

National Center and Team Science Planning Award

Overview

President Khator's *strategic plan to Build a Research Powerhouse that Impacts our Region & the World* calls for a doubling of our research expenditures from \$200 million to \$400 million within the next five years. To achieve the doubling of research expenditures, national centers and large interdisciplinary projects are critical. The Division of Research (DOR) recognizes the significant effort of applying for large multi-investigator grants and offers this internal planning grant to prepare for such an application.

The funding is intended to provide up to 18 months of support to teams of researchers led by a University of Houston (UH) faculty member to prepare for the submission of a proposal to a targeted funding opportunity. Contact Dr. Claudia Neuhauser (cmneuhauser@uh.edu) to confirm eligibility. **A Letter of Intent is required no later than two weeks prior to the submission of the planning grant proposal.**

If the submission deadline is less than six months away from the date of the request for a planning grant, the proposal can still be accepted; however, it must include additional justification explaining the feasibility of preparing a strong submission within the time frame.

The DOR will accept submissions through August 31, 2026, or until the funds are exhausted, whichever occurs first. Members of the Research and Scholarship Committee (RSC) and the Committee on Academic Centers and Institutes (CACI) in the Office of the Provost will evaluate the proposals (typically within four weeks of submission) and make a recommendation to the VC/VP for Research. If a proposal is declined, a resubmission will not be considered until a minimum of three months from the date of the initial submission has passed. Resubmissions that are deemed substantially similar to a previous proposal by the hybrid RSC/CACI review committee will be returned without further review.

Eligibility

- The Principal Investigator (PI) must be a full-time tenured, tenure-track, or promotion-eligible non-tenure track faculty member at UH. There are no such restrictions for Co-PIs or Other Key Personnel that may come from other universities or industry.
- PIs or co-PIs may only apply for one planning grant within a three-month period as PI or co-PI, but they may serve on more than one application as Other Key Personnel.
- Proposals must target a specific funding opportunity that is either for a national center or a comparable, large opportunity that requires a team of researchers across different disciplines with a deadline of no more than 18 months from the date of submission of the planning grant. Collaborations with other highly ranked universities are strongly encouraged.

- If the external program is a limited submission, only the team(s) awarded with slot(s) to submit the full proposal(s) will be considered for this internal support.

Award Budget Information

- The maximum award will be \$100,000 for a maximum of 18 months. The amount requested must reflect the award size of the application sought. If the application involves multiple stages (LOI, preliminary proposal, full proposal by invitation only), the budget should reflect the requested funding for each stage of the proposal preparation.
- The funds must be designated for the direct support of proposal development activities; consulting support; travel, meeting, and hosting costs; pilot data collection; and other needs identified in the application. The requested funds must be well-justified to reach the goal of a competitive submission.
- Funds can be used to support a course buyout or faculty salary (up to one month of summer salary for the PI and up to one month of summer salary for one co-PI with an active faculty appointment at UH System) using institutional base salary.
- Funds can be used to pay for an external consultant to help prepare the proposal, but permission must be obtained from the Vice President for Research prior to contracting with a consultant.
- Funds cannot be used for salaries of administrative personnel, service contracts, subawards to other institutions, or computers.
- This internal award will not generate indirect costs.
- Funds cannot be used toward any cost sharing/matching requirements posted by the external sponsor for the full proposal submission.

Review Criteria

Proposals will be judged on their scientific merit, likelihood of being competitive in the targeted opportunity, strength of the team, and justification of the budget request.

Proposal Preparation and Submission

The application must be prepared using the guidelines below and submitted by the PI or the PI's affiliated pre-award research administrator. Combine all files of the completed proposal into a single PDF, name the file LAST_FIRST_2026 where the LAST is your last name and the FIRST is your first name, and upload it to the online cover sheet using the "Apply for Internal Awards" link on the DOR webpage: <https://www.uh.edu/research/funding-opportunities/internal-awards/national-centers-planning-award/>

Prior to filling out the online cover sheet, you must obtain permission from your department chair and the dean of your college to submit this proposal. Failure to inform your department chair and the dean of your college about this submission and obtain permission may result in automatic rejection of the proposal or denial of the award if funded. Emails to you, your

department chair (or equivalent), your associate dean for research, and your dean will be sent after you submit the proposal. Note that you may be asked to provide evidence that you obtained permission, but we do not ask that you submit the evidence with the proposal.

Formatting Requirements

All documents must be prepared on US Letter size paper (8.5"x11") with 1-inch margins on all sides, Arial font size 11 pt or greater. The proposal narrative must have exactly 1.5 line spacing; all other documents may be single-spaced. An Arial font size of no less than 8 pt should be used for the captions to graphics and tables and may be single-spaced. The text in the captions must be legible. Applications that fail to follow the formatting requirements will not be reviewed.

Letter of Intent

1. Cover page

The cover page must include a title, short abstract (max. 200 words), PI and co-PI names and affiliations, target grant program name (including URL), and deadline.

2. Center Team Members (Up to 2 pages)

Provide a list of the center team members, including PI and Co-PIs, and include their departmental and institutional (if not UH) affiliation.

3. Submit the Letter of Intent to Dr. Claudia Neuhauser, Vice Chancellor and Vice President for Research, cmneuhauser@uh.edu

Proposal Documents

Proposal Narrative (Up to 3 pages, includes graphics, tables, equations, and formulas)

The rationale for the proposed planning grant should be described and must contain:

- a. Target announcement and deadline.
- b. Synopsis of the goal and purpose of the targeted funding opportunity (can be copied from the funding announcement as long as appropriate attribution is given).
- c. Proposed activities during the preparation of the proposal and how they will inform the goal and purpose of the targeted funding opportunity.
- d. Detailed milestones against which progress during the preparation of the proposal will be evaluated.
- e. Describe the roles of the PI, co-PI(s), and Other Key Personnel and the potential for synergy. Identify gaps in expertise and provide a plan on how the gap may be closed.
- f. Explanation of why the team believes they are well-positioned to compete successfully. Demonstrate results from current and previous collaboration among team members, if any.
- g. References Cited are in addition to the 3-page Proposal Narrative.
- h. Attach a copy of the program announcement as Appendix 1.

I. Biosketch(es)

Provide biosketches for the PI and co-PI(s). The NSF style is preferred, but not required. The narrative format of an NIH Biosketch is acceptable. Regardless of the format, the biosketch is limited to no more than five pages.

The biosketch should provide the following:

- Current and Past Positions
- Education: List degrees and dates awarded
- Awards and Honors: Include dates
- Other Relevant Professional Activities and Accomplishments
- Publications: Include full citations for selected publications and presentations

II. Current & Pending Support

Provide a list of current & pending support for each PI and co-PI(s). Identify the activities closely related to the funding opportunity.

III. Budget (1 page)

The budget must be constructed and presented using the standard UH budget template (<http://www.uh.edu/research/resources/dor-forms/proposal-processing-forms/>).

Please work with your affiliated pre-award personnel to generate the budget. This person must sign the budget template, indicating that they prepared and approved the budget. (In lieu of a signature on the budget template, a letter can be included certifying that the signatory prepared and approved the budget.)

Allowable costs include buyout for one course or one month of summer salary for the PI and up to one month of salary for one UH co-PI, pre-approved consultant(s), travel to planning meetings, and related accessories. If external reviewers for a future grant submission are considered as part of the proposed activities, the PI must acknowledge that they are aware of the potential for a conflict of interest if the identified reviewer is a member of the agency's review panel. Specifically, if the funding opportunity is from an agency that publishes the roster of their review panels (e.g., NIH), the PI must acknowledge that they will check all relevant rosters and refrain from sending any inquiries for an external review to such members. If the PI plans to pay external reviewers for reviews, this must be explicitly included in the budget.

Unallowable costs include indirect costs, travel not related to the center planning, lab renovation, and any expenditure for academic programs.

IV. Budget Justification and Fiscal Accountability (1 page)

V. Commitments

This program allows cost sharing or matching from non-DOR resources. Any financial or tangible commitments must be formally documented. Written commitments signed by the sponsoring unit authorities (i.e., dean, center director, and/or department chair) must be submitted when cost sharing or matching is proposed.

VI. Space

Space availability and requirements should be identified.

- a. Location(s) of the laboratory unit(s).
- b. What facilities, renovations, and technology needs are anticipated? These needs should be part of the grant proposal and are not appropriate for the budget request.

VII. Team Members (Up to 2 pages)

Provide a list of the team members, including PI and co-PIs, and include their departmental and institutional affiliations.

Criteria for Award

Each proposal must supply convincing evidence that the following criteria have been met or will be met:

1. The proposed activities must represent high-quality research of significant benefit to the University and society (scientific merit).
2. A competitive proposal must be submitted within 18 months of funding. Provide a clear timeline for submission.
3. The team must demonstrate the potential to compete for a grant by virtue of their publication records, strength and extent of past collaboration, and prior funding.
4. The review committee will rank each proposal in the following four domains on a scale of 1 (highest) to 5 (lowest):
 - a. Impact and innovation of proposed research.
 - b. Plan for external grant submission, including the timeline.
 - c. Investigator expertise, track record or potential.
 - d. Need for planning funding.

Program Dates

- Application deadline: **This is a rolling deadline and submissions will be accepted through August 31, 2026, or until the funds are exhausted.**
- Funding expiration: Awards are effective for up to 18 months or until one month after the targeted submission deadline of the proposal, whichever occurs first.

Review Process

All applications will be checked against the eligibility criteria and formatting requirements outlined above. Only eligible and compliant applications will be forwarded to the review committee for evaluation.

Each accepted proposal will be competitively reviewed by a hybrid committee of the Research and Scholarship Committee (RSC) and the Committee on Academic Centers and Institutes (CACI) in the Office of the Provost. The committee of the hybrid review committee is

chosen by a mutual agreement of the VPR and Provost with at least two members from the CACI and two members from the RSC, and is advisory only. At the discretion of the chair, members external to the UH campus who have content-area expertise may serve as ad hoc, non-voting members of the review committee. Typically, within four weeks of proposal submission, the review committee will make a recommendation to the VC/VP for Research, who will be responsible for awarding and administering the grant.

The proposals should be clear, concise, and explicit about the benefits of the activities to be undertaken and must provide clear justification for expenses. Proposals should be written to be understandable to reviewers who are from a range of disciplinary fields. Reviewers will be internal to UH, and some might lack relevant disciplinary expertise.

Congruency Review

Congruency review by the Research Integrity and Oversight (RIO) Office is required for all research submitted to this program. Congruency review includes human subjects, animal usage, biological materials (rDNA, human samples, microorganisms, etc.), and radiation (radioactive materials, lasers, and x-rays).

All oversight committee approvals must be secured within three months of the award announcement, or the funds will be forfeited:

- All projects involving human subjects must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before the grant cost center will be established.
- All projects involving the use of animals in research must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) before the grant cost center will be established.
- All projects involving biological materials must be reviewed and approved by the Biological Safety Manager and the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) before the grant cost center will be established.
- All projects involving radiation must be reviewed and approved by the Radiation Safety Officer (RSO) & Laser Safety Officer (LSO) and authorized by the Radiation Safety Committee (RSC) before the grant cost center will be established.

Reporting and Acknowledgement

Use the *Internal Grant Reports Form* button on the DOR Internal Awards webpage to submit progress reports that are due on the established dates, regardless of progress through the congruency review. Reports are due every three months until the proposal for the targeted opportunity is submitted and should reflect the progress made as expected based on the proposed activities. A final report is expected one month after receiving the summary statements from the external review. An in-person/video conference meeting between the award team and representatives of the DOR and/or the hybrid RSC/CACI review committee may be held at the midpoint after the start of the planning grant to review progress and assist the team in meeting their project goals.

At any time during the award period, the DOR reserves the right to ask the hybrid RSC/CACI review committee or an *ad hoc* committee to assess progress and rescind the award if no substantive progress has been made toward the goals of the proposal.

Assistance

If interested in the opportunity and want additional information, please contact: Dr. Claudia Neuhauser (cmneuhauser@uh.edu), Vice Chancellor/Vice President for Research.