



**Pilot & Pre-Pilot Grants
Calendar Year (CY) 2026
Guidelines for Applicants & Reviewers**

[Program Description](#), [Investigator Eligibility](#), [Funding and Award Period](#), [Allowable Expenses](#), [Research Project Criteria](#), [Scoring Criteria](#), & [Review Criteria](#)

Program Description

University of Vermont Cancer Center (UVMCC) Pilot awards support \$50,000 Pilot and \$15,000 Pre-Pilot research projects that pursue novel ideas in cancer research.. Pre-Pilot grants may be awarded for proposals describing an innovative idea, with minimal or no preliminary data to support development of a future pilot award or small R03 type grant. Pre-Pilot awards are most appropriate for Clinical/Translational and Population Science projects, or any projects aiming to generate preliminary data for an extramural grant application.

All applications must be related to some aspect of cancer, including basic science, behavioral, bench, bi-directional, clinical, clinical trial, computational, data analytic, epidemiological, preventive, and translational studies. Applications should be identified as falling under one of four categories: Basic Science, Clinical/Translational, Open Topic, or Population Science.

Projects not requiring regulatory approvals must be completed within one year; clinical trials or other projects requiring IRB approval may be permitted up to two years for completion.

Emphasis will be on investigations that prepare applicants for success in obtaining peer-reviewed extramural cancer research funding, ideally from NCI. Applicants are required to include in their proposals a clearly defined path to extramural funding by outlining which agencies and which funding programs they might target in subsequent extramural funding applications. The credibility of these plans will constitute a critical part of the review process.

Reviewers will also evaluate innovation and the potential for significant advances in understanding of the stated problem. Preliminary data may be included but are not essential.

Investigator Eligibility and Expectations

Applications are limited to investigators who are Full, Associate, Core Clinical, or Clinical members of the University of Vermont Cancer Center. Applicants should describe how the research activities align with one of the established [UVMCC Programs](#):

- Cancer Cell (CC)
- Cancer Host and Environment (CHE)
- Population Sciences Cancer Outcomes (PSCO)

Extramural collaborators are not required to be UVMCC members. Proposals from investigators whose [UVMCC Membership](#) is pending can be accepted if the membership application has been submitted in advance of the Pilot Project application.

Applicants who have received pilot awards in the prior two years or those with current awards are ineligible.

If a new extramural award for the same research is received, the UVMCC Pilot Project must be relinquished.

Individual faculty may participate in only one grant submission.

The PI(s) from each of the projects selected for funding will be asked to make a presentation describing their project at the fall Cancer Center scientific retreat. In addition, it is expected that awardees will maintain high levels of participation with the UVMCC Pilot Project Program in areas of future pilot review, presentations of study outcomes, and future progress reporting. Pilot award funding should be acknowledged on any resulting publications or abstracts.

Investigators who are delinquent with reports on any previous awards are ineligible for new funding until they have satisfied reporting requirements.

Funding and Award Period

Pilot research projects will be supported at up to \$50,000, and pre-Pilot projects will be supported at \$15,000 each. The award period will be up to 24 months for clinical trials and up to 12 months for all others.

Allowable Expenses

Allowable Expense:	Non-Allowable Expense:
Salaries & Benefits for Research Staff (e.g., laboratory technicians, data managers, etc.)	Salary support for any Key Personnel on this project.
Salaries & Benefits for Graduate and Postdoctoral Research Assistants	Salary support for teaching, secretarial or administrative activities.
Specialized Services (e.g., microscopy, animal care, etc.)	Consultants, sub-contracts, or consortium agreements outside UVM.
Research Supplies	Office supplies, unless directly related to the aims of the project.

Allowable Expense:	Non-Allowable Expense:
<p>UVMCC Core Facilities (Flow Cytometry, Medical Biostatistics, Microscopy Imaging Center (MIC), Organoid Development Shared Resource, Vermont Integrative Genomics Resource (VIGR))</p> <p><i>Applicants are strongly cautioned to consult with facility heads early in the planning process, not less than four weeks prior to the deadline, in order to obtain the required approvals for facility usage and budget. Facilities cannot guarantee that they will be able accommodate requests beyond this time line.</i></p>	Any external services when the same services are available using UVMCC resources.
<p>Patient Care Costs related to clinical trials (e.g., stipends, procedures, lab tests done solely for research). UVMCC Clinical Trials Office (CTO) personnel must be budgeted for clinical trial activities.</p>	Therapeutic Equipment
Equipment (up to \$10,000)	Equipment maintenance and service contracts
Domestic travel for presentation of the research at scientific meetings (one trip, up to \$2,000)	Speaker travel and honoraria. Recruiting and relocation expenses
Publication costs	Membership dues, textbooks/coursebooks and periodicals; binding of periodicals and books.
Costs associated with regulatory approvals (IRB, IACUC, IBC, etc.)	Rental of office or laboratory space; construction, renovation, or maintenance of buildings/laboratories

Research Project Criteria

Proposed projects should not fall within the specific aims of a currently funded project of any of the collaborating investigators.

The UVMCC Pilot Project Review Committee will review the relevant applications and provide recommendations for funding based on potential impact, innovation, scientific merit, need, relevance to UVMCC programmatic initiatives and potential for future peer-reviewed funding.

A major criterion will be the probability that the research project will lead to the submission of a competitive research grant application to NCI, NIH or a similar major source of peer-reviewed extramural cancer research funding.

Collaboration among researchers representing multiple disciplines or program areas is encouraged.

Scoring Criteria

All proposals should be held to the appropriate standards of scientific rigor for the discipline being evaluated.

- The table below provides an [NIH Scoring System](#) guide for reviewers in assigning overall impact scores and individual criterion scores.
- A reviewer may give only moderate scores to some of the review criteria but still give a high overall impact score because the one review criterion critically important to the research is rated highly; or a reviewer could give mostly high criterion ratings but rate the overall impact score lower because the one criterion clinically important to the research being proposed is not highly rated.
- Reviewers may not submit an Overall Impact Score that has no corresponding value for individual review criteria. For example, assigning an Overall Impact Score of 6 when the individual criteria scores are all 3's, 4's, or 5's isn't helpful to the applicant or to the review committee.
- Because constructive criticisms are an important heuristic for this program, reviewers will provide specific feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal as if the applicant were their own mentee.
- An application does not need to be strong in all categories to be judged likely to have major impact, e.g., a project that by its nature is not innovative may be essential to advance a field.
- A score of 5 is a good, medium-impact application. Pilot project applications that have been approved for funding have historically achieved scores of 3.0 or better.
- ***The entire scale (1-9) should always be considered.***

Overall Impact or Criterion Strength	Score	Descriptor
High	1	Exceptional
	2	Outstanding
	3	Excellent
Medium	4	Very Good
	5	Good
	6	Satisfactory
Low	7	Fair
	8	Marginal
	9	Poor

Review Criteria

Overall Impact

Reviewers will provide an overall impact score to reflect their assessment of the likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved, in consideration of the following review criteria and additional review criteria (as applicable for the project proposed).

Reviewers should consider how this study contributes to establishing a strong scientific foundation to support an extramurally funded research application.

1. Quality of the Science (50%)

Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field? Is there a strong scientific basis for the project? If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field?

2. Potential that the project will lead to success in future applications for significant extramural funding and impactful peer-reviewed publications (20%)

The project will be evaluated for the likelihood that, if the research is successful, it will lead to peer-reviewed extramural funding and publications. Applicants are required to include in their proposals a clearly defined path to extramural funding by outlining which agencies and which funding programs they will target in subsequent extramural funding applications.

3. Inter-programmatic proposal, use of shared resources (15%)

Do the PD/PIs, collaborators, and other researchers represent a stimulating cross-pollination of disciplines? Are diverse [UVMCC Programs](#) represented? Will any [UVMCC Shared Resources](#) be used?

4. Relevance to the UVMCC catchment area cancer priorities (15%)

Questions? Contact edward.north@uvm.edu