



Harvard Chan NIEHS Center for Environmental Health

HARVARD CHAN NIEHS CENTER PILOT PROJECT GUIDELINES – 2026

Who can apply for Pilot Project funding?

All Harvard NIEHS [Center members](#) are eligible to apply for pilot project funds. Other faculty or research scientist level researchers may apply in collaboration with a Center member co-investigator.

Applications are accepted from Harvard Research Associates or Fellows working under the supervision of Center faculty, but the role of the sponsoring faculty member must be specified. Doctoral students are not eligible for pilot project support.

How do I apply?

[Applications](#) follow an abbreviated NIH structure, including a narrative section (2-3 single-spaced pages) with background, specific aims, experimental protocols; a brief budget and justification; a PDF of the [IRB Decision Tool](#); and an [NIH SciENCv biosketch](#) for the principal investigator and co-investigators.

Email completed application form with IRB Decision Tool PDF and biosketch(es) to niehsctr@hsph.harvard.edu (cc sunninayar@hsph.harvard.edu) and fill out the [Qualtrics form](#).

What is the deadline

Pilot project applications are due at 11:59 pm ET on August 14, 2026.

What is the maximum award amount and what expenses are allowed?

- Requested costs for a one-year project period may not exceed \$30,000.
 - Subcontracts are allowed, however, if the sub-institution requires indirect costs, it will be included in the \$30K.
- The PI is required to have a minimum of 1% effort devoted to project.
 - PI Salary between 1-3% commensurate with effort is allowable.
 - The NIH Salary cap should be applied if faculty salary is over the cap.
- In some cases, postdoc salary or technical support salary may be appropriate (e.g., biostatistical support).
- The budget may include funds for supplies and other appropriate costs directly related to the project.
- Travel costs are not supported except those essential to carry out the project.
- Unallowable costs include: graduate student stipends, publication costs/page fees, food, conference registration fees/travel, and costs usually allocated to overhead (e.g., data storage).

Can I conduct a clinical trial with Pilot funds?

No, clinical trials are not allowed.

Can my pilot project research take place outside of the United States?

No. We are only able to fund domestic pilot projects.

If you plan to use samples previously collected outside of the US, please reach out to niehsctr@hsph.harvard.edu for further guidance about allowability.

What is the typical project duration?

Funds are awarded for a period of one year. A one-year extension may be requested but carry forward is not guaranteed.

How are Pilot Project proposals evaluated?

Each application is reviewed by three or more reviewers, at least one of whom is not a Harvard Chan NIEHS Center member. Evaluation criteria include:

1. Innovation
2. Study Design
3. Project team
4. Potential for future funding
5. Relevance to the Harvard NIEHS Center mission
6. Potential for stimulating collaborative research

The Pilot Project Review Committee meets to consider the reviews, rank the proposals and make funding decisions.

Funding is determined by the Review Committee ratings, and the availability of funds in a particular cycle. Funding decisions are provided to the applicants along with a summary of comments from the internal and external reviewers. Applicants may be asked to address critical issues before final approval. Unfunded applicants are encouraged to consider reviewer feedback and re-apply during the following funding cycle. Unfunded projects are allowed one resubmission.

When are awards announced?

Funding decisions are typically announced within 6-8 weeks from the application deadline.

What is the funding rate?

Funding success rate can vary with the quality of the proposals and the availability of funds. Over the past several years, the funding rate has been approximately 30% with the average award around \$24,000. [Click here to see a list of previously funded Pilot Projects.](#)

What are a recipient's reporting responsibilities?

Funding recipients will be contacted periodically by the Center Administrator to monitor progress. At the completion of the project, the investigator will submit to the Center Director a short summary of the project and its findings, publications, and applications for independent funding that have resulted from the pilot project. Investigators will be asked to present their work at a Center-sponsored event, such as at an External Advisory Board meeting or the annual retreat. Recipients will be expected to notify [Sarah Unninayar](#) of any publications, press, grant applications or other outcomes related to the pilot funding, and to be responsive to requests for such information annually for Center progress reports.

How do I acknowledge Center support?

Investigators must acknowledge support Center support with a statement that the study “was supported in part by a Pilot Project grant from the Harvard Chan NIEHS Center for Environmental Health (P30 ES000002).”