

Early Stage Investigator (ESI) Pilot Grants Program

Program Overview

The ESI Pilot Grants Program awards are intended to assist early-stage investigators as they launch their independent research careers. The awards may be used for the collection of preliminary data, equipment, or research assistance necessary to strengthen an extramural grant application. Applications for both clinical and basic science research are encouraged. Faculty who receive support through this program are expected to collect preliminary data to submit a research proposal for extramural funding.

Applications (see below) will be scored using an NIH 1-9 scale.

Applicants can request up to **\$50,000 for one year**. A faculty member can submit only one application per funding cycle; unfunded proposals may be resubmitted one time with revisions. The maximum project period is 12 months.

Allowable costs: personnel (research staff, students, postdoctoral fellows, residents/fellows), inpatient/outpatient care, core services, and supplies and consultant and equipment costs (less than \$5,000).

Unallowable costs: faculty salaries, office equipment, renovations, alterations, publication and travel expenses.

Eligibility: Applicants must be early-stage investigators, as defined by the NIH. An ESI is a principal investigator who has completed their terminal degree or post-graduate clinical training within the past 10 years and who has not previously competed successfully as PI for a major NIH independent research award.

Applications: Applications are accepted through InfoReady. Proposals will include the following:

- **ESI Cover Page** [on the InfoReady submission platform]
- **Application Research Plan** – 2 pages containing the following sections:
 1. Specific Aims (1 page)
 2. Brief description of the Research Approach (1 page)
- **NIH biosketch** (PI only)
- **Detailed Budget**
- **Budget Justification**
- **Departmental Letter(s) of Support**
- **SMART Goals**

Review Criteria

The applicant must be an early-stage investigator and have adequate laboratory space (if research is lab-based). The review will use NIH scoring criteria and also consider the following additional criteria:

- Does the investigator have appropriate experience and training?
- Is/are the PD(s)/PI(s) likely to progress to robust, independent and productive research careers, including obtaining independent research funding and publishing high-impact research papers?
- Does the application challenge and seek to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms by utilizing novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions?
- Do the PD(s)/PI(s) demonstrate an ability to conceptualize and organize a short-term research project that will translate to an independent R01 or equivalent research application?
- Is there a plan and the potential to submit subsequent R01 or equivalent applications, to receive additional independent research grant awards, to produce research results, and to author high-impact publications?
- Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project?

Review Process:

- The Principal Investigator must submit the full application to the Department Chair or Dean for their assessment and commitment of resources,
- This Chair's and/or Dean's sign-off assessment of quality and trajectory of research plan and program must be conducted prior to submission to FRST,
- Applications with a statement of Chair/Dean's approval and support will then be submitted by the Investigator to InfoReady by the announced deadline. FRST will review applications for 2-3 weeks prior to a scheduled RAC meeting for a regulatory and financial compliance screening review,
- FRST will then send the application package to RAC for review:
 - Ad hoc review panel (three or four members) selected by RAC which can also involve non-RAC specialty reviewers
 - Ad hoc review panel makes a recommendation to RAC
 - RAC will make a funding recommendation to the Executive Vice President for Research and Innovation
- If funding is approved, the relevant parties will be notified in writing, and the ESI award will be processed/managed by FRST

SMART Goals

Funds will be made available in three tranches (40/40/20%) based on progress made according to agreed-upon SMART goal milestones. SMART goals will be used as project progress markers at day 90, 180 and 270. Goals must be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound. SMART goals are intended to measure project progress, not outcomes. For the Early Stage Investigator Pilot Grants program, awardees will be expected to participate in grant consultation specific for submitting grants. These workshops or advisory sessions will be provided through the Division of Research and Innovation (DRI). The SMART goals for this program will include an estimated date for submission of the application (which may be after the funding period) and participation in professional development activities and grant writing workshops to facilitate the resubmission. FRST will meet with the PI at 90, 180, and 270 days to determine progress on the SMART goals. If there are any scientific issues reported at any of these meetings, a member of RAC and/or appropriate designated faculty member from the PI's college, if applicable, will meet with the PI to modify the SMART goals. After Day 270, FRST will audit all expenditures, and any unobligated funds will be recovered.

Note that SMART Goal "dates" may be adjusted in accordance with the time frame for the funding agency resubmission; dates to be set at the time of award from DRI.

Action	Amount	Upon
Tranche 1	40% of approved budget	Day 0 (launch meeting)
Tranche 2	40% of approved budget	Day 90 <u>and</u> attaining SMART goal 1
Tranche 3	20% of approved budget	Day 180 <u>and</u> attaining SMART goal 2

SMART Goal 1 should include IRB or IACUC approval if applicable.

SMART Goal 2 should be specific to the research project proposed.

SMART Goal 3 should include draft documents of the external proposal submission, including the following sections:

- Specific Aims (1 page)
- Research Strategy (6 or 12 pages per grant mechanism)
- NIH biosketches
- Budget
- Budget Justification
- References (not included in page count)

Deadlines:

Application Deadline	November 15, 2021
Scientific Review	December-January
Earliest Start Date	Late January 2022