



South Carolina Building Resilience through innovative Interventions to promote
Growth & Health after Trauma COBRE (BRIGHT Center)

Year 3 (2027–2028) Request for Applications for Pilot Project Grants and Submission Guidelines

KEY DATES

RFA Release Date	Wednesday, October 7, 2026
Letter of Intent Due	Wednesday, October 21, 2026 (5:00pm EST) REQUIRED
Application Due Date	Wednesday, December 16, 2026 (5:00pm EST)
Earliest Start Date	Thursday, July 1, 2027

NIH's REQUIREMENTS FOR PILOT GRANTS UNDER THIS COBRE GRANT

The Pilot Program is a competitive program that utilizes an NIH-style review to fund **Early Stage and New Investigators and other investigators entering trauma as a new area of research**. Pilot studies that meet the NIH definition of a clinical trial will need to comply with all NIH clinical trial policies, including registering the clinical trial on ClinicalTrials.gov and regularly updating the project status. All pilot funds through this program must be spent in the United States. **Pilot projects are intended to provide critical preliminary data that will be used to pursue competitive extramural grant awards and produce peer-reviewed publications.**

NIH Early Stage Investigator (ESI) and New Investigator definition link: <https://grants.nih.gov/policy-and-compliance/policy-topics/early-stage-investigators>

BRIGHT COBRE OVERVIEW

The purpose of the South Carolina (SC) Building Resilience through innovative Innovations to promote Growth & Health after Trauma Center of Biomedical Research Excellence ([BRIGHT Center](#)) is to strengthen capacity of ESIs and New Investigators to conduct high-impact independent research with an emphasis on development and rigorous testing of innovative interventions and implementation strategies that aim to improve access to and

quality of care among individuals affected by trauma and adversity. Trauma refers to a wide range of sudden or chronic experiences that can be perceived as dangerous or life-threatening and can cause intense feelings of helplessness or horror and lead to long lasting emotional and psychological distress. **Eligibility** is limited to full-time faculty at MUSC who qualify as NIH ESI or New Investigators or full-time faculty at MUSC entering a new area of research directly related to the BRIGHT Center’s mission. All PIs must have earned doctoral degrees and be eligible to submit extramural grant applications at MUSC. It is expected this round that the program will fund ~2 proposals with outstanding potential to translate preliminary data into successful extramural NIH R-series (or equivalent) grant awards, peer-reviewed publications, and, when appropriate, intellectual property.

PILOT PROJECT CATEGORIES

Each pilot award application may request direct costs up to \$50,000. Each award will have a 12-month duration.

Grant Categories	Brief Description
Early Stage/New Investigator	Provide <u>mentored research experiences</u> for investigators at MUSC or other SC institution that meet the definition of NIH ESI or New Investigators. These applications should propose a project mentor in a relevant field of trauma (as defined above), as well as a related mentoring plan.
New Area of Research	Provide support for MUSC investigators <u>at any career stage</u> new to the field of trauma (or an aspect of the trauma field that differs from their prior trauma research). These applications should describe a PI's current field of research and how their proposed pilot study reflects their entry into the trauma (or a different aspect of the field).

PROGRAM QUESTIONS	ADMINISTRATIVE QUESTIONS
Carla Kmett Danielson, PhD Director, Pilot Project Program danielso@musc.edu	Charli Kirby Pilot Program Administrator kirbych@musc.edu

KEY REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL CATEGORIES

- The program is not designed to provide ongoing support for a long-term project or supplemental support for ongoing funded research projects.
- **Multiple PIs:** Not allowed
- **ClinicalTrials.gov NCT Numbers:** In accordance with the bullet above, pilot awards are intended to be standalone projects. For pilots that meet the definition of an NIH Clinical Trial and require registration on ClinicalTrials.gov, the pilot must not be combined with a larger study under a single NCT number, nor should the pilot study be extended to include additional phases (with additional participant enrollment or downstream reportable results) beyond the NIH- and BRIGHT Center-approved scope of work.
- **Cite the Grant:** You must cite the NIH grant number in each publication, published abstract, and poster presentation using language similar to, “Research reported in this publication was supported by the BRIGHT COBRE funded, in part, by the NIH/NIGMS under award number P20GM156709.”
- **Records of Invention:** Any inventions that arise from a pilot award must include the NIH grant number (P20GM156709), and the pilot PI is required to notify the Medical University of South Carolina to ensure appropriate reporting and handling of intellectual property rights and disclosures.

CATEGORY SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

ESI/New Investigator Awards. PIs must designate a primary research mentor for the pilot project, who must have recognition as an accomplished scientist in their field (relevant to trauma that aligns with the proposed work of the pilot application), a strong history of competitive research support, and a track record of success in training independent investigators. Applications must include a detailed letter from the proposed mentor describing the Mentoring Plan (e.g., frequency of mentor/mentee meetings, access to space and/or equipment, scientific knowledge to be gained [e.g., methods, techniques]).

New Area of Research Awards. Pls must include a letter addressed to the BRIGHT COBRE Pilot Project Review Committee that describes the PI's current field of research and how their proposed pilot study reflects their entry into the trauma field (or new aspect of the trauma field); and the letter must further explain how the PI intends to be successful in this new area of research (e.g., methods/techniques training, relevant consultations with experienced researchers, etc.).

APPLICATION PROCESS

1) **REQUIRED:** Letter of Intent (LOI)

Due Wednesday, October 21, 2026 (5:00pm EST)

The LOI is required. It allows us to ensure you have access to the full application submission system, allows our team to estimate the potential review workload, and assures that your proposed topic is relevant to the BRIGHT Center mission. Unless you hear from the BRIGHT Center, you can proceed with submitting your full application once you submit your LOI. LOIs should contain the following information (completed via REDCap survey, see below for link):

- Descriptive title of proposed research
- Name, email address, and telephone number of the PI
- Complete listing of the investigative team with each individual's academic title, primary department, and proposed role on the project (including the proposed mentor(s) for Early Stage applications)
- Pilot grant category (Early Stage/New Investigator or New Area of Research)
 - If a New Area of Research, description of current area of research and how the proposed pilot is a new area of research for you (max 100 words)
- Objective and hypotheses of the project (max 300 words)
- Overview of the study design/methods (max 500 words)
- Relevance to the trauma field (max 100 words)
- How proposed project will utilize [BRIGHT Center Cores](#) and align with the [BRIGHT Center mission](#) (max 250 words)

Follow this REDCap link to submit your LOI
<https://redcap.musc.edu/surveys/?s=KFC4J884FE99TJ3T>

2) NIH Grant Instructions for an R-series Application (Version I)

<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/forms-i/research-forms-i.pdf>

3) Full Application Instructions

Due Wednesday, December 16, 2026 (5:00pm EST)

The link to submit a full application will be sent upon receipt of your required LOI

- Formatting:
 - Font: Arial
 - Font Size: 11-point (except tables and figures can be 9-point)
 - Margins: No smaller 0.5" on all sides
 - Only use Word documents and then save and upload as PDFs

3A. Project Summary and Project Narrative (REQUIRED)

- 30 lines of text total for the Project Summary (majority of the section) and the Project Narrative (Lay Abstract; 2-3 sentences)
- The **Project Summary** should serve as a succinct and accurate description of the proposed work when separated from the application. State the application's broad, long-term objectives and specific aims, relating them to the BRIGHT COBRE / Trauma & Traumatic Stress mission. Describe concisely the research design and methods for achieving the stated goals. This section should be informative to others working in the same or related fields and understandable to a scientifically or technically literate reader.
- The **Project Narrative (Lay Abstract)** should provide the same information as the Project Summary but be written in plain language understandable to a general, lay audience – such as people who have experienced trauma and are interested in learning about the work.

3B. Research Plan (REQUIRED)

- 5-page limit (1 page for Specific Aims, 3 pages for Research Strategy, and 1 page for Additional Review Criteria)
- The **Specific Aims** should state concisely the goals of the proposed research and summarize the expected outcome(s), including the impact that the results of the proposed research will exert on the research field(s) involved. List succinctly the specific objectives of the research proposal, e.g., to test a stated hypothesis, solve a specific problem, challenge an existing paradigm or clinical practice, address a critical barrier to progress in the field, or develop a new technology. **The Specific Aims section is limited to one page.**
- The **Research Strategy** section should describe how the data will be analyzed and used to make inferences regarding the Specific Aims. **The Research Strategy section is limited to three pages.**

- The Research Strategy should follow the standard NIH format, which includes Significance, Innovation, and Approach (see #2 above the NIH R-series NIH Grant Applications for Version I).
 - The **research strategy** should be informative enough for reviewers to understand the proposed research without any supporting documents.
 - Applicants should include all required details for the grant category and its review criteria within the proposal, without referring to additional pages/documents.
 - Include a scientific rationale for the proposed methods/technologies and how and why they will be used in your study. Describe how this study may further the field's understanding.
- The Additional Review Criteria section should include (**limited to 2 pages**):
 - State how you plan to secure future extramural funding, including how you plan to use the results of the pilot study in future grant proposals. Please be sure to state the target funding agency, mechanism, and timeline. Describe how your project aligns with the [NIH Unified Strategy](#) and, as applicable, be as specific as possible as to how your target variables of study align with strategic priorities of your target funding agency/institute(s) within NIH.
 - Each proposal must include a realistic timeline for completing the proposed project, preparing and submitting at least one manuscript to an appropriate professional journal, and preparing and submitting a competitive grant application by or shortly after the end of the award period.
- **Required Elements** Not Included in the 5-page Limit
 - A **Biostatistical Justification** of sample size should be included for all studies. The Biostatistical Justification should be placed at the end of the Research Strategy and is not included in the page limit.
 - **Category Specific Requirements Letters** should be placed after the Biostatistical Justification and are not included in the page limit.
 - The **Literature Cited** section should be placed after the Letters of Support and is not included in the page limit.
- **Overall Research Plan** section order
 - 1) Specific Aims
 - 2) Research Strategy
 - 3) Biostatistical Justification
 - 4) Category Specific Requirement Letters
 - 5) Additional Review Criteria
 - 6) Literature Cited

4C. Data Management & Sharing Plan (**REQUIRED**)

- Follow instructions here found here: <https://grants.nih.gov/policy-and-compliance/policy-topics/sharing-policies/dms/writing-dms-plan>
- Review [NOT-OD-26-046](#) and [NOT-OD-26-100](#) for recent changes to DMSP standards.
- Please use the new 2026 template found here: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants-process/write-application/forms-directory/data-management-and-sharing-plan-format-page>

- Uploaded within the PHS Human Subjects and Clinical Trials Information section in the InfoReady application

4D. Regulatory Documents (REQUIRED)

- Follow NIH Grant Instruction for an R-Series Application (Version I). <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/forms-i/research-forms-i.pdf>
- Human studies must include a PHS Human Subjects and Clinical Trials Information (HSCTI) packet that conforms to the NIH R-Series Grant Instructions (Version I), section R.500 (PHS Human Subjects and Clinical Trials Information) instructions.
- Link to HSCTI form: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html>
 - Use the form/instructions linked above as a reference. Do NOT submit the packet itself. Each individual element will be submitted separately in the InfoReady application
- Animal studies must include a Vertebrate Animals section that conforms to the NIH R-Series Grant Instructions (Version I), section R.400 (PHS 398 Research Plan Form) instructions for #5 Vertebrate Animals.
- Assurance of IRB and/or IACUC approval and of completion of NIH-mandated responsible conduct of research training must be furnished after the Award notice and before funds can be released.

4E. Letters of Support/Collaboration (limit 3) – not required other than mentor letters for ESI applications

- Uploaded within the Category Specific Requirements section of the Research Plan

4F. Budget Justification and Statement of Intent

- For the budget, please use **PHS 398 Form Page 4: Detailed Budget for Initial Budget Period in MS Word Version** (1 page) at <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html> Use continuation pages as needed for the budget justification. The BRIGHT Center Executive Committee reserves the right to reduce requested award amounts.
- **Personnel Support:** Salary and fringe benefits is required to cover 1 CM (8.3% FTE) of PI's effort to conduct the proposed research. Additional salary support may cover other faculty, staff, and trainees.
- **Non-Personnel Research Expenses:** Allowable expenses include research supplies, animal purchase and per diem, institutional core service fees, research subject compensation and transportation, and data analysis/statistical support. All expenses must be directly related to the proposed research.
- **Unallowable Costs:** General office supplies, computers and laptops, capital equipment, tuition, membership dues and fees, publication costs greater than \$2,500, subscription costs, mailing costs, and rent. Additionally, no pilot project funds of any kind can be spent outside the domestic United States – this includes both effort for personnel and purchases.
- In-kind budgetary items or other paid costs will be considered as cost-share, and the PI's primary
- department will be required to provide a letter of support/collaboration confirming the commitment.

- Funding to external investigators will be provided based on monthly invoices under a Sub-contract/Consortium Agreement. Post-award management of pilot project funds awarded to internal MUSC applicants will be managed by the BRIGHT Center Grant Administrator. For internal MUSC pilots, an individual account number will be established, and instructions for the process of funding personnel and ordering supplies will be provided upon official notification of award. **Internal applicants are not allowed to include F&A (Indirect Costs) in their pilot budgets, and those budgets are limited to 30,000. Also note that the source of funding for internal pilots is considered cost share, and Affiliate salary will not be charged to the project; only the MUSC portion will be charged.**

4G. NIH-Formatted Biosketch

- Provide a certified SciENcv, NIH-formatted Biographical Sketch for all key personnel. Please use the SciENcv NIH format that includes the supplemental form.
- Combine all biosketches into a single PDF file in the following order: Pilot Project PI first, then all others in alphabetical order by last name.

Pilot Projects must be completed within 12 months of the funding date.

For questions or assistance with submission, please contact Charli Kirby at kirbych@musc.edu.

Application Review Criteria and Process

Each application will be reviewed by two to three reviewers with appropriate expertise. Applications will be scored on the 1-9 point NIH scale, and recommendations for funding will be primarily based on these scores. Scoring will focus on four areas: 1) quality of the research (scientific merit, innovation, and impact); 2) relevancy to the mission of the BRIGHT Center; 3) qualifications of the research team to lead the research effort toward securing extramural funding; and 4) probability of the proposed research outcomes and the research team to successfully compete for NIH R-series (or equivalent) grant awards. The reviewers will provide a concise written review of the application's strengths and weaknesses, along with recommendations for improvement.

Funding recommendations will be made by the Executive Committee and the BRIGHT Advisory Committee and then must be approved by NIH program staff.

Post Award Reporting Requirements

- Progress reports will be required every 6 months during the active award period and will include standard items required for an R01 annual progress report (RPPR), such as:
 - Progress towards each stated aim
 - Revised budget and justification
 - Publications and patents
 - Grant applications submitted and grants awarded
 - Intellectual property findings

- Updated regulatory documents and cumulative enrollment tables (participant level) – this includes reporting requirements/updates to ClinicalTrials.gov NCT records, if appropriate
- PPLs are expected to report on the following professional activities on a quarterly basis:
 - Grant submissions
 - Collaborative projects
 - Manuscripts/peer-reviewed publications
 - Oral/poster presentations at local, regional, or national meetings
 - Engagement with BRIGHT Cores
- After the close of the active award period, pilot project PIs will be required to submit annual reports on the following, until NIH closes the project and final results are uploaded to ClinicalTrials.gov, if required:
 - Publications and patents
 - Grant applications submitted and grants awarded
 - Intellectual property findings
- Updated regulatory documents and cumulative enrollment tables (participant level) – this includes reporting requirements/updates to ClinicalTrials.gov NCT records, if appropriate

Pilot Project Leader Expectations

Pilot Project Leader (PPL) Expectations	PPL Mentor Expectations
Adhere to all ethical, regulatory and compliance curricula and certifications	Attend PPL presentations (e.g., at Advisory Committee meetings, Retreats, etc.)
Responsibly use and account for BRIGHT resources including all Cores	Attend Project Progress Report Meeting (month 6 of project)
Publish BRIGHT pilot project findings in peer-reviewed journals	Complete six-month PPL evaluation form
Cite BRIGHT COBRE grant support in all manuscripts and presentations	Advise on PPL lab/research project management
Present BRIGHT pilot project results to AC, BRIGHT seminars, local and national scientific meetings	Maintain an open-door policy for PPL
Report and discuss any perceived problems with BRIGHT project with the PD, EC member, or AC member	Support problem solving
Remain affiliated with and active in BRIGHT after completing pilot project	Advocate for PPLs locally and nationally and assist with professional development
	Provide expertise as a senior investigator to the PPL project
	Critique PPL grant proposals and manuscripts

Meetings and Reporting Activities

✓ required; * encouraged	PPL	PPL Mentor
Monthly All Hands	✓	*
Monthly (min.) Mentor Mtg	✓	✓
1 Core Consult Per Core Per Quarter	✓	*

Quarterly Activities Reporting	✓	✓
6-month Progress Mtg	✓	✓
Biannual AC Mtgs	✓	*
Annual Strategic Retreat	*	*
BRIGHT-sponsored Trainings/Seminars	*	*