Request for Applications
CFAR Pilot Grant Program

The Penn Center for AIDS Research (Penn CFAR) invites Pilot Grant applications. Projects can be in any areas of HIV/AIDS supported by the U.S. National Institutes of Health including clinical, basic, behavioral and implementation science research. This year, we especially encourage projects focused on:

- Implementation strategies, including implementation of Long-acting PrEP
- Integration of AI technologies into HIV/AIDS research (all domains)
- HIV and Aging (all domains, including basic science, clinical, psycho/social, implementation)
- Collaborations with Philadelphia Department of Public Health *
- Reducing HIV Incidence
- Developing next-generation HIV Therapies
- Research towards HIV Cure
- Addressing HIV-associated Comorbidities, Coinfections, and Complications

Pilot awards are open to investigators *without prior R01-level funding in AIDS*.
*See below for more information.

Pilot projects are intended to lead to independent HIV/AIDS funding.
All proposals must address high or medium priority areas in the NIH Priorities for HIV/AIDS:
https://www.oar.nih.gov/hiv-policy-and-research/research-priorities

Pilot Award eligibility include:
- New investigators without prior R01 level funding from NIH, or
- Established investigators who have had R01-level funding only in fields other than HIV/AIDS.

Two types of pilot award are available:
1. General Pilot Research Awards
2. Mentored Research Scholar Awards.
The award types are described below.

Amount: Awards are for a maximum of **$50,000** per grant**. Applicants should provide justification for the proposed budget. Grants are for one-year and are not renewable. IRB approvals must be in place before funds can be dispersed.

Application Details: The required cover page and instructions can be found on the Developmental Pilot Awards page of the CFAR website.

A brief Letter of Intent (LOI) is requested two weeks before the application due date in order to allow us to plan for a rapid review process. The LOI should contain a brief summary of the planned work with enough detail to allow us to choose knowledgeable reviewers. The LOI should also list all individuals who will be directly involved with the research, who should be disqualified as potential reviewers.

Letter of Intent Deadline: October 31, 2025
Application Deadline: November 14, 2025
Funding release expected: May 1, 2026

AWARD TYPES AND ELIGIBILITY

Note that researchers who are not eligible for these awards may be eligible for CFAR microgrants which are awarded on a rolling basis throughout the year: https://www.med.upenn.edu/cfar/microgrant-program/)

General Pilot Awards: Faculty members

Eligible applicants must have a faculty appointment of at least Assistant Professor or its equivalent at a Penn CFAR institution. It is also acceptable to have an offer letter for an appointment by the award date.

For junior faculty applicants, a one-page mentorship plan with a senior faculty member is strongly encouraged; for non-HIV/AIDS investigators, a partnership plan with an established HIV/AIDS investigator is strongly encouraged. Contact the Developmental Core leadership for assistance with identifying HIV-focused mentors and partnerships.

Mentored Research Scholar Awards: Young Investigators (Pre-Faculty)

Young investigators at the Instructor, Research Associate, Wistar Staff Scientist, or Wistar Research Assistant Professor level are eligible for mentored awards. *Senior fellows will also be considered if they have institutional commitment for a pre-faculty position* at the time the award will start. Postdoctoral fellows preparing transition to independence grants may also be eligible. Eligibility must be discussed with Developmental Core Co-Director, Amelia Escolano (aescolano@wistar.org), prior to submission. Applicants should be poised to begin an independent research program. If you have general questions about eligibility, please contact Developmental Core Director (Liz Lowenthal, MD MSCE).

Mentored Research Scholar Award applications must include a letter of support from a scientific mentor and a 1-page mentorship plan. For fellows, an institutional letter of support is also required. For postdoctoral fellows preparing transition to independence grants, a brief document (max.1 page) describing the candidate's plans for grant submission and application to independent positions should be provided. This document should explain how this pilot grant would support grant application and transition to independence.

Instructions for Specific Study Types:

For work in collaboration with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH): Please consult with Dr. Kathleen Brady, Director of PDPH Division of HIV Health. Consultation with the Implementation Science Core is also recommended. PDPH has a broad range of priority topics for collaborative research, selected examples include:
- Acceptability, feasibility, and uptake of HIV prevention services in mobile buprenorphine sites
- Assessing the impact of harm reduction vending machine implementation on health outcomes
- Development and assessment of acceptability and feasibility of non-stigmatizing health messaging for providers
- Acceptability and feasibility of interventions to improve the quality of life in people aging with HIV
- What is the cost-effectiveness of different implementation strategies for HIV testing (community-based testing, clinical testing, pharmacy-based, low-threshold sexual health sites)
- To what extent does the PDPH Prevention Clinical Associate facilitate the integration of opt-out HIV screening into clinical workflows? What impact do clinic-specific protocols have on the uptake of opt-out HIV screening in clinical settings?

Community-based Organizations & Department of Health: Investigators at partner institutions may be eligible in collaboration with Penn, CHOP, or Wistar faculty.

Clinical Studies: The NIH restricts CFAR Pilot Grants from funding NIH-defined "Clinical Trials." If you are planning to propose a human intervention study (biomedical, behavioral, etc.), please contact Dr. Lowenthal so we can help ensure that your study, if approved, could be supported by available funds.

Use of Fetal Tissue: Research plans using fetal tissue are not permitted in pilot awards.

For International Applications: Applications with international components must be approved by the International Core Director (Robert Gross, MD MSCE) prior to preparation of the application. Subcontracts to foreign entities are currently disallowed by federal regulations. International work conducted through the

Botswana-UPenn Partnership (BUP) may be allowable since BUP does not require foreign subcontracting.

For work in Implementation Science: Consultation with the IS Core is strongly recommended. Please use this link to schedule: https://upenn.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_e4zjmPYnvIAiT42

Awardee Expectations: Successful awardees will be required to submit periodic progress reports and to take part in mentoring activities and feedback seminars. Pilot recipients will be followed with periodic brief surveys for at least 5 years after the funding period ends for NIH reporting.

We strongly encourage all applicants to reach out to the Developmental Core prior to submission for help identifying resources including potential investigative partners.

Pilot grant applicants are encouraged to seek support from CFAR Cores. Cores provide resources that often help to expand the impact of HIV research.

Please refer to the CFAR website for details of other Core services:
https://www.med.upenn.edu/cfar/cores/

Developmental Core Contacts:

Scientific Questions for Clinical/Behavioral Research:
Liz Lowenthal, MD MSCE
Director, CFAR Developmental Core

Scientific Questions for Basic Science Research:
Amelia Escolano, PhD
Co-Director, CFAR Developmental Core

Administrative Questions:
Cherylann McGee