

Enterprise Research Pilot Program

Executive Overview | Proposed 2027 Launch Model

October 19, 2026

Program at a glance. The Enterprise Pilot Funding Program consolidates institutionally funded pilot opportunities into one coordinated portfolio designed to support excellent investigator-initiated science while intentionally advancing enterprise research priorities. The launch model uses a standardized RFA, two funding cycles per year, a common scientific review process, and a Pilot Study Council that makes merit-first portfolio recommendations.

1. What Is Changing and Why

The redesign shifts pilot funding from a collection of largely independent Center mechanisms to an enterprise portfolio. Centers remain essential scientific partners, but funding is no longer organized as fixed Center allocations. Instead, investigators enter through a common process, proposals receive consistent scientific review, and funding decisions consider both merit and the composition of the overall portfolio.

The goal is not simply to centralize administration. The model is intended to increase access to pilot funding across the Advocate Health enterprise, streamline and harmonize the pilot funding infrastructure, create more opportunities for cross-Center and cross-market collaboration, respond more intentionally to enterprise priorities, and generate greater return on investment.

2. Core Program Architecture

Program Element	Launch Direction
Pilot Support	\$15K-\$75K in direct costs for one-year project period
RFA structure	A standardized RFA
Funding cadence	Two enterprise funding cycles per year at launch
Pilot applications	Investigator-initiated studies that test novel concepts; generate preliminary evidence; open new scientific directions; or move evidence toward implementation, scale, external funding, or another defined translational step

3. How the Portfolio Is Shaped

Every project is viewed across multiple dimensions rather than through a single Center affiliation. The portfolio framework tracks scientific theme, translational stage (T0–T4), and strategic driver. Projects may align with multiple scientific themes and may also identify with annual strategic priorities established by the CTSI Governance Board.

Enduring scientific areas provide continuity; annual priorities provide flexibility. The CTSI Governance Board can review the existing portfolio and external environment each year, identify underinvestment or emerging opportunities, and publish a set of strategic priorities in the RFA. These priorities inform funding deliberations without excluding strong (investigator-initiated) science outside the priority areas.

Portfolio balance is a stewardship tool, not a quota system. The program will assess balance over time across scientific domains, translational stages, career stages, markets/geographies, collaboration patterns, strategic priorities, and other relevant dimensions.

4. Application and Scientific Review

Letter of Intent (LOI): A required one-page LOI serves as the early alignment and planning step. It provides investigators with early feedback, gives Centers an opportunity to support feasibility and identify relevant expertise, and gives CTSI time to recruit appropriate reviewers for full applications.

Full Application: Invited applications use an intentionally concise format, with a short research strategy and only the supporting materials needed to evaluate rigor, feasibility, budget, regulatory needs, milestones, and the project's next step. Applicants also identify their scientific theme(s), translational stage, and strategic driver(s).

Scientific Review: The Intramural Research Support Committee (IRSC) remains the scientific review body. Full applications use the NIH-aligned simplified framework: Importance of the Research (Significance/Innovation); Rigor and Feasibility (Approach); and Expertise and Resources (Investigator/Environment, assessed for sufficiency), plus an Overall Impact Score. Institutional alignment and next steps (toward extramural funding) are explicit reviewer callouts but are kept distinct from the core scientific score.

Reviewer Model: Standing IRSC members provide continuity and conduct LOI review; ad hoc subject-matter experts are added once invited full applications are known.

5. How Funding Decisions Are Made

Scientific merit is the entry requirement for funding. The Pilot Study Council receives the scientific review results and recommends the combination of meritorious projects that create the strongest enterprise portfolio. It does not conduct a second scientific peer review.

Recommended decision logic: merit first, portfolio optimization second. Projects within a clear fundable range are considered first. Where multiple meritorious choices exist, the Council may consider translational-stage and discipline balance,

career stage, geography/market, enterprise strategic alignment, meaningful cross-Center or cross-market collaboration, existing funding/overlap, and opportunities for synergy among investigators.

Strategic fit cannot rescue weak science. Likewise, portfolio balance should be evaluated over time rather than forcing every cycle to mirror a predetermined distribution.

Final funding decisions are made by CTSI Leadership. Based on Pilot Study Council recommendations, CTSI Leadership will select final awardees to reflect both the scientific strength of individual proposals and the goal of building a balanced, high-impact portfolio of institutional research investments."6. Role of Centers and Institutes

Centralization changes the role of Centers from independent funding silos to scientific partners in a shared enterprise process. Centers can help investigators refine concepts, confirm feasibility when Center resources are proposed, identify alignment with domain priorities, connect collaborators, and recommend expert reviewers. Center expertise therefore remains visible and influential.

Center involvement will be tracked. Investigators will be asked to indicate which Center (or Centers) were influential in the pilot creation process, if applicable.

7. Post-Award Stewardship

Each award is paired with a CTSI Research Navigator. The Navigator serves as the consistent CTSI point of contact, supports study initiation, connects teams to relevant resources, monitors progress against milestones, and helps overcome barriers.

The standard lifecycle includes kickoff, midpoint, and closeout touchpoints plus financial monitoring. Awardees are expected to complete defined milestones, report outcomes and next steps, and continue reporting downstream products such as extramural submissions and awards, publications, implementation, intellectual property, and significant collaborations for a minimum of 5 years after completion of the award. Extension requests for funding beyond 12 months are considered case-by-case rather than automatically.

8. How Success Will Be Measured

The program will evaluate both operational performance and research return on investment. Historical Center data will be used as a baseline where sufficiently complete, while the centralized model establishes standardized prospective tracking.

- Demand and access: LOI/full-application volume, funding rate, new versus repeat awardees, investigator career stage/type, geography/market, and Center engagement.
- Process performance: time from LOI to decision, reviewer workload, investigator/reviewer satisfaction, and whether the concise application format is sufficient across research types.
- Portfolio composition: scientific themes, T0–T4 stage, strategic drivers, annual priority alignment, cross-Center/cross-market collaboration, and representation of emerging areas.
- Research outcomes/ROI: extramural submissions and awards, publications, implementation or dissemination outcomes, intellectual property, and new collaborations.

A formal annual review closes the loop. The CTSI Governance Board and program leadership use a dashboard to identify intended and unintended effects, refine annual priorities, adjust reviewer capacity and program parameters, and improve the model over time.

9. Governance and Decision Rights

Body	Primary Role
CTSI Governance Board	Sets enterprise priorities and major program guardrails; reviews portfolio performance
CTSI Pilot Program Leadership/Administration	Runs the common RFA, application workflow, reviewer recruitment, award administration, data collection, and continuous improvement. Leadership selects final awardees
Intramural Research Support Committee (IRSC)	Conducts scientific merit review and provides applicant feedback
Pilot Study Council	Applies approved portfolio considerations to meritorious applications and recommends the funded portfolio to CTSI Leadership
Centers	Provide scientific/domain expertise, investigator support, feasibility input, collaboration, and reviewer recommendations

10. Launch Configuration

- Two funding cycles per year using one comprehensive RFA.
- One-page LOI followed by an invited concise full application.
- IRSC review using the NIH-aligned simplified framework, using a standing membership plus *ad hoc* as needed.
- Pilot Study Council using transparent, merit-first portfolio decision guardrails.
- CTSI Leadership selects final awardees.
- Research Navigator support and standardized post-award milestones for every funded project.
- Baseline dashboard established before launch, with formal review after the first two cycles.