program will include participation in the SC CTSI's new Quality by Design (QbD) program. The QbD framework defines quality as the absence of errors that impact the safety of trial participants or the credibility of the trial results. Potential

errors are identified at the study design stage with input from a wide range of experts and stakeholders. Risks are closely monitored and addressed throughout the conduct of the study. The project team for each awarded project is required to participate in the Trax Launch Support Program, which will be initiated prior to funding in Spring 2027.

3. **Grant Funding:** The SC CTSI is currently in the application cycle for its next center grant from the NIH-NCATS. Funding for pilot awards is contingent upon renewal of the grant. Trax activities are anticipated to begin upon the new award start date, which may occur later than April 1, 2027. In the event that the grant is not awarded, Trax funding will be placed on hold until such time as funding is secured.

AI Disclaimer

SC CTSI upholds the AI policies set forth by the NIH. Applicants may use AI for limited aspects of LOI and proposal development such editing but may not use it to generate LOI or proposal ideas/text.

For more information regarding AI use guidelines for research applications, please visit [AI NIH POLICY](#).

Lay Summary Resources & Guidance

Click [here](#) for video instructions.

Watch the following videos on how to record from your computer:

HP Computers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzTMA9mPhsQ>

Macbook Pro: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMP642HmSck>

Lay Summaries Tips from Elsevier:

<https://www.elsevier.com/connect/authors-update/in-a-nutshell-how-to-write-a-lay-summary>

- Predict and cover the “so what?” factor – justify your research.
- Give some background and context to the research. What prompted you to do it?
- Follow a logical order. This may not always coincide with a temporal order.
- Explain the impact of the work – what is going to change (especially in relation to wider society)?
- Use succinct, short sentences – and write and/or speak in plain English. Imagine you’re talking to an undergraduate who’s just stepped into your introductory class. Or, better still, pretend you’re trying to explain your article to a distant family member who works in retail/fashion/hospitality.
- Avoid jargon unless absolutely necessary and explain it if you do have to keep it in.
- Use first person and active voice (“we agreed” rather than “it was agreed”).
- Use positives not negative sentences: “You will have repeat appointments at least once a week”, rather than “The usual practice is not to schedule repeat appointments more frequently than once a week”
- Images are very important – try to include one if you can.

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