



FRONTIERS
CLINICAL & TRANSLATIONAL
SCIENCE INSTITUTE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS



2026 Lauren S. Aaronson Frontiers Clinical and Translational Science Pilot Program

About Frontiers

The Frontiers Clinical and Translational Science Institute (Frontiers) is a regional initiative involving academic institutions, healthcare systems, and community organizations that address the clinical and translational research needs of Kansas and western Missouri. Frontiers supports high quality clinical and translational science innovation in research methods and training and career development of investigators committed to achieving improved health across the lifespan for all people.

The **Lauren S. Aaronson Clinical and Translational Science Pilot Program** provides grant funding and other support to grow interdisciplinary, investigator-initiated clinical and translational science projects across a broad range of scientific disciplines. The Pilot Program provides funding for early- and mid-career investigators to complete one-year long, impactful, innovative, collaborative clinical and translational projects that will support applications for subsequent externally funded larger studies. The Pilot Program major goals are to: 1) boost emerging investigators' research programs to develop critical preliminary data in support of future applications, including studies leading to trials of promising treatments, interventions, devices, or novel diagnostic or analytic approaches and 2) to support research that addresses clinical challenges pertinent for communities in Kansas and Western Missouri that can be applied to the general population.

Awarding Institute	Frontiers Clinical and Translational Science Institute
Federal Prime Sponsor	National Institutes of Health (NIH) / National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS); Award number UL1TR002366. Applications must be aligned with NIH Agency priorities.
Key Dates	Online System Opens and RFA Release: October 15, 2025 Letter of Intent Deadline: November 17, 2025, 11:59 pm CT Letter of Intent Status Notification: Week of December 15, 2025 Community Rapid Reactor Panels: February 3 and February 4, 2026 Full Application Deadline: February 17, 2026, 11:59 pm CT Merit Review Completion: March 17, 2026 Funding Selection Notifications: early-April 2026 NCATS Prior Approval Submission Goal: May 29, 2026 Official Notice of Award and Public Announcements: July 2026 (anticipated) Earliest Project Start Date: July 1, 2026, pending Frontiers Notice of Award for 2026-27 fiscal year. <i>*Note: The Pilot Award Program reserves the right to extend submission deadlines to better meet Frontiers' needs; all changes will be communicated in advance.</i>
Award Amount	Up to \$50,000 can be requested.
Maximum Award Period	July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027. All funds must be spent by June 30, 2027 – carry over and no-cost extensions are not allowed.
Number of awards	Up to 3 awards
Review Criteria	Invited full applications will be reviewed using a process based on the new NIH-Simplified Peer Review Framework and other stated review criteria.
Contact Information	Robin Liston, MPH, Project Director, rliston2@kumc.edu

Introduction

The National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) is charged with determining where common pitfalls exist in the translational process and developing innovative solutions that will ultimately benefit research across a range of diseases and conditions. This disease-agnostic approach to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of all translational research is known as *translational science*.

The Frontiers Pilot Award Program is supported by and aligned with the NCATS Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) Program, focused on advancing clinical and translational science (CTS) to:

- Develop, demonstrate, and disseminate scientific and operational innovations that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of clinical translation from identification to first-in-human studies to medical practice implementation to community health dissemination.
- Promote partnerships and collaborations to facilitate and accelerate translational research projects locally, regionally and nationally.
- Create, provide and disseminate innovative research programs and partnerships across institutions and communities to address health needs and deliver the benefits of translational science to all.
- Create and implement scientific and operational innovations that increase the quality, safety, efficiency, effectiveness and informativeness of clinical research.

Applications must be aligned with NIH Agency priorities.

Translational Science Requirement

Pilot projects are **required** to focus on translational science, i.e., [understanding a scientific or operational principle](#) underlying a step of the translational process with the goal of developing generalizable principles to accelerate translational research. **Applicants are required to address at least one of the principles but should include all relevant principles.**

Translational research focuses on advancing a step of the translational process for a specific target/disease, translational science seeks to develop, demonstrate, and disseminate generalizable innovations and strategies to improve the process of translational research.

Translational science projects seek to **1. identify and understand barriers that delay progress or limit the quality or impact of translational research** (e.g., clinical trial recruitment, data interoperability, implementation, etc.), and **2. develop innovative solutions** (e.g., methods, best practices, tools, technologies) to overcome these barriers. Addressing critical barriers will allow subsequent translational research to accelerate the time from discovery to improved human health. The innovative solutions will have broad applicability to multiple research projects, increasing capacity and efficiency.

Applications directly related to one or more of the following priority areas will be accepted:

- Processes and programs to understand, support and advance translation (e.g., collaborative structures; comprehensive workforce development; integration of project management; incentives/credit for team science; incentives/credit for health improvements; education/training; biomarker qualification process).
- Data-related improvements and tools (e.g., data interoperability; Electronic Health Records for research; data transparency/release).
- Clinical research improvements and tools (e.g., clinical trial networks; clinical outcome criteria, patient-reported outcomes); clinical diagnostic criteria; contemporary clinical trial designs; single Institutional Review Board implementation; regulatory science; shortening time of intervention adoption).
- Clinical study recruitment improvements and tools (e.g., identification, recruitment, engagement and/or retention of populations and/or subpopulations in clinical trials and studies).
- Community and stakeholder engagement.
- Methods to better measure impact on health outcomes (or lack thereof).

Examples of activities that may be supported:

- Development of new research methodology and/or new technologies/tools/resources that will advance CTS and thus increase the efficiency and effectiveness of translation.
- Early-stage development of new therapy/technology with generalizable application to an identified translational roadblock.
- Demonstration in a particular use case(s) that the new methodology or technology advances translational science by successfully making one or more steps of the translational process more effective or efficient.
- Dissemination of effective tools, methods, processes, and training paradigms.
- Feasibility/proof of concept studies to support future CTS projects.

LSA Pilot Award Program has identified the following areas for Programmatic Fit.

- Studies that include multidisciplinary perspectives.
- Studies that address health issues among local populations, including rural communities.
- Community-based research involving participants/patients, families, caregivers and/or communities, which test new treatments, interventions, recruitment/retention strategies, or policies that impact health outcomes.
- Implementation and dissemination studies, effectiveness, and/or dissemination of clinical research findings into practice.

Eligibility

This competition is open to principal investigators (PIs) at any partner institution who are eligible to receive investigator-initiated federal funding at their respective institutions.

- Children's Mercy Kansas City
- Kansas City University
- Kansas State University
- University of Kansas/Medical Center/Health System
- University of Missouri-Kansas City
- Saint Luke's

Academic applicants are encouraged to collaborate with community organizations to develop applications. Early to mid-career PIs are encouraged to apply. Established PIs may apply but should demonstrate that the pilot project explores a substantially new direction beyond their current work and has strong potential to lead to future larger funding.

PIs who have received previous Frontiers funding may submit a Letter of Intent, but must describe:

- Outcomes from previous funding.
- Why this pilot funding is vital for the extension of previous work or for a new area of investigation.

PIs can apply for more than one of Frontiers funding mechanism annually but will only be allowed to accept one award. Applicants may serve as PI on only one award but may be included as collaborators on any number of applications.

Volunteer faculty, residents, fellows, or graduate students are generally not eligible to serve as principal investigators. United States citizens, non-citizen nationals, or those who have legal admission as a permanent resident are eligible. However, any questions regarding PI eligibility should be addressed to individual institutional grants management offices before Letter of Intent submission.

Letter of Intent Requirement

Investigators must submit a Letter of Intent outlining the Significance and Innovation (Importance of the Research), Approach (Rigor and Feasibility), impact of the project, how the project will lead to extramural funding, and how it will further their career goals. We anticipate inviting about eight full applications.

Applicants who do not advance to the full application stage will be notified via email. No scores or written

comments will be provided.

Letters of Intent (LOI) must be combined into one PDF, submitted [online here](#) and should contain:

- Pilot Project Overview using the required [LOI Template](#).
 - Lay Language Summary ($\leq$ 250 words; Public relevance, target population, recruitment strategy, dissemination to key stakeholders)
 - Proposed pilot study description and future plans (3 pages maximum)
 - NIH-format Biosketch for Principle Investigator
 - Prior pilot funding outcome (if relevant); Justification for established investigator (if relevant)

Letters of Intent will be evaluated on the Importance and relevance of the topics to NCATS CTSA and Frontiers as described above.

Full Application Requirements

The following documents are required and must be uploaded as one PDF, in the order below, with the following naming convention: PLastNameFirstInitial – LSA Pilot

- Research Plan
- Budget and Budget Justification
- NIH Biographical Sketch (for all Key Personnel)
- Institutional Letter of Support from department or division chair, using the required template below.

Research Plan should include the following sections and should not exceed five (5) pages

[Download the Research Plan here.](#)

- a. Specific Aims (1 page)
- b. Research Strategy (5 pages, excluding references). See Review Criteria below for additional details.
 - Significance, Innovation (Importance of the Research)
 - Approach (Rigor and Feasibility)
 - Investigator, Environment (Expertise and Resources)
- c. Project Specific Resources (1 page). Describe existing and anticipated resources directly relevant to the proposed study. Specifically include [Frontiers Resources and Services](#) that will be used. *Not included in the 5-page limit.*
- d. Study Timeline. [Template provided here](#), but any format is accepted. (1 page)
- e. For Human Subject Studies: Complete the Planned Enrollment Table using this [template](#). *Note the template requires Java Script to be enabled to calculate the totals.*
- f. References (no page limit)

Community Engagement

Applicants who are invited to submit a full application will be required to present their proposed application to a Rapid Reactor Panel of community members. Applicants will present their projects, including plans to disseminate results to the community in lay language, to the Rapid Reactor Panel representing the ultimate consumers of biomedical research. The Rapid Reactor Panel will provide feedback on presentation, input regarding communication with the population of intent and potential challenges in study recruitment and retention. **A paragraph, at least, must be included in the final application describing modifications that resulted from the Rapid Reactor Panel feedback.** (Not included in the 5-page limit).

Budget guidance: Applicants may request up to \$50,000. All funds must be spent by June 30, 2026 – carry over and no-cost extensions are not allowed. **Contact Jen Whitaker**, jwhitaker5@kumc.edu, for institutional guidance regarding indirects.

The award may be used to fund up to \$10,000 of the PI's salary. Applicants are encouraged to include and compensate a relevant community or patient representative as a team member who can make substantive contributions to project design or implementation. Only essential Key Personnel and staff salary should be included in the budget. Other Key Personnel (e.g., faculty co-investigators) may be included with zero compensation, with a rationale as to their role included in the [budget justification](#).

Equipment may not exceed 10% of the total budget.

The following costs are not covered by these awards:

- Non-Frontiers institution staff salaries (with the exception of required consultants, if justified)
- Administrative or office costs (e.g., office supplies, telephone, etc.)
- Meals or hospitality (e.g., food, beverages or alcohol, unless justified for the study outcomes)
- Travel that is not directly related to the conduct of research
- Other items typically supported by Facilities and Administration costs

NIH Biographical Sketch: Include for all Key Personnel. [Template, instructions, and samples found here.](#)

Institutional Letter of Support: PIs must have written commitment from their department chair, or equivalent, of a minimum of 20% of the PI's 1.0 FTE to conduct the proposed research. [Institutional Letter of Support can be accessed here.](#)

Notice of Proprietary Information

Applicants are discouraged from submitting information considered proprietary unless it is deemed essential for proper evaluation of the application. Applications containing information that constitutes trade secrets, that is financial or commercial, or that is confidential or privileged should identify the content by marking those paragraphs or lines with an asterisk (*). All reviewers sign a Confidentiality Agreement.

Merit Review: Applications will be reviewed and scored using a process based on the new [NIH Simplified Peer Review Framework](#) as described below. Applicants will receive a summary describing strengths and weaknesses of the application in the late spring/early summer of 2026. Applications that do not follow the requirements as detailed in this RFA and applications that are submitted late will be administratively withdrawn.

Factor 1: Importance of the Research (Significance, Innovation), scored 1-9

Significance

- Evaluate the importance of the proposed research in the context of current scientific challenges and opportunities, either for advancing knowledge within the field, or more broadly. Assess whether the application addresses an important gap in knowledge in the field, would solve a critical problem, or create a valuable conceptual or technical advance.
- Evaluate the rationale for undertaking the study, the rigor of the scientific background for the work (e.g., prior literature and/or preliminary data) and whether the scientific background justifies the proposed study.

Innovation

- Evaluate the extent to which innovation influences the importance of undertaking the proposed research. Note that while technical or conceptual innovation can influence the importance of the proposed research, a project that is not applying novel concepts or approaches may be of critical importance for the field.
- Evaluate whether the proposed work applies novel concepts, methods or technologies or uses existing concepts, methods, technologies in novel ways, to enhance the overall impact of the project.

Factor 2: Rigor and Feasibility (Approach), scored 1-9

Approach

- Evaluate the scientific quality of the proposed work. Evaluate the likelihood that compelling, reproducible findings will result (rigor) and assess whether the proposed studies can be done well and within the timeframes proposed (feasibility).

Rigor

- Evaluate the potential to produce unbiased, reproducible, robust data.
- Evaluate the rigor of experimental design and whether appropriate controls are in place.
- Evaluate whether the sample size is sufficient and well-justified.
- Assess the quality of the plans for analysis, interpretation, and reporting of results.
- Evaluate whether the investigators presented adequate plans to address relevant biological

- variables, such as sex or age, in the design, analysis, and reporting.
- For applications involving human subjects or vertebrate animals, also evaluate:
- the rigor of the intervention or study manipulation (if applicable to the study design).
 - o Whether outcome variables are justified.
 - o Whether the results will be generalizable or, in the case of a rare disease/special group, relevant to the particular subgroup.
 - o Whether the sample is appropriate and sufficiently varied to address the proposed question(s).
- For applications involving human subjects, including clinical trials, assess the adequacy of inclusion plans as appropriate for the scientific goals of the research. Considerations of appropriateness may include disease/condition/behavior incidence, prevalence, or population burden, population representation, and/or current state of the science.

Feasibility

- Evaluate whether the proposed approach is sound and achievable, including plans to address problems or new challenges that emerge in the work. For proposed studies in which feasibility may be less certain, evaluate whether the uncertainty is balanced by the potential for major advances.
- For applications involving human subjects, including clinical trials, evaluate the adequacy and feasibility of the plan to recruit and retain an appropriate population of participants. Additionally, evaluate the likelihood of successfully achieving the proposed enrollment based on age, racial, ethnic, and sex categories.
- For clinical trial applications, evaluate whether the study timeline and milestones are feasible.

Factor 3: Expertise and Resources (Investigator, Environment), to be evaluated as either sufficient for the proposed research or not (in which case reviewers must provide an explanation)

Investigator(s)

- Evaluate whether the investigator(s) have demonstrated background, training, and expertise, as appropriate for their career stage, to conduct the proposed work. For Multiple Principal Investigator (MPI) applications, assess the quality of the leadership plan to facilitate coordination and collaboration.

Environment

- Evaluate whether the institutional resources are appropriate to ensure the successful execution of the proposed work.

Overall Impact, scored 1-9

Overall Impact is the synthesis/integration of the review criteria as well as the relevance of the budget (and budget justification) for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved.

Potential of pilot to result in future funding and publication. Is there evidence that successful completion of the pilot will competitively position the PI for an NIH award and an impactful publication.

Funding Selections and Notice of Award: Selections for Intent to Fund are anticipated in April 2026. Selected applications will be submitted to the NCATS for Prior Approval, when applicable. NCATS approval must be received before release of funds and any public announcements. Release of funding is also dependent on receipt of the Notice of Award for Frontiers Y4 funding year, which is anticipated in July 2026.

Post Award Requirements: Clinical trials are required to be registered prior to official submission for Prior Approval from NCATS. Results of the study must be posted on clinicaltrials.gov to adhere to NIH policy.

Meetings

All recipients of pilot awards are required to meet with the Communications Coordinator within four weeks following notification of Intent to Fund. A story will be prepared about awards prior to the issuance of official Notice of Awards.

Awardees will be required to meet with Frontiers Project Director and the Administrative Director, who handles financial aspects, two times during the funded project to ensure the study is progressing and funds are being expended. These individuals are available to assist throughout the project period.

Dissemination: Presentations and Publications

Awardees will be required to present their awarded projects to Frontiers Advisory Groups during the funding year and at the completion of the project. [Find additional information about the Advisory Groups here.](#)

It is expected that research supported by the pilot awards will result in one or more publications in a peer-reviewed journal and will provide critical preliminary data to support extramural grant applications. Details of all published manuscripts, meeting abstracts, and grant awards that result from data obtained from pilot grants should be included in the mid-year and end of year progress reports and annual surveys. Report templates will be provided. Awardees will be sent an annual survey for up to 5 years asking about the impact of their work.

It is essential that study outcomes are disseminated to both the scientific and lay communities; therefore, Frontiers expects that awardees will also disseminate findings to participants and community groups as appropriate. Frontiers will highlight projects at the Annual Research Symposium, where awardees will be required to present.

All publications and presentations must acknowledge NIH grant support arising from any research project that used Frontiers resources. [Learn how to cite Frontiers here.](#)

[Find Additional Resources and Frequently Asked Questions here.](#)