



Request for Applications for Collaborative PHSU/MCC Pilot Research Projects

Application deadline: Monday, March 16, 2026

\$120,000 per year (\$60,000 per institution) in direct costs for up to 2 years

The Ponce Health Sciences University in Ponce, Puerto Rico and the Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, FL are funded by the National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute's Comprehensive Partnerships to Advance Cancer Health (CPACH) program with the ultimate goal of eliminating health drivers that contribute to differences in cancer outcomes across populations. This Request for Applications (RFA) is for pilot research projects aimed at improving cancer outcomes in our communities and the American population at large. Proposed research projects must demonstrate relevance to cancer in the areas of cancer prevention and control, cancer epidemiology, social and behavioral sciences, basic science, or clinical and translational science.

Funding Opportunity Purpose: This funding opportunity seeks to further enhance the infrastructure of the partnering institutions to continue to conduct research that addresses health drivers of cancer outcomes. All applications must be **joint projects** led by a faculty member at each of the partner institutions. **All projects require a Co-Leader from Moffitt Cancer Center and a Co-Leader from Ponce Health Sciences University.**

Key Dates

FINAL APPLICATION DUE DATE	March 16, 2026
Notification of Award to Project Recipients	May 2026
Award Effective Date	September 1, 2026

Funding Information

- \$120,000 per year (\$60,000 per year in direct costs only with up to \$240,000 in total direct costs possible) will support two-year pilot research projects. A second year with an equal amount of funding is available contingent upon demonstrated scientific productivity.
- A maximum of 5 pilot research projects will be funded.
- Awards and budgets are subject to change contingent on NCI funding availability.

Eligibility

- Research projects must involve an investigator from each institution (PHSU and MCC). Investigators should have a faculty appointment at their respective institution. For information about potential research collaborators visit: <https://www.ponceresearch.com/researchers/> and <https://www.moffitt.org/research-science/>.
- All faculty members, including investigators already in the Partnership, are encouraged to apply, irrespective of faculty rank or current funding.
- ***Current Partnership project funded investigators may submit applications with new specific aims that are not merely an extension of currently funded research Partnership projects.***

Application and program guidelines are available at <https://www.phsu-moffitt.org/>.

For more information contact: HDelgado@psm.edu or Sabrina.Rodriguez@moffitt.org

GUIDELINES

- It is our intention to make developmental funds available for selected projects no later than June 2026. All funds will be administered through the Partnership at each institution's Grants and Contracts office.
- Funding for research projects involving human subjects and/or animal models will not be released until IRB and/or IACUC approval documents have been received.
- Research projects may be in any area of cancer research and must address health drivers that contribute to differences in cancer outcomes in the PHSU and MCC catchment areas.
- During the development of their proposals, investigators must coordinate with the Puerto Rico BioBank (PRBB) and Quantitative Sciences Core (QSC) for support in the development of the biobank, bioinformatics and biostatistics aspects of their proposal in order to determine feasibility and proper budget for the proposed services. **Please allow one (1) month prior to the application deadline for consultation with the PRBB and QSC.** (For PRBB Services, please email Douglas.Cress@ Moffitt.org and joliveras@psm.edu. For QSC services, please email Steven.Eschrich@ Moffitt.org and Imorales@psm.edu).
- Partnership leaders are available to assist interested applicants with identifying a partner at the other institution. Please email Sabrina.Rodriguez@ Moffitt.org and hdelgado@psm.edu with questions or to request assistance identifying a Co-Leader from the partnering institution.

APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Application Format

The format and specification for research project applications should follow [NIH grant application instructions](#). Font and format specifications must be followed. Otherwise, application processing may be delayed, or the application may not be reviewed.

- **Font:** Arial 11 black font; smaller type size (not below 9 pt) may be used for figures, graphs, diagrams, charts, tables, figure legends, and footnotes.
- **Spacing:** single-spaced with all text showing
- **Paper:** standard paper size (8 ½" x 11")
- **Margins:** 0.5-inch margins (all sides)
- **Header:** Principal Investigators' names should be shown in the header of all application pages
- **Page Numbering:** Consecutively number pages throughout the application.
- **Grantsmanship:** Use English and avoid jargon.
- **Abbreviations:** If terms are not universally known, spell out the term the first time it is used and not the appropriate abbreviation in parenthesis. The abbreviation may be used thereafter.

Application Forms

- 1) **Face Page** – Include the title of the project and names of Co-Leaders at both MCC and PHSU.
- 2) **Abstract** – One paragraph lay abstract. (**maximum 300 words**).
- 3) **Key Personnel** – List all proposed senior/key personnel
- 4) **NIH Biosketches** – Include an updated NIH biosketch all senior/key personnel.
- 5) **Budget** – A budget is not required at the time of submission. However, each institution must provide a detailed budget upon notice of award.
 - a. Initial Budget Period (09.01.2026-08.31.2027)
 - b. Entire Proposed Project Period (09.01.2026-08.31.2028)

PROJECT PERIOD: 09/01/2026 – 08/31/2028 (estimated)	
TOTAL AMOUNT REQUESTED: \$60,000 per institution	
Allowable and Unallowable Costs	
<i>*NOTE: The Administrative Core reserves the right to request budget changes.</i>	
Allowable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PI and Co-PI salary Note effort and salary coverage will take up budget dollars. Please consider this in assessing your level of effort on the project. Any effort will be charged at full Institutional salary, salary cap will be applied Research supplies and animal expenses Technical assistance Publication costs Shared resources costs Domestic travel to MCC/PHSU for research project collaborations Special fees (pathology, photography, etc.) Stipends for graduate students and postdoctoral assistants if their role is to promote and sustain the project presented by the faculty member Equipment costing less than \$2,000 (Special justification is necessary for items exceeding this amount and must be included in the proposal budget and justified for specific <u>research purposes</u>) Tablets and e-readers for <u>specific scientific purposes</u> and must be justified and budgeted in the application. Data plans, if needed must also be justified. NOTE: Data plan costs for tablets and e-readers are not supported by the <u>Institution</u>. 	Unallowable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost share (including salary cap) Secretarial/administrative salaries Tuition Foreign travel Honoraria and travel expenses for visiting lecturers Books and periodicals Membership dues Office and laboratory furniture Office equipment and supplies Most computer purchases Rental of office or laboratory space Recruiting and relocation expenses Non-medical services to patients Per-diem charges for hospital beds Construction, renovation, or maintenance of buildings/ laboratories

6) **Budget Justification** – A budget justification is not required at the time of submission. However, each institution must provide a detailed budget justification upon notice of award.

7) **Research Project Plan** – **Maximum of three (3) pages.** The research project plan must include the following:

a. **Specific Aims**

b. **Impact**

c. **Research Approach**

Describe the rationale and significance of your planned research. Describe, as appropriate, the nature of the research project, experimental methods/study design, or the training, outreach, and/or education plans and objectives.

8) **References Cited** – Provide relevant citations for the proposal. Remember to include any manuscript and/or abstract that the members of the research team have published together. References are not considered in the page limitations.

9) **Contributions of the Co-Leaders** – **Limited to 300 words.** Describe the role of each of the Co-Leaders. Identify which aspects of the pilot project will be conducted at each institution.

REVIEW PROCESS

Applications will be reviewed by community members as well as the Partnership's Internal Advisory Committee

and external Program Steering Committee. Written reviews and feedback will be provided to the applicants within two (2) months of the receipt deadline.

Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated for:

- Scientific merit and feasibility (preliminary data preferred but not required).
- Potential to rapidly progress to publications and independent peer-reviewed grants (NIH, ACS, DoD, Research Foundations).
- Promotion of Partnership objectives, with a focus on improving cancer outcomes in our communities and the American population at large, and training of ESIs

The proposal review will be conducted using the NIH scoring system and criteria, as follows:

- **Significance** – Projects must address a relevant research question and have potential to lead to peer-reviewed publications and competitive extramural funding.
- **Innovation** – Projects must address a novel hypothesis or develop novel methodologies.
- **Approach** – Projects must provide a clear plan to achieve stated goals (e.g., Can the work be completed in the proposed time within the proposed budget with the available resources?).
- **Investigators** – Projects must clearly benefit from the leadership of investigators from both institutions.
- **Environment** – Projects must be relevant to the overall Partnership objectives and benefit from the Partnership's resources (such as the Puerto Rico BioBank).
- **Rigor and reproducibility** – Proposals should also address strategies to ensure reproducibility and rigor of their research findings as outlined by NIH (<https://www.nih.gov/research-training/rigor-reproducibility/principles-guidelines-reporting-preclinical-research>)

The reviewers will be asked to summarize the most important points specifically addressing the strengths and weaknesses of the application. The application does not have to be strong in all categories to deserve high merit, but it should have excellent potential to become competitive for external peer-reviewed funding. In addition, applications must have relevance to the objectives of the Partnership in addressing health drivers of cancer outcomes. If an applicant is an ESI, then the project must have significant potential to advance the ESI's career. Protection of human subjects; animal welfare; biohazards; and budgets are evaluated as well, following NIH Reviewers' Guidelines.

Formal Review and Priority Scoring

All applications will be reviewed at the 2026 Annual Program Steering Committee during which the Internal Advisory Committee and Program Steering Committee will meet for formal assessment of all applications. Applications will be assigned to reviewers for scoring using the NIH criteria for project significance, innovation, approach, investigator(s), environment, and rigor and reproducibility. Additionally, each project will be evaluated for relevance to the objectives of the Partnership. The reviewers will prepare a detailed, written critique, which will be provided to the Project Co-Leaders to optimize funded projects and strengthen subsequent submissions of unfunded projects. **Selected applicants must respond to reviewer comments as requested following receipt of the application reviews and scores.**

AWARDEE OBLIGATIONS

The PHSU-MCC Partnership research project awards carry several important obligations and responsibilities. Specifically, award recipients agree to the following:

- Must adhere to IRB, IACUC, and other regulatory and funding requirements prior to release of funds.
- If an award is made to a proposal involving an ESI, the ESI will participate in the Partnership ESI program and must submit an independent career development plan within 3 months of issuance of the

award.

- Any deliverables or other products and resources produced as a result of these funds will belong to the governance of the PHSU-MCC Partnership.
- Awardees will complete an annual research project progress report due February/March of each year. These reports are completed via email and describe: 1) accomplishments, including but not limited to major activities, specific objectives, significant results (e.g., major findings, developments, or conclusions), and key outcomes; 2) opportunities for training and professional development; 3) dissemination of results to communities of interest; 4) interactions and collaborations with other Partnership components; and 5) plans for the next reporting period.
- Awardees will meet with members of the Internal Advisory Committee at least two times per year to discuss research progress.
- Attendance at Partnership meetings (e.g., bimonthly meetings, annual meetings, retreats, workshops and seminars).
- Presentation of research and career development updates at Partnership and other meetings (e.g., Partnership Bimonthly Meetings, NCI PACHE Program Meetings).
- Completion of annual Partnership Assessment surveys.
- Awardees must acknowledge the Partnership in any related publications or presentations by including the statement *"This work was supported in part by the National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health under award numbers U54 CA163068 and U54CA163071"*.
- Awardees agree to serve on a future Review Committee or participate in a U54 PHSU-MCC Partnership activity (e.g., retreat, workshop), if requested.