



District of Columbia Center for AIDS Research (DC CFAR) Traditional Pilot Awards Program Request for Applications – Spring 2026

Overview: The District of Columbia Center for AIDS Research (DC CFAR) is pleased to announce this request for applications for the Spring 2026 cycle of the Traditional Pilot Awards Program. The goal of this program is to provide pilot research funds to [Early Stage Investigators](#) or [New Investigators](#) as defined by NIH to collect preliminary data that will enable them to then compete successfully for NIH funding in HIV/AIDS research as Principal Investigators. This program provides funding of **up to \$75,000 in direct costs** to support research-related activities such as partial salary support for early-stage investigators, research staff, or students; supplies and reagents; participant incentives; and travel expenses (requires pre-approval) to attend national scientific meetings to present research related to the DC CFAR award. The number of awards that are funded will depend on the number and quality of submissions and on the availability of funds. Awards will be made for a one-year period; no-cost extensions may be considered for a maximum of one additional year.

Timeline:

Release of Request for Applications	April 3, 2026
Pre-submission Form	5 PM ET, April 20, 2026
Consultation Call Completion	May 1st, 2026
Core Service Request	May 2026
Specific Aims Review	May 2026
Full Application	5 PM ET, May 27, 2026
Application Review	May-June 2026
Anticipated Project Start	July 1, 2026

Investigators are encouraged to collaborate with local studies, including the [DC Cohort](#) and [MACS/WIHS Combined Cohort Study \(MWCCS\)](#). Interested investigators should review the procedure for working with these Cohorts prior to the pre-submission deadline and consult with the leaders to assess feasibility. Investigators who plan to use these collaborations will be required to submit an approved concept sheet and a letter of support from a corresponding Cohort Study leadership with the DC CFAR pilot award application.

***New* Pivot Grant Opportunity:** This cycle, DC CFAR investigators who received a pilot award three or more years ago may apply for a Pivot Grant. This opportunity is intended for investigators whose prior pilot work focused on areas that no longer align with current NIH priorities, and who seek to redirect their research toward current NIH HIV research priorities. The application process and requirements will mirror those of the standard pilot awards; however, pivot applications will be reviewed separately from pilot awards. The DC CFAR will consider funding up to one Pivot Grant this cycle and priority will be given to traditional pilot awards. Investigators with questions about eligibility are encouraged to contact the Senior Research Program Manager before applying.

1. Pilot Award Application Requirements

Scope: Projects must focus on HIV/AIDS and align with the [NIH-defined high-priority HIV/AIDS research areas](#). High priority research domains for this cycle include studies that address Ending the HIV Epidemic using an implementation science approach, HIV cure research, aging and comorbidities, reducing HIV/AIDS incidence through pre-exposure prophylaxis and treatment as prevention, and engagement, adherence, and retention in HIV care.

To ensure compliance with the DC CFAR Notice of Award from the NIH, applications cannot include activities related to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), gender identity, or climate change. Projects also cannot involve foreign sites or have international components. [Clinical trials](#) and studies involving new drugs, treatments, or



devices cannot be funded by the DC CFAR; please use [this NIH tool](#) to determine if your research study idea meets the NIH definition for a Clinical Trial.

Principal Investigator Eligibility: Eligible applicants must have a terminal degree; be eligible to submit NIH grant applications through one of the nine [DC CFAR collaborating institutions](#); and be an [investigator member](#) of the DC CFAR. For membership information, please visit the [DC CFAR website](#). PIs can either be [Early Stage Investigators](#) or [New Investigators](#) as defined by NIH, including new investigators in HIV research. Clinical and postdoctoral fellows are not eligible to apply as PIs. Investigators with previous or current DC CFAR Pilot or Transitioning Investigator Awards are not eligible to apply and are encouraged to apply directly to the NIH for funding or confirm eligibility to submit through the pivot award opportunity. However, in this cycle, the pivot award opportunity described above is an exception as previous pilot recipients can reapply under the specific circumstances described above.

Mentorship: Early stage investigators are expected to identify a Primary Mentor (or request one through the DC CFAR Developmental Core) who agrees to provide scientific and grant writing guidance through the application development process, including review of a draft version of the application, and for the duration of the study if funded. The Mentor will ideally be a senior faculty member with expertise in the scientific focus area of the proposal who has been successful in securing grant funding from the NIH. Mentors may be selected either from a DC CFAR institution or from another research institution and must agree, as evidenced by a letter of support, to participate in this role. Applicants are strongly encouraged to allow the proposed mentor adequate time for a substantive review of the proposal prior to its submission. Continued support by the Mentor will be expected for the completion of funded study activities, publication of study results, and the writing of a subsequent NIH grant application.

Funding Period: Awards will be made for a one-year period. While applicants may request a no-cost extension of up to one additional year, such extensions are not guaranteed and will only be granted with strong justification.

Other Requirements: Applications must describe how they will use DC CFAR Core services in their proposed research projects; demonstrate how their research project relates to, and could impact, the HIV/AIDS epidemic in DC; and describe how the pilot award results will inform the development of a specific future NIH proposal. We highly recommend using person-first language and avoiding stigmatizing terms throughout the application.

2. Application Procedures and Instructions

Overview: Potential applicants should note that the DC CFAR Pilot Awards Program is a highly competitive program with a rigorous review process. Successful applications have typically been those that involved substantial advance preparation, including the initial review of the research aims and ongoing mentoring by senior DC CFAR investigators and/or service providers who provide input into the feasibility of the study and the likelihood of future NIH funding. The following pre-application procedures will assist investigators with the development of their applications and provide detailed instructions for the full application.

Pre-Application

Pre-Submission Form: All applicants are required to submit a [Pre-submission Form](#) available through the DC CFAR website. Applicants should continue preparing their full applications after submitting the Pre-submission Form and while awaiting the next step.

Consultation Call: Applicants are required to participate in a virtual meeting with select members of DC CFAR leadership and Community Partnership Council based on the proposed scope of work outlined in their pre-

submission forms. The purpose of this consultation is to provide scientific and administrative feedback from persons who will not be reviewers of the application, and to make recommendations to consult with other DC CFAR members and service providers as appropriate. Primary Mentors should participate in this consultation. Applicants should continue the preparation of their applications while waiting for the scheduling of the consultation call.

Specific Aims Review: Applicants will be invited to participate in a specific aims review with appropriate DC CFAR Service Providers. The purpose of this review is to provide feedback on one of the most important and often most challenging parts of the application. Clear and reasonable specific aims are an essential component of successful applications. Although this review is not required, it is highly recommended.

Core Services: Applicants are strongly encouraged to utilize DC CFAR Core services in their proposed research projects and describe these services in their application. A variety of services are available from the Cores, including design and methodological consultations, laboratory services and assays, statistical methods and sample size calculations, and more. During the pre-consultation call, faculty from the Cores will identify and refer the applicant to necessary services and service providers.

Other Resources: An annual grant writing workshop is provided through the DC CFAR. Other training and mentoring activities may be scheduled during the cycle to further support investigators with their applications.

Full Application Checklist

Submission Procedure: Applications must be submitted to Lorena Segarra at lsegarra@gwu.edu as a combined PDF document through their institutional Offices of Sponsored Research Projects (or a comparable office) with the appropriate institutional signature. Investigators at GW do not need to route their applications and may submit them directly. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted. DC CFAR staff cannot make changes to or alter applications once submitted.

Application Form: All applications must be submitted using the form available at this [link](#). Unless specified otherwise, please use NIH [PHS 398 guidance](#). Additional documents such as study timeline, staffing, research instruments, and informed consent or confidentiality forms may also be included. Please use Arial 11 font and review additional instructions below.

Face Page – Complete this form as if submitting to NIH. Non-GW applicants are required to include the signature of an official from their respective institution.

Lay Summary – A lay language summary of the project which describes the abstract in terms understandable to the general public is required. All scientific terms used in this summary should be written at an 8th grade reading level. The lay summary should also include a brief dissemination strategy detailing how findings will be communicated to the public and a concluding statement describing the potential for local community impact. This summary will be reviewed by DC CFAR Community Partnership Council members with relevant expertise who will assess the project's potential for community impact.

Detailed Budget and Justification – Applicants are encouraged to work with their Office of Sponsored Projects (OSP) to develop the budget in accordance with their institution's procedures. Review the NIH [allowable expenses](#) and then complete the detailed budget request of up to \$75,000 in direct costs or up to \$82,500 if collaborating with the DC Cohort. As agreed by each of the DC CFAR collaborating institutions, indirect costs are not to be included in the budget. Investigators may want to discuss their application and budget with their OSP in advance, as they may need to include a copy of the RFA with this stipulation prior to or at the time of routing of the grant application. Examples of allowable and unallowable expenses are detailed here.

Allowable: Award funds can be used for research-related activities such as: salary support for early stage investigators or new investigators who do not have an R01-equivalent award in HIV (up to \$15,000 not including fringe benefits), research staff or students; equipment, supplies and reagents; participant incentives; and pre-approved domestic travel expenses to attend national scientific meetings to present research related to the DC CFAR award. Travel funding can be requested to cover one conference for this award. This can be done either within the grant budget or, after the grant period has ended, through an application to the microgrant program.

Not allowable: Salary support for senior career faculty or mentor coverage; equipment purchases over \$5,000; travel expenses for unapproved meetings and international conferences.

Biosketches – Include a biosketch for all key personnel and collaborating investigators following [NIH guidelines](#).

Research Plan – No more than six pages total, including a one-page for the Specific Aims. The research strategy should be labeled with section headings for Significance, Innovation, and Approach. We encourage applicants to review examples of successful [NIH](#) and [pilot award](#) applications to NIH prior to writing your research plan. Pertinent graphs, tables, and charts necessary for the understanding of the research project should be included within the body of the Research Plan so the page limit is not circumvented.

Applicant Statement – An applicant statement should be included which summarizes (a) how the findings of this proposal may lead to a future NIH grant application; (b) the role of the Primary Mentor in supporting the application and the subsequent NIH proposal if the project is funded (applicants are required to verify that the Mentor reviewed the final application prior to submission; and (c) a description of DC CFAR Core service(s) that will be utilized for the proposed project.

DC CFAR Developmental Core Checklist – Fill out the checklist included in the full application form.

Scope of Work - Submit a 1-page scope of work detailing your responsibilities by specific aim. This document is required for administrative purposes only. If your award is funded, the document will be attached to the sub-award agreement or used for the award setup.

Letters of Support – Letters of support are required from the Primary Mentor acknowledging continuing support if the project is funded and the PI's Department Chair or Division Director. In addition, appropriate letters of support from co-investigators, collaborators, or consultants should be included. Letters are not required from DC CFAR service providers.

Human Participants Information – If your study involves human participants, specimens and/or data, the Protection of Human Subjects information must be submitted following [SF424 instructions](#). If funded, you will be required to submit all PHS Human Subjects Information about your project to the DC CFAR.

Vertebrate Animals Information – If your study involves live vertebrate animals, information on how you will use and care for the animals must be submitted. Please follow the [SF424 instructions](#) to include the content in the "Vertebrate Animals" attachment.

Resubmission Requirements: Applications may be resubmitted to the DC CFAR Pilot Awards Program if they were not selected for funding in a previous round. If the resubmission involves a similar project, then a one page *Summary* that addresses the feedback received in the Application Review Form should be included. It is highly recommended that resubmitting applicants contact the DC CFAR Developmental Core to set up a meeting to review the initial feedback received.

Application Review Information

Reviewers and Criteria: Applications will be reviewed by a DC CFAR Scientific Review Committee. Non-conflicted reviewers will be selected for each proposal by the Developmental Core. Participants in the Consultation Calls are not eligible to review the applications they consulted on. Reviewers will assess the scientific merit of the applications using the [NIH simplified review framework](#). Each application will be reviewed and scored by a community reviewer with relevant expertise for potential community impact.

Selection Process: The DC CFAR Developmental Core will make funding recommendations to the DC CFAR Executive Committee based largely on the scientific review score while also considering programmatic factors such as research focus area, strength of plan for future NIH funding, proposed use of Core services, and potential for community impact. Each applicant will receive a Summary Statement summarizing the Review Committee's feedback.

Just-in-Time Responses to Reviewers: Prior to final funding decisions, applicants must submit a detailed response to reviewer critiques within two weeks of notification. If the Developmental Core determines that the response is incomplete or insufficient, applicants may be asked to provide additional clarification or, in some cases, the proposal may not be funded.

3. Award Guidelines

Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Institutional Animal Care & Use Committee (IACUC) Approval, and Ethical Oversight

- Final IRB and/or IACUC approvals must be submitted to the DC CFAR before initiating any human or animal subject research.
- Awardees must confirm submission of their IRB and/or IACUC applications within **one month** of receiving the Notice of Award (NOA). Final approval documentation must be provided within **three months** of the NOA; failure to meet this requirement may result in funds being withheld.
- Study activities involving human or animal subjects may not begin until all required approvals are received, including IRB, IACUC, and any necessary reliance agreements with GW. Approvals are expected by the third month of the project period. Investigators are strongly encouraged to engage with their institutional IRB and/or IACUC offices early in the application process to facilitate timely review. Any anticipated delays in approval should be communicated to the DC CFAR as soon as possible.
- A project may require additional advance NIH review before award recipients can begin if by NIH and/or IRB determination, it:
 - involves new ways of using known drugs, treatments, or devices;
 - is deemed above minimal risk by the Institutional IRB;
 - involves vulnerable populations (children, pregnant women, sex workers, prisoners, refugees, individual who are unable to provide informed consent, etc.); or
 - involves behavioral interventions above minimal risk.
- For studies in these categories, the clinical research protocol and informed consent documents of funded studies must be sent to NIH for review and no human subjects work may be initiated until clinical approval is received.
- Funded investigators who plan to recruit human participants will be required to submit the appropriate Human Subjects Information, including but not limited to, the planned enrollment and inclusion across the lifespan.
- CFAR projects must adhere to the [Single IRB policy](#). Reliance agreements are required for any CFAR pilot projects involving human participants that are subcontracted out to another institution, even if the parent institution (GW) is not engaged in the research protocol. The DC CFAR will work with award recipients to obtain the reliance with GW through the SMART IRB platform (the use of a paper IAA will

be reviewed on a case-by-case basis) where GW relies on the institution's IRB review and approval. Investigators must work with their IRB office to determine any other requirements (for example, the protocol may need to be amended) to add GW as a relying site.

- As required by the NIH, the DC CFAR must have a current IRB or IACUC approval copy at all times, and renewal approvals and study closure forms should also be submitted to us in a timely manner.
- Award recipients are responsible for notifying the DC CFAR if there are any reportable events associated with the study. This includes events that are required as prompt reports by the GW or other governing IRB, NIH, or as otherwise requested by the DC CFAR. Specifically, participant death, hospitalization, or injury, participant or community social harms or complaints, concerns about fraud, theft, or falsified data, or other serious events. Should one of these events related to the study occur, they must be reported to the Developmental Core in writing within 72 hours of the event along with a copy of the report to the IRB.

Fiscal Management

- The management of award funds and the completion of the activities outlined in the proposal and budget justification. Expenses must adhere to [NIH](#), DC CFAR and the applicant institution's guidelines on allowable expenditures.
- Investigators have re-budgeting authority when the amount change is less than 25% and within the scope of work and the expenses are allowable for GW, NIH, and the institutions.
- A projected expenditure report will be requested 6 months into the project period. Funds may be rescinded if the project has not made substantial progress at the time of the progress review.
- Final invoices must be submitted within 60 days of the project's end date or sooner based on the terms and conditions of your agreement.
- Pre-approval must be requested before booking any travel; any travel not pre-approved may not be reimbursed. Investigators may request domestic travel expenses to present research findings or training related to the DC CFAR award. Submit the request to lsegarra@gwu.edu at least one month prior to the travel date for expedited review of the Developmental Core.

Reporting and Compliance

- Investigators are required to notify the Developmental Core in writing if significant delays or changes to the research plan will be made after the project has started.
- A progress report (two pages including figures) will be required every six months after the award start date. Progress reports should include scientific progress to date, updates on the project's timeline and expenditures, a summary of DC CFAR Core services and mentoring consultations, a listing of any resulting publications, funding applications, or collaborations; and documentation of annual, ongoing IRB and/or IACUC review. Investigators will also be invited to meet with the Developmental Core to discuss their progress reports.
- A final report (three pages including figures) will be expected two months after the end date of the award. This report should provide a summary of DC CFAR Core services and mentoring consultations since last progress report, and preliminary scientific findings and plans for follow-up, including publications, funding applications and/or future research. Both interim and final progress reports must be sent by email to Lorena Segarra.
 - Please note that after the award has ended, the Core will request details on subsequent grants and publications related to the pilot project. It is the grantee's responsibility to track accomplishments associated with the pilot award and be responsive to data requests.
- Ongoing consultation with a Primary Mentor is required throughout the project and thereafter to support publishing results and submitting a subsequent NIH grant application.

- If invited, the award recipient is expected to present their research at CFAR meetings and events, including the annual DC CFAR Research Symposium, Research-in-Progress seminars, and other events organized by the Developmental Core or the DC CFAR.
- Award recipients are responsible for completing outcome reports for the DC CFAR detailing subsequent publications, funding awards, or collaborations resulting from this grant award for the next five years.
- The DC CFAR should be acknowledged in all above listed project outcomes from the pilot award. Please note that any publications resulting from this award, DC CFAR services and/or mentorship must cite the DC CFAR's NIH award number (AI117970) and must be compliant with [NIH's public access policy](#). Please visit our website for more information about how to [acknowledge the DC CFAR](#).
 - Please review the [2024 NIH Public Access Policy](#) for manuscripts accepted after July 1, 2025.

Contact Information :

Application and Content Questions

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Budget and Institutional Routing Questions

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