



Cancer Center

NCI-DESIGNATED COMPREHENSIVE
CANCER CENTER

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

TO: Full and Mentored Members of the Tumor Host Interactions Program

FROM: **THI Program Leaders** – Diana Cittelly, PhD, Jill Slansky, PhD, and Michael Verneris, MD

RE: Tumor Host Interactions Program Pilot Grants – FY2026

DATE: October 10, 2025
DATE DUE: November 17, 2025

The Tumor Host Interactions (THI) Program of the University of Colorado Cancer Center is offering a **new pilot grant opportunity** designed to catalyze high-impact cancer-relevant research that aligns with THI's strategic priorities and evolving NIH funding trends. This mechanism aims to support Full and Mentored THI members in launching innovative, collaborative projects that address critical gaps in cancer biology immunology, new alternatives to mouse and other animal models, and to promote translational science.

Up to three, \$35,000 pilot grants will be awarded, depending on the merit of proposals received. Projects should be designed so that they can be realistically completed in one year. Proposals will be due November 17, 2025, and awards are anticipated to start January 1, 2026.

Pilot Parameters

- 1) **Use alternative preclinical models** beyond traditional mouse and other animal models, in response to a [recent release from the NIH](#). Projects leveraging in vitro systems, multicellular organoids, explanted human tumors, spontaneous canine cancers, tumor on a chip, or AI-drive simulations are strongly encouraged.
- 2) **Accelerate Translational Research** in cancers in Colorado ([as defined here](#)) of high incidence and mortality (ie. breast, lung, colorectal, melanoma), as well as pediatric and rare cancers with unmet therapeutic needs
- 3) **Encourage collaboration with the Developmental Therapeutics (DT) program to accelerate translational research.** If you need recommendations or ideas for collaborators, please connect with the Cancer Center Member Coordinator, Rachel Vardeman at rachel.vardeman@cuanschutz.edu, for a list of members in DT or the other Cancer Center research programs (those members in CPC or MCO are also welcome to participate if the PI is a THI member).

Pilot projects will be competitively awarded to THI Mentored and Full members who submit ideas that have a high likelihood of attaining NCI or other national funding. Recipients will be expected to submit competitive national grant proposals within 6 months following completion of this pilot project. Projects will be awarded for 1 year. No cost extensions will be considered only in extreme circumstances.

Applications will be competitively reviewed and assigned an NIH-style overall priority score based on scientific impact, significance, and innovation; the research strategy, use of appropriate institutional resources, and the likelihood of obtaining NCI funding, in addition to the specific criteria described above for each of the funding opportunities.

Submit a pdf copy of your complete application on-line at:

[THI Pilot Project Submission Form](#)

Applications are due November 17, 2025

Guidelines for the structure and content of the application begin on the next page.

If you have any questions about the submission process, please contact Nikki Chandler
(CC_FundingOps@cuanschutz.edu).

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

Applications must include all sections outlined below. Non-conforming applications will not be reviewed. All narrative sections must maintain at least ½ inch margins; must be at least single-spaced; and be in a font size not less than 11-point (Arial or Calibri).

Individuals interested in applying must be Full or Mentored members of the THI Program. If you have questions about your membership status, please contact [Rachel Vardeman](#).

Only one proposal per contact/lead investigator will be accepted.

Title Page: Include the title of the project and the name and email address of the Principal Investigator(s) and other Key Personnel. Identify the Pilot opportunity that is most relevant to your project.

Project Summary: Include a summary of the project not to exceed one-half page or 30 lines of single-spaced type. It should consist of a brief description of the rationale, methods, and expected results.

Budget: A categorical budget request for the project must be provided. The budget request can be up to \$35,000 total direct costs for one year only. Faculty salary support is not allowed. Salary for trainees, fellows, and PRA's is allowable up to \$15,000. Use of Cancer Center subsidized shared resources is encouraged as applicable to the project. Funds will not be provided to pay for standard of care clinical services or other expenses that are reimbursable through insurance. Awards are made with institutional funds. No indirect costs will be funded. The anticipated start date for awards is January 1, 2026.

Budget Justification: Please include a justification for all costs. Requests for travel funds or for items of capital equipment exceeding \$5,000 per item will require detailed justification.

Project Narrative: Provide a complete but concise description of the project including the following sections (adherence to stated page limits is required). The ***Project Narrative should be no more than 4 typed pages***.

- Specific Aims –1 page or less
 - Significance
 - Innovation
 - Approach
- } –3 pages or less

Timeline & Milestones (on a separate page not included in the 4-page limit). Generate a GANTT chart (or similar visual- see example below) outlining the timeline for the major activities associated with your specific aims and include a list of key milestones for the project that are relevant to demonstrating progress.

References: References should be included and are in addition to the previously outlined page limits.

Biographical Sketch(es): Include an [NIH-style biographical sketch](#) for all key personnel listed on the title page and **for collaborative grants explain the nature/need for the collaboration in your personal statement.**

Regulatory Documentation (not required for the application): If the study involves human subjects, vertebrate animals, or recombinant DNA research, approval of the study by the properly constituted Institutional Review Board, Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, Protocol Review and Monitoring Committee, and/or Biosafety Committee are required by the time of the award. ***Funds will not be awarded until documentation of all required regulatory approvals are provided.*** Failure to provide required approvals within 3 months of the award date will

result in forfeiture of the award.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Applications will be evaluated using the NIH scoring system (1-9) and parameters (below), supplemented by consideration of the likelihood of leading to external funding. Projects are encouraged to focus on catchment-issues of high priority to the Cancer Center as outlined in the [COE Fact Sheet](#).

Factor 1

Investigators

- Are the PD(s)/PI(s), collaborators, other researchers, and community partners/stakeholders (if appropriate) well suited to the project?
- If the project is collaborative, do the investigators have complementary and integrated expertise?

Environment

- Will the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success?
- Will the project benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangements?

Factor 2

Significance

- Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field?
- Does proposal align with one or more of the following themes: tumor-extrinsic factors, immune responses and immunotherapy, development of next-generation cell therapies, spatial and single-cell multiomics, novel delivery systems, or community-informed research priorities.
- How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field?

Innovation

- 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?
- Are the concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions novel to one field of research or novel in a broad sense?

Factor 3

Approach

- Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses justified and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project?
- Have the investigators presented strategies to ensure a robust and unbiased approach, as appropriate for the work proposed?
- If the project is in the early stages of development, will the strategy establish feasibility?

Probability of Leading to External Funding

- Does the application make a compelling argument for a trajectory leading to external funding?
- How will funding this application 'push the research over the top' for funding (e.g., address a key gap in a prior proposal)
- Does the application provide examples of relevant potential mechanisms for external support?

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 above review criteria and additional review criteria (as applicable for the project proposed).

REVIEW AND AWARD PROCESS

Applications will undergo peer review and will be evaluated for scientific merit, innovation and alignment with programmatic priorities. The evaluation criteria are above. The anticipated start date for the award will be January

1, 2026. The Cancer Center's Administrative Office will set up speed types for all pilots selected for funding.

PUBLICATIONS

All publications, abstracts, or similar dissemination efforts resulting from an award must acknowledge this support by inclusion of the statement: *"Supported by a pilot grant from the University of Colorado Cancer Center's Tumor-Host Interactions Program."* Projects that use Cancer Center Shared Resources must include the following acknowledgement and be submitted to PubMed Central: *"Research supported by the ### Shared Resource funded through the University of Colorado's Cancer Center Support Grant (P30CA046934)."*

PROGRESS REPORTS

A final report summarizing the results of the studies, detailing your timeline for pursuing national-level funding, and listing any publications resulting from the work **will be due two months after the grant end date**. Awardees will be provided with a weblink via REDCap for submission of their final report 60 days in advance of the due date.

Ongoing updates/requests for outcomes related to the project (publications, subsequent federal grants, publications, and other outcomes (i.e., patents, or other intellectual property) will be made for up to 4 years after the completion of your project.

Gantt Chart and Deliverables Timeline

Please note the major tasks or activities involved in the project in the table below. In addition to the project milestones, please identify specific sponsor(s) and national-level grant mechanism(s) that you intend to pursue to sustain the research or to advance it to the next level of research/dissemination. (Please adapt as needed)

Activity Timeline with Deliverables / Milestones (D/M)												
	MONTHS 1-4				MONTHS 5-8				MONTHS 9-12			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Task 1												
Task 2												
Task 3												
Task 4												
Task 5												
Task 6												
etc.												

Deliverables Narrative	
Deliverable 1	
Deliverable 2	
Deliverable 3	
Deliverable 4	
Deliverable 5	
Deliverable 6	

Anticipated Grant Plans	
Anticipated Grant Sponsor:	
Anticipated Grant Mechanism:	
Anticipated Grant Deadline:	
Additional Grant Information (Narrative):	