Request for Proposals

Biomedical Research Seed Grants
Office of Research and Innovation
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Application Deadlines: October 1, 2026, and April 1, 2027
Proposals must be submitted in NuRamp.

Program Overview

Biomedical Research Seed Grants enhance the competitiveness of University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) faculty submitting grant proposals to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Given that evidence of prior work or preliminary data is an essential component of most biomedical research proposals submitted to NIH, awardees receive seed funding to facilitate preliminary study and/or data collection to strengthen a future NIH proposal submission. The expected outcome for these grants is for UNL principal investigators (PIs) to improve competitiveness of NIH R21 or R01 proposals.

While not an exhaustive list of allowable activities, seed funds may be used to:

- Accumulate evidence in support of a working hypothesis.
- Demonstrate the feasibility of a new approach.
- Build reviewers' confidence in the project team's ability to handle cutting-edge technologies, understand methods, and interpret results.

Applicants to this program must submit a draft of their NIH R21 or R01 proposal and will receive substantive, constructive feedback on the draft proposal from expert external reviewers.

Biomedical Research Seed Grants are made possible by support from the Nebraska Tobacco Settlement Biomedical Research Fund and are administered by the UNL Office of Research and Innovation (R&I).

Faculty are strongly encouraged to contact Matthew Dwyer at mdwyer4@unl.edu or 402-472-1661 before submitting a proposal to discuss eligibility and appropriateness of the project for this program.

Award Information

Award types: Two grant categories are offered based on the NIH funding mechanism being targeted: ***Category 1*** for proposals targeting the development of NIH R21 applications and ***Category 2*** for proposals targeting the development NIH R01 applications.

Award amounts: Applicants may request up to $25,000 per application for Category 1 proposals and up to $50,000 for Category 2 proposals. However, applicants are not required to seek the maximum level of funding. Budget requests should reflect the scope and scale of the proposed work.

Project duration: The project duration for Biomedical Research Seed Grants is 12 months. For this award cycle, the award periods are:

- January 1, 2027, to December 31, 2027, for proposals submitted to the October deadline.
- August 1, 2027, to July 31, 2028, for proposals submitted to the April deadline.

Expected number of awards: The number of awards issued will be determined based on proposal quality (see Proposal Review Process and Timeline below) and availability of funds.

Eligibility

Applicant eligibility: Individuals holding positions in the following categories are eligible to serve as a principal investigator (PI) and submit a proposal to this competition:

- Tenured and tenure-track assistant, associate, and full professors.
- Research assistant, associate, and full professors.

The PI must agree to develop and refine a NIH proposal requesting R21 (exploratory/developmental research grant award) or R01 (research project grant program) support (see Award Conditions and Requirements for details on program expectations for NIH proposal development). Proposals requesting support to develop smaller-scale NIH proposals (e.g., R03s) will not be considered.

Investigators with current biomedical research funding will not be at a competitive disadvantage for funding from the Biomedical Research Seed Grant program. However, applications to the program must be for new projects aimed at obtaining a new funding stream and not aimed at a continuation of existing work.

Faculty interested in developing proposals that do not meet the eligibility guidelines for the Biomedical Research Seed Grant program are encouraged to contact the Office of Proposal Development for assistance and to utilize R&I's expert external review of grant proposals program.

Other personnel: Other essential project personnel (e.g., co-investigators) may participate in the proposed Biomedical Research Seed Grant project and may be internal or external to UNL. While co-investigators listed in the NuRamp submission form will be limited to internal investigators, personnel from external organizations should be listed on the proposal coversheet (see Proposal Requirements below), along with UNL personnel.

Limit on the number of applications: Individual PIs may submit one proposal to this competition per deadline. There is no limit on the number of applications to which an individual may contribute in another role (e.g., as other project personnel).

Limit on the number of awarded grants: UNL faculty may have no more than one active award from the Biomedical Research Seed Grants program as PI. Biomedical Research Seed Grants do not count toward the limit of two R&I internal grants in any four-year fiscal period.

Resubmissions: Declined proposals may be resubmitted following substantive revision in response to reviewers' comments. However, all proposals will be treated as new applications. Resubmissions should not be described as revised applications, and revisions should not be called out in proposal narratives.

Proposal Requirements

Overall instructions and formatting: Proposals should be prepared using an 8.5" x 11" page size with 1" margins and single-spaced 11-point font (Arial, Calibri, Aptos, Georgia, or Times New Roman). The font sizes used in captions, graphics, tables, and detailed budgets may be smaller, but this text must be legible when printed. The NIH R21 or R01 proposal draft (Proposal Component 6 below) may use standard NIH formatting (e.g., one-half inch margins).

The proposal should include sufficient detail to demonstrate to reviewers its technical merit and potential to achieve the stated outcomes.

Proposal components: Please prepare the following information—in the order described—as a single PDF. The inclusion of appendices or documents in addition to those requested below are not allowed.

1. ***Coversheet*** *(two-page maximum)*

- Prepare the coversheet using this template.
- The coversheet requests the project title, the Biomedical Research Seed Grant category, the sponsoring NIH Institute or Center, the targeted NIH program, contact information for the relevant NIH program officer (and a summary of relevant interactions to date), a list of project personnel, the total seed grant amount requested, contact information for up to four potential expert external reviewers, and a 300-word project abstract.

2. ***Proposal Narrative*** *(four-page maximum)*

A. Introduction

- Pose a clear biomedical research topic for which you will seek NIH funding.
- Detail relevant background information and rationale to demonstrate the need for preliminary study and/or data collection to enhance NIH grant proposal competitiveness. This may include situating the project in existing literature, research, or practice in the relevant field(s); describing relevant preliminary study, data, or work by project personnel; and/or providing background information on relevant human health issues.
- State the PI's long-term goal that the proposed project will contribute to and list the Biomedical Research Seed Grant project's overall goal and specific objectives for the proposed preliminary study and/or data collection.
- Summarize the significance and potential impact of the proposed project for which you are seeking NIH funding, including how the project will help to advance biomedical research and human health.

B. Proposed Plan

- Describe the specific preliminary study and/or data collection activities to be conducted with the Biomedical Research Seed Grant with enough specificity so reviewers may understand how the proposed objectives will be accomplished. The scope of the activities must align with a one-year funding period and the requested budget.
- As appropriate for the project, describe data/information sources to be used; methods of analysis or development; engagement with relevant technologies, platforms, or resources; potential pitfalls and alternative approaches; etc.
- Describe alignment of the project with institutional strengths and relevant prior investments (e.g., personnel, facilities, equipment, etc.).

- If the project is collaborative, summarize the roles and responsibilities of the PI and other essential project personnel.

C. Outcomes

- Describe specific outcomes and/or deliverables expected from the proposed preliminary study and/or data collection.
- Clearly articulate how the outcomes/deliverables will improve the competitiveness of the NIH R21 or R01 proposal and how the project aligns with the mechanism being targeted (i.e., the relevant NIH Institute or Center if targeting the Parent R21 or R01 or the priorities of a specific NIH R21 or R01 Request for Applications if relevant).
- Explicitly describe how the project aligns with current NIH and/or federal administration priorities. See R&I's Federal Research Updates webpage for links to relevant resources, including the Office of Management and Budget's *Fiscal Year 2028 Administration Research and Development Budget Priorities* and NIH-specific resources.

D. Timeline

- Provide a timeline summarizing 1) when key project activities will occur during the one-year Biomedical Research Seed Grant project period and 2) immediate future activities related to preparing the NIH grant submission. Include the targeted NIH proposal submission deadline.

3. References Cited *(two-page maximum)*

- Provide a list of references cited in the proposal.

4. Detailed Budget *(one-page maximum)*

- Prepare a detailed budget table for the seed grant project using the Excel budget template available on the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP)'s Proposal Preparation Resources webpage. Applicants may request up to $25,000 for Category 1 proposals and up to $50,000 for Category 2 proposals.
  - Once complete, print the budget to PDF from the "Basic Budget" tab in the template so that it may be combined with the other proposal components as a single PDF. The final budget should generally look like this example, though content will vary depending on the specific budget.
- Applicants are encouraged to review OSP's Budget Template Training Videos and/or work with their business center staff to prepare the budget.
- See Budget Guidelines below for information on allowable and unallowable costs.

5. Budget Justification *(one-page maximum)*

- Provide a budget justification that provides strong rationale about how the requested Biomedical Research Seed Grant funds will be used to carry out the proposed seed project.
- If individuals in the budget are TBD (e.g., technicians, postdoctoral researchers, graduate students), applicants are encouraged to briefly describe a recruitment plan and timeline.
- Proposers may wish to make use of the budget justification samples curated on OSP's Proposal Preparation Resources webpage.

6. NIH R21 or R01 Proposal Draft

- Provide drafts of the following R21 or R01 proposal components for the planned NIH submission, which must be developed in accordance with NIH proposal preparation guidelines. Applicants may use standard NIH formatting when preparing the NIH draft (e.g., one-half inch margins).
  - Project Summary/Abstract (limited to 30 lines of text)

- Project Narrative (limited to three sentences)
- Specific Aims (limited to one-page)
- Research Strategy (limited to six pages for R21s and 12 pages for R01s)
- Bibliography and References Cited (no page limit)
- Corresponding Budget and Budget Justification(s)
  - *The NIH Develop Your Budget webpage provides guidance on NIH budget preparation.*
  - *Resources for developing NIH-style budgets and justifications are available on OSP's Proposal Preparation Resources webpage.*
- NIH-style Biographical Sketches for the PI and any essential project personnel. See the NIH biographical sketch webpage for guidance.
- NIH-style Current and Pending (Other) Support form for the PI (other project personnel should not provide current and pending forms). See the NIH current and pending webpage for guidance.

- Applicants are asked to combine all proposal components as one PDF. Biographical sketches and current and pending forms generated in SciENcv have protections that prevent combining them with other documents in Adobe Acrobat. To combine SciENcv-generated documents with other PDFs, first print the files to PDF.
- The SF 424 (R&R) Application Guide provides instructions for preparing these proposal components, and R&I staff curate a webpage listing NIH application resources, including outlines and templates.

7. ***NIH Proposal Draft Status*** *(limited to 300 words)*

- While applicants should submit as complete an NIH R21 or R01 proposal draft as possible, it is understood that some aspects of the required proposal components may not be fully developed at this stage (e.g., preliminary data sections of the Research Strategy). Use this short statement to explain the current status of the NIH proposal draft included with the application and how the proposed Biomedical Research Seed Grant activities will be used to strengthen the draft for submission to NIH.
- ***Note:*** *In all cases, NIH proposal drafts should be at a sufficient stage of development to enable external reviewers to provide substantive feedback on the draft.*

Proposal Submission Process and Deadline

Applications for internal funding must be submitted via the Internal Competitions module in NuRamp (https://nuramp.nebraska.edu). Sign in to NuRamp using your institutional credentials.

Proposals must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. Central on Thursday, October 1, 2026, or Thursday, April 1, 2027.

Late proposals will not be reviewed.

Budget Guidelines

Budget requests must comply with applicable university policies.

Allowable costs

- Costs to support well-justified activities for preliminary study and/or data collection
- Salary for non-tenure track research faculty, postdoctoral associates, graduate or undergraduate student research assistants, and technical personnel. Requests for salary support must include benefits (including graduate student tuition remission and health insurance stipends, when appropriate).

- Requests for travel must be strongly justified.
- Publication charges are allowable budget expenses. However, proposers are encouraged to leverage the open access publishing agreements available through the UNL Libraries whenever possible. These agreements with scholarly publishers allow UNL authors to publish in selected open access journals at no cost or at reduced rates. Visit the UNL Libraries' Open Access Publishing Agreements webpage for more information about participating publishers and journals. If publication charges are included in the budget, the budget justification should explain why publishing through one of these journals is not suitable for the proposed work.

Unallowable costs

- Costs to support research or activity involving the use of human fetal tissue obtained in connection with the performance of an induced abortion or involving the use of human embryonic stem cells or for the purpose of obtaining other funding for such use
- Salary for tenure leading/tenured faculty
- Teaching release time (i.e., course buyouts)
- Normal operations (e.g., office space, administrative assistance)
- Equipment acquisition or development
- Alteration/renovation of facilities
- Facilities and administrative (F&A) costs (sometimes known as indirect costs)

Sub-recipients/external contractors: Sub-recipients are not allowed. However, external contractors providing goods or services, not substantive intellectual contributions, are allowed and may invoice UNL for project-related costs (see federal definitions of subrecipients and contractors).

Compliance Guidelines

Funds cannot be released unless all personnel identified on the project routing form have an approved conflict of interest (COI)/conflict of commitment (COC) disclosure in place. Participating UNL personnel who do not have a currently approved COI/COC disclosure should complete the online COI/COC Annual Disclosure Form in NuRamp as soon as possible.

Outstanding compliance approvals—such as those required for research involving human subjects, Human Embryonic Stem Cells and/or their derivatives and Human Fetal Tissue and/or their derivatives, animal subjects, transgenic animals, recombinant DNA, biohazards, select agents, radioactive materials, regulated plant materials, and/or the export laws and regulations of the United States—will delay the release of funds following award notification. Contact Research Compliance, Integrity, and Security for more information.

Proposal Review Process and Timeline

Review process: R&I will recruit and compensate external expert reviewers to review proposals, who will provide two levels of review: 1) review of the proposed Biomedical Research Seed Grant projects using the proposal review criteria identified below and 2) review of the NIH R21 or R01 proposal drafts to provide constructive, substantive feedback to all applicants (regardless of whether their Biomedical Research Seed Grants are awarded). R&I staff may also solicit reviews from senior research administrators in the applicants' academic units and/or senior research leaders in R&I, if needed.

While external reviewers are expected to have alignment in expertise with the technical area(s) of the applications, it is possible that not all reviewers will be experts in the exact technical focus area(s) of the applications. Applicants should prepare proposals accordingly.

R&I staff will prepare a report summarizing the proposal review process and review outcomes and share it with the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, who will make final funding decisions.

All applicants will receive summarized written feedback on their applications based on the review process when notified about the funding outcome.

Proposal review criteria and rubric: Proposals will be reviewed based on the following scoring rubric (100 points possible):

Proposal Review Criteria – Biomedical Research Seed Grants	Maximum Value
Significance and fit with the Biomedical Research Seed Grants competition: The extent to which the project will facilitate preliminary study and/or data collection to strengthen a future NIH proposal submission and will advance biomedical research and human health.	25
Technical merit: The extent to which the proposal presents feasible goals and objectives, relevant background information and rationale for the project, a realistic plan of work, methods that are appropriate to the project and discipline, alignment with institutional strengths and relevant prior investments, and a realistic timeline for activities during and beyond the grant period.	25
Potential to achieve program-relevant outcomes: The likelihood that the proposed seed project will enhance the competitiveness of the NIH R21 or R01 proposal and the extent of alignment between the proposed research project and NIH and/or federal administration priorities.	25
Qualifications of PI/personnel: The extent to which the PI/personnel are well-qualified to successfully complete the proposed project and, for collaborative projects, the roles and responsibilities of all personnel are clearly explained.	15
Quality of the budget and justification: The extent to which the outlined costs are appropriate, reasonable, and realistic in relation to the scope, duration, and objectives of the project. The strength of the rationale in the budget justification.	10

Award timeline:

- **For proposals submitted to the October deadline:** Award announcements will be made no later than December 2026. The award period is January 1, 2027, to December 31, 2027.
- **For proposals submitted to the April deadline:** Award announcements will be made no later than July 2027. The award period is August 1, 2027, to July 31, 2028.

Award Conditions and Requirements

Reporting: Recipients must submit a final report to R&I no later than 30 days after the end of the funding period or award termination date. A report template will be sent with the award notification.

Program Requirements: Awardees must commit to and complete the following steps:

- **NIH program officer engagement:** Hold a telephone, face-to-face, or virtual conversation/meeting with the cognizant program officer to discuss the technical merit of the proposed project and its alignment with current priorities at NIH or within a funding program at a specific Institute or Center prior to submitting the R21 or R01 grant application to NIH. An assessment of programmatic fit should be a key component of this conversation.

- **Seed grant project:** Complete the proposed seed grant project (preliminary study and/or data collection) prior to submitting the R21 or R01 grant application to NIH to ensure investment in the seed project is leveraged for optimal competitiveness of the NIH application.
- **R&I engagement:** Commit to a complete review of the updated proposal package by R&I staff at least three weeks prior to final submission to NIH. The Office of Proposal Development will be responsible for providing feedback on the proposal narrative and ancillary documents (e.g., biographical sketches, facilities and other resources, etc.).
- **NIH grant submission:** Submit their NIH R21 or R01 proposal within 24 months of receiving the Biomedical Research Seed Grant.

Unused funds: Funds must be used by the project end date. Any unused funds at the completion of the grant must be returned. University purchasing and travel reimbursement guidelines and timelines must be followed; thus, applicants are encouraged to spend grant funds in a timely manner to avoid last-minute purchases near the end of the grant term.

Budget reallocation: Minor reallocations of funds among existing, approved budget categories are allowable without approval from R&I if the reallocation does not alter the scope of the project. However, reallocations involving 25 percent or more within an approved budget category or for new, unapproved items or budget categories must be approved by R&I in writing in advance of the reallocation.

Transfer of grant: If a PI leaves the university before the project start date, or during the award period, the funds remaining in the account must be returned. If a PI leaves the university, project funds may not be transferred to another faculty member.

Failure to meet award conditions or requirements may disqualify PIs from future internal R&I funding.

Additional Information

For questions or to discuss the fit of a project idea with the priorities of the program, contact Matthew Dwyer, senior research development program coordinator in R&I (mdwyer4@unl.edu or 402-472-1661).