



2026 Biostatistics, Epidemiology, and Research Design Trailblazer Award 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 improved health across the lifespan for all people.

The **Biostatistics, Epidemiology, and Research Design (BERD) Trailblazer Award** provides grant funding to support statistical, epidemiological, and data science investigations toward novel methods development that will improve clinical and translational science (CTS) inferences. BERD Trailblazer Awards support research projects for methods development for CTS.

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	RFA Release: December 10, 2025 Application Deadline: March 3, 2026, 11:59 pm CT Merit Review Completion: late-March 2026 Funding Decision Notifications: mid-April 2026 Award Announcement: May 2026 NCATS Prior Approval Materials for Notification Only: May-June 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 funding year. <i>*Note: The BERD 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 \$20,000 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 1 award
Review Criteria	Invited full applications will be reviewed and scored using a process based on the new NIH-Simplified Peer Review Framework and other stated review criteria.
Contact Information	Megan Cosse, BERD Navigator, mcosse@kumc.edu

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Translational Science Requirement

Trailblazer 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 will be 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.

Research Focus Areas

Frontiers BERD Trailblazer Awards support projects that address methodologies or analyses useful to the study of all diseases, and include academic disciplines such as biostatistics, epidemiology, bioinformatics, data science, and other quantitative areas that impact clinical and translational science.

Eligibility

This competition is open to principal investigators who are eligible to receive federal funding and employed by any Frontiers partner institution:

- 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

Principal Investigators can apply for more than one funding mechanism but will only be awarded one award annually. Applicants may serve as PI on only one application 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 eligibility should be addressed to individual institutional grants management offices before application submission.

Research Plan: should include the following sections and should not exceed four (4) pages. [Download the Research Plan Template.](#)

- a. Specific Aims (1 page maximum)
- b. Research Strategy (3 pages, excluding references). See Review Criteria below for additional details.
 - Significance, Innovation (Importance of the Research)
 - Approach (Rigor and Feasibility)
 - Investigator and 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 4-page limit.
- d. Study Timeline. Template provided [here](#), but any format is accepted (1 page, not included in the 4-page

limit).

- e. References (only include crucial references; no page limit, not included in the 4-page limit)

Budget guidance: Applicants may request up to \$20,000. Lesser amounts are acceptable and encouraged especially if the BERD Trailblazer Award can be used to match or leverage additional resources. All funds must be spent by June 30, 2027 – carry over and no-cost extensions are not allowed. **Contact Jen Whitaker, jwhitaker5@kumc.edu** for institutional guidance regarding indirects. Budget may be used to support Principal Investigator, Co-Investigator, and other appropriate personnel salaries necessary to complete the project. Required Budget forms can be found [here](#).

Applications should describe projects that will be completed within Frontiers Y5 funding cycle (ends June 30, 2027). All funding decisions and actual start dates for Trailblazer Awards are contingent on receipt of the NCATS Notice of Award for Year 5. 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.

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)
- 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.](#)

Non-Human Subjects Research and Non-Animal Studies Applications ONLY

This mechanism is intended for methodological or quantitative analysis development only. Documentation for designation as “Not Human Subjects Research” is required with full application submission from the appropriate IRB-governing body. The official Human Research Protection Program correspondence of submission and/or approval should be including in the application package. Animal studies requiring IACUC approval are not eligible to apply for this mechanism.

Applications must be submitted [online 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 statement 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).
 - Whether outcome variables are justified.
 - Whether the results will be generalizable or, in the case of a rare disease/special group, relevant to the particular subgroup.
 - Whether the sample is appropriate and sufficiently varied to address the proposed question(s).

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 Trailblazer Award to result in future funding and publication. Is there evidence that successful completion of the project 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 must be submitted to NCATS. Release of funding is dependent on receipt of the Notice of Award for Frontiers Y5 funding year, which is anticipated in July 2026.

Meeting

All recipients of Trailblazer 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.

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 Trailblazer 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. 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.](#)