

**Southern California Clinical and Translational Science Institute**  
**Team Building Voucher (TBV)**  
***Description and Call for Applications***

Description

The Southern California Clinical and Translational Science Institute (SC CTSI) is seeking applications for **team building activities** for up to \$10,000 each. This mechanism is intended to provide rapid funding for activities that promote the SC CTSI goal of assembling new multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and/or multi-sector teams focused on clinical and/or community-engaged research, that are grounded in team science principles (<https://sc-ctsi.org/training-education/team-science-training>). We highly encourage investigators **newer** to working in multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and/or multi-sector teams to apply.

**What are “Team Building Activities”?**

This mechanism is not intended to fund pilot research projects. Rather, the intent is to fund team building activities that will enable new multidisciplinary and/or multisector research teams to generate ideas, plans, and new projects, and enhance their research activities. Examples of team building activities include, but are not limited to:

- Hosting a Conference/Workshop/Seminar to bring together researchers interested in a new multidisciplinary research project or program
- Engagement of a consultant or facilitator to brainstorm and formalize new multidisciplinary research directions
- Landscape analysis of a new research area
- Conducting focus groups of a variety of stakeholders to guide new project development
- Engagement of specialized personnel, e.g., project manager to facilitate submission of a large multidisciplinary grant proposal
- Crowdsourcing information/data (Citizen Science) to inform new research projects
- Developing collaborations with community groups in anticipation of community engaged research (e.g., for Community Based Participatory Research or Research to Action research application)
- Building use of communication tools to enhance multidisciplinary team functions or formation, e.g., a new USC Slack channel for artificial intelligence in medicine
- Other activities that support new multidisciplinary and/or multisector collaborations and incorporate team science principles

Priority

Priority will be given to proposals that (a) demonstrate a clear path for new engagement of individuals from a variety of research backgrounds and disciplines in addressing challenges in

clinical and community research and (b) provide specific plans and a timeline to move forward to application for extramural funding to support the research.

### **SPECIAL TOPIC FOR JAN 2026: Translational Science**

*Note: Applications that are not addressing this special topic are welcome to apply, and we anticipate funding 1-2 vouchers for teams not explicitly focused on this topic area.*

We are looking to fund at least 1 team building voucher award focused on translational science.

Translational science is “the field that generates scientific and operational innovations that overcome longstanding challenges along the translational research pipeline. These include scientific, operational, financial, and administrative innovations that transform the way that research is done, making it faster, more efficient, and more impactful” (NCATS).

- Do you have an idea for transforming the way that research is done, and need to build a team to do it? If yes, this special topic is for you. Tell us:
  - The research barrier
  - The new/extended team you need to build to overcome it
  - The team building activities you need to do to solidify partnerships
  - The benefits/generalizability of the project and new/extended team

Example of successful translational science pilot projects (please find more at website):

#### **Validating and Promoting the W4H Toolkit**

- **Barrier:** wearable data can provide valuable insights and enhance clinical decision making but most research teams do not have the technical expertise and necessary analytical tools to integrate wearable data with clinical data sets to develop models for specific study endpoints.
- **Solution:** Adoption of the W4H toolkit which will serve as a platform to develop and share advanced machine learning models.
- **Rigor/Metrics:** Validating the toolkit through independent use in clinical trials including trial speed, data integration efficiency, and overall workflow performance.
- **Benefits/Generalizability:** Creates a scalable, research-grade (compliant with HIPAA and FHIR) wearable data platform that is easy and efficient to use.
- **Product:** W4H toolkit for wearable data analytics.
- **Team Leads:** Cyrus Shahabi and Luciano Nocera

#### **Establishing a GMP-Ready Base Editing Platform for Universal Off-the-Shelf T Cell Therapies**

- **Barrier:** CAR T cells and other adoptive cell therapies have revolutionized cancer treatment but the patient specific approaches are costly, slow and inaccessible to many patients.
- **Solution:** Develop a non-viral base editor approach that will act as a more safe and scalable option for creating the universal T-cell. It allows one donors T-cells to be used in many patients by overcoming the immune incompatibilities that cause cells to not be a match.
- **Rigor/Metrics:** Edited cells are assessed for efficient target gene disruption and maintenance of cell viability.
- **Benefits/Generalizability:** The T-cell being created would be disease agnostic and could be used to help treat a multitude of issues.
- **Product:** Streamlined editing protocol with a guide RNA design and delivery conditions.
- **Team Lead:** Mohamed Abou-el-Enein

The goal is that this team building voucher award will move a team forward towards a successful application for translational science Pilot funding from the SC CTSI, or directly to a larger project proposal. This will include determining a solution, metrics, and if applicable a product for the pilot proposal.

*Please note that Pilot funding is not guaranteed, and the team's pilot proposal will be competitively reviewed.*

### Eligibility

- Full-time faculty members at USC and CHLA as of the date of the award are eligible to apply as PI.
- Postdocs, residents, fellows, students, and community members can serve as co-PIs or co-Investigators.
- An eligible PI may have only one active Team Building Voucher proposal or funded award at any one time.
  - A PI on a currently active proposal or funded award can serve as co-investigator on additional proposals or awards.
  - A PI and team who have demonstrated significant progress during an initial Team Building Voucher award is eligible to apply for one additional award to reach additional goal(s) beyond those of the initial award.

### Award Conditions

Funding will be made available within 4-6 weeks of application. The project is expected to be completed within 6 months.

By accepting an award, all funded team members will be required to:

- Meet with Research Development (RD) to tailor team science support
- Participate in a 2-hour online CTSI team science training that covers principles and practical tools
- SC CTSI is interested in understanding best practices of team building in biomedical research. SC CTSI program staff may request to be present as observers in team building activities to better understand the effectiveness of the team building activities.
- Awardees will be asked to complete a final report about their project outcomes.

### Application

Applications will be accepted for two annual deadlines: **January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026** and early July 2026

**Prior to** submitting your application:

- It is highly encouraged that you attend our **Team Building Voucher Information Session**. We will provide more information about the types of projects we are looking to fund, and successful past examples. The upcoming Information Session details are:

○ December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025 12-1pm

○ Register for the session: [HERE](#)

- The PI(s) are encouraged to attend consultations with the SC CTSI Research Development team (key personnel are also encouraged to attend). These consultations will help the applicants develop project proposals that meet the mission of the mechanism. Please note that we will not review any documents or presentations. If requested, the SC CTSI Research Development team can advise on team building activities to achieve your goals. **Please email [Mayla.Boguslav@med.usc.edu](mailto:Mayla.Boguslav@med.usc.edu) to schedule a consultation and/or with any questions.**

**Application form:** There is an application form [HERE](#) that will request the following:

- **General Applicant Information**
- **Project Information**
  - Project Title
  - Five key words
  - Total Budget Requested
  - Co-PI/ Co-I Information
  - Post Award Administrator Information
    - Name
    - Email
    - Phone (optional)
- **Your Project Proposal** (to be uploaded as one PDF, instructions below)

#### **Project Proposal components and instructions:**

##### General Format

- Arial font, 11pt
- Margins: minimum 0.5 inch
- No appendices
- Include page numbers and table of contents

Your Project Proposal needs to include the following information, compiled in one PDF file:

1. **Team Building Proposal** (3 pages maximum, including references) including:
  - Objectives: objectives of the project, including a rationale for how the project will enhance the development of the new multidisciplinary team
    - If your project is focused on the special topic of translational science, include:
      - The research barrier
      - The benefits/generalizability of the project and new/extended team
  - **Team roles:** Description of the role of all participants and how they contribute to the multidisciplinary of the team

- If your project is focused on the special topic of translational science, include why this new/extended team is necessary to build to overcome the barrier
  - **Team Building Activities:** specific description of these activities and what they will help the team achieve
    - If your project is focused on the special topic of translational science, include why the team building activities are needed to overcome the barrier and determine a solution
  - **Future Directions:** next steps for the team, including plans and a timeline for external grant submission
    - If your project is focused on the special topic of translational science, describe plans for preparing a pilot project proposal to the SC CTSI; or plans for preparing a larger award application directly to an external funder.
2. **Budget**
- \$10,000 maximum over 6 months
  - 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](#) Guidance OMB A-81.
  - Indirect costs are not allowed, including sub-contracts funded by SC CTSI pilot awards. Cost sharing and attempts to raise funds from other sources are encouraged.
  - Salary for project PIs/Co-PIs are not allowed. Salary for other personnel (e.g., Research Assistant) is allowed.
3. **Budget Justification** (1 page maximum)
- Justify all costs fully. Provide detailed information for all requested items.
4. **NIH Biosketch** of Principal Investigators (5 page maximum for each individual)
- Template can be found [HERE](#)
5. **Letters of Support(s).** Include if needed to confirm access to other resources or matching funds, or the support/engagement of external partners.

## Meal Guidelines

If meals are necessary to conduct your project aims, please use the SC CTSI meal guidelines below in your proposed TBV budgets.

Business/Event Meals	CTSI Recommended per person rate
Breakfast Meeting	\$20.00
Lunch Meeting	\$30.00
Dinner Meeting	\$40.00
Light Refreshment (beverages, snacks, cookies...etc)	\$5.00

The amounts in the chart include the cost of the food and beverages, labor, sales tax, delivery charges, gratuities and other service fees.

## Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria, using [NIH scoring](#):

- Team Attributes
  - New multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and/or multi-sector team
  - Demonstrates a clear path to convene the team
  - Evidence of productive research
- Team Building Activities
  - Will generate ideas, plans, and new projects
  - Will enhance research activities
- Research Domain Attributes
  - Clinical and/or community-engaged translational research
  - Impact
  - Innovation
  - Approach
- Future Directions
  - Plans for funding after the award