

**CFAR 03 Mentored Research Award (CFAR-03)
Clinical Trials Not Allowed**

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

expires 12/31/2026

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CFAR 03 Mentored Research Award (CFAR-03) Clinical Trials Not Allowed

- [NIH revised definition of Clinical Trials](#)
- [NIH Clinical Trials definition FAQ](#)
- [Determine if your proposed study is a Clinical Trial](#)

The Center for AIDS Research (CFAR) at Emory University's mentored research award mechanism (CFAR-03) is designed to help move early-stage investigators toward independent investigator status in HIV/AIDS research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). CFAR-03 funding is designed to generate preliminary data that will strengthen the competitiveness of subsequent NIH R-level applications in areas that align with [NIH/OAR high-priority areas of HIV research](#).

CFAR-03 projects may be single or dual PI.

It is expected that projects be designed to take one year or less to complete.

Direct costs for this mechanism are \$40K. Proposals requiring a larger budget (e.g., proposals promoting team science or community engagement) may be considered with appropriate justification. Please contact the Developmental Core leadership to discuss. (See 'Contact the Developmental Core' on pg. 3.)

NOTES

- Submission of a CFAR-03 application does not preclude concurrent submission of an NIH application containing substantially the same research proposal. Should a related NIH proposal be funded, the CFAR-03 award may be terminated, and unspent funds recovered.
- CFAR-03 awards may not be used to supplement research currently funded by NIH or to provide interim support for projects under NIH review.
- CFAR-03 awards may not be used to supplement or extend research previously funded by a CFAR-Series award. The applicant must demonstrate that the proposed CFAR-03 project meets this requirement.

SCOPE

Examples of the types of projects that might be funded under this NOFO include:

- Pilot or feasibility studies for emerging research opportunities in HIV;
- Secondary analysis of existing data;
- Small, self-contained research projects;
- Development of research methodology or research technology.

ELIGIBILITY

INCLUSION CRITERIA:

- Faculty or faculty-equivalent position with a full-time appointment at Emory University or the Morehouse School of Medicine as of CFAR-03 award start date.
- Eligible to be a PI on an NIH R01 grant.
- Meet the definition of an NIH "[New Investigator](#)" in **HIV/AIDS**. Specifically, prior funding as an NIH independent investigator makes an applicant ineligible **ONLY IF** that funding has been in **HM**.
 - Exception: Investigators with prior independent NIH funding in HIV are eligible if they have not been the PI on *any* NIH HIV grant within the last five years.

EXCLUSION CRITERIA:

- Serving as PI or MPI on an active CFAR-Series award (i.e., CFAR-03, CFAR-AUCC, CFAR-K).

APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Required for All Applicants:

1. Submit a Research Pre-Proposal (RPP) by the deadline

See directions below, noting that RPPs are submitted electronically: bit.ly/EmoryCFAR-Series-RPP

2. Consult with the Data Science Core (currently listed on CFAR website as Biostatistics and Bioinformatics Core) to review your data collection and analysis plan

Please visit bit.ly/CFARServiceRequest to request the consultation. After the meeting, the Data Science Core will provide the required verification letter for inclusion in the application packet.

Required for Applicants without Prior NIH R01-Equivalent Funding:

1. Identify a CFAR-03 Research Mentor

2. Get pre-review comments on the application draft from your CFAR-03 Research Mentor

Optional but Encouraged for All Applicants:

1. Contact the Developmental Core

Before preparing an application, applicants are encouraged to discuss whether their proposed project aligns with the objectives of the CFAR-03 mechanism.

- **Basic and preclinical science applications:** Dr. Rama Amara (ramara@emory.edu)
- **Social/behavioral applications:** Dr. Drenna Waldrop (drenna.waldrop@emory.edu) or Dr. Kimbi Hagen (kbs.hagen@emory.edu)
- **Clinical science applications:** Dr. Andrés Camacho-González (acamac2@emory.edu)

2. Present your specific aims and approach to the CFAR Core Directors for scientific feedback

This optional pre-submission webinar will take place via Zoom; presentation slots are limited. Contact Deaunna Thomas (deaunna.thomas@emory.edu) if you are interested in this opportunity.

3. Meet with other CFAR Science Cores to get Letter(s) of Verification (LOV) documenting Core services provided for your project

Support may include consultation, services, materials, training, and/or shared research space/equipment. As appropriate to the support proposed, CFAR Cores can also provide you with information addressing rigor and reproducibility to include in your Significance/Approach section. Learn about the Cores [here](#). Please visit bit.ly/CFARServiceRequest to request services or consultation.

SCHEDULE / DEADLINES

Fall 2026 (CYCLE Y28A):

	DATE	SUBMISSION LINK
Research Pre-Proposal due (required but non-binding)	September 1, 2026	bit.ly/EmoryCFAR-Series-RPP
Application due	October 1, 2026	bit.ly/EmoryCFAR-Series-APP
CFAR-Series Study Section held	First week in November 2026	
Funding decisions announced	End of November 2026	

RESEARCH PRE-PROPOSAL (RPP) INSTRUCTIONS

An electronic RPP, including a one-page research pre-proposal attachment, is **required but non-binding**. See deadline and online submission link above.

The pre-proposal (**submitted in PDF format**) must include:

- A 1-3 sentence summary of the research problem
- Proposed research question(s) or hypotheses
- Proposed specific aims
- A brief description of the proposed approach
- References (not included in the 1-page limit)

Contact CFAR Developmental Core coordinator, Deaunna Thomas (deaunna.thomas@emory.edu) with questions.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Applicants should work with their assigned department's Research Administration Services pre-award specialist to develop, assemble, and submit the application packet. Applications may be prepared using Cayuse 424 using PA-25-302 (NIH R03) as the "Opportunity Number." The completed packet should be submitted as a single PDF packet, using the submission link on pg. 2. If your RAS pre-award specialist has questions regarding the preparation of the application packet or submission requirements, they are encouraged to contact the Developmental Core for assistance prior to submission.

Do **NOT** complete an "intent to submit" through Emory's INSIGHT system.

Do **NOT** route the application through Emory's OSP office.

IMPORTANT: CFAR-03 applications **must** include certain components not required by the NIH. Please refer to the checklist provided for **ALL** required components, including CFAR-specific items.

Applicants without prior experience writing NIH-style applications may want to review the NIH "[How to Apply – Application Guide](#)" website.

COVER LETTER

The PI, PI's Chair/Division Director, and, when applicable, the PI's Research Mentor should all sign the cover letter. Restrict information provided in the letter to the following:

- ☐ PI name(s), department(s), and contact information
- ☐ Application title
- ☐ Application type (New or Resubmission)
- ☐ Direct Costs requested
- ☐ Post Award administrator name and contact information
- ☐ A statement, if applicable, confirming that the PI's Research Mentor provided pre-review comments on a final draft of the new or resubmitted application

FORM PAGES

- ☐ Applications should be prepared using NIH **FORMS-I** forms and NIH NOFO [PA-25-302](#), the current Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for investigator-initiated applications using the NIH Small Research Grant Program (R03) mechanism upon which the CFAR-03 is based.
- ☐ Except when CFAR-specific instructions are provided below, applicants should follow NIH instructions for completing an SF424 form set.

PHS 398 RESEARCH PLAN

- ☐ Format all documents per NIH rules.
 - [See NIH Forms I Application Guide](#)
- ☐ Rigor and Reproducibility: The research plan should fully address rigor and reproducibility.
 - See [NIH FAQs](#) for [NOT-16-011](#)
- ☐ Inclusion Across the Lifespan: For projects including human subjects, the research plan **must** fully address inclusion across the lifespan.
 - Read NIH [NOT-OD-18-116](#)
- ☐ Sex as a Biological Variable: All research projects conducted with a) human subjects, b) vertebrate animals, and/or c) materials from human or vertebrate animal subjects (e.g., blood, tissue, cell lines) must fully address sex as a biological variable in the research plan
 - Read [NOT-OD-15-102-Guidance](#)
 - Read (<https://orwh.od.nih.gov/sex-gender/nih-policy-sex-biological-variable>)
- ☐ The Approach section should include a project activities timeline.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT (LOS) / VERIFICATION (LOV)

- ☐ CFAR Data Science/BIOS Core LOV, verifying that Core faculty reviewed and approved the proposed data collection and analysis plans.
- ☐ As applicable, LOV signed by the Director of each CFAR Science Core that will provide services for the proposed project. Provide a separate LOV from each Core to be used.
Limited subsidized support may be available through CFAR Cores. The LOV should describe agreed on services and the limits on those services. The estimated cost of Core provided services should be described in the LOV on a fee-for-service basis. Any additional cost for Core provided services beyond the agreed-on subsidy must be included in the project budget.
- ☐ As applicable, LOS signed by the PI's CFAR-03 Research Mentor, verifying participation in the development of the CFAR-03 application and, if funded, in the implementation of the CFAR-03 project and the preparation of publications based on project findings.
- ☐ As applicable, LOS from named research collaborators and consultants. For paid consultants, letters must include the rate/fee for consulting services; these expenses must be listed in the application budget.

CFAR REQUIRED INFORMATION

Application packets that do not include the following four required documents will be returned without review. Note: Each of these documents should be saved as a separate PDF file and uploaded as individual documents through the electronic application portal.

- ☐ **Applicability to NIH/OAR Research Priorities:** (Limit = 1 paragraph)
See [NOT-OD-20-018](#). This document should identify *which* High Priority topic the proposed project addresses and describe *how* the proposed project will address that topic.
- ☐ **Future Plans for NIH Applications:** (Limit = 1 page)
This document should describe how the findings from the proposed research will contribute to future NIH applications. Outline the remaining investigations, if any, that need to take place prior to a future NIH application based on this project.

Almost half (40%) of an application's overall impact score will be based on the proposed project's potential to contribute to a future NIH application, Therefore, the ABOVE two documents are key.

- ☐ **Emory CFAR Scientific Core Statement:** (Limit = 1 page)
This section should include one of the three options below:
 1. A description of support provided by the Emory CFAR Science Core(s) during implementation of the project, referencing the appended Core LOV (limit: 1 paragraph per Core). *Note: The narrative should re-state and align with the description of support provided in each attached Core LOV.*
 2. A statement that no Emory CFAR Core will provide consultation, services, training, materials, and/or shared equipment / research space for the proposed study.
Note: If, in the opinion of the reviewers, the applicant has overlooked opportunities to collaborate with / seek appropriate research support from the Emory CFAR Cores, the application may be marked down on review.
 3. A statement explaining any other reason the applicant is not planning to use any of the Emory CFAR Cores.
- ☐ **Community Impact Section:** (Limit = 1 page)
This section should describe, in lay terms, the project and its potential impact on community (e.g., persons with HIV or persons placed at-risk for HIV) and should answer the following questions:
 1. What is the potential benefit of your study to persons with HIV or persons placed at risk for HIV?
 2. How did you generate this research idea and how was community input gathered?
 3. How will you share results with the research participants?
 4. Why should persons with HIV, or persons placed at risk for HIV, care about this project?

BUDGET (Use the R&R, NOT modular, budget)

Stipulations:

- It is not required that the PI(s) request salary. If PI salary costs are requested, they may not exceed \$8,000 (including fringe benefits) without prior permission from the CFAR. Please contact Deaunna Thomas (deaunna.thomas@emory.edu) with any questions.
- Funds may be requested for travel and activities associated with writing an NIH research grant proposal based on project findings and/or attending meetings to establish collaborations or to present project-related data. Supported travel must be completed within the award's project period.
- Investigators must include a justification of the activities connected with Data Management and Sharing that will incur costs. This justification must be labeled as "Data Management and Sharing Justification" within the budget justification attachment, followed by the estimated dollar amount.
- The following are unallowable on a CFAR budget request:
 - Salary or travel support for senior faculty.
 - Tuition and fees for trainees.
 - Funds to support an international subaward.
 - Equipment purchases of > \$5,000
 - **NOTE:** items like computers or tablets fall under the "supplies" category, unless they are a part of a larger equipment system.
 - Indirect Costs (although these may be awarded later, depending on the source(s) of funding used to support the award).
- As noted above, limited subsidized (low or no cost) services may be available through CFAR Cores and the terms/limits of the Core's support should be clearly outlined in an LOV. Any additional cost for Core provided services beyond the agreed-on subsidy must be included in the project budget. The estimated cost of Core provided services should be described in the LOV. Applicants may also request funds for services provided by non-CFAR cores and entities. All requests for funds to cover CFAR and non-CFAR Core provided services should be well described in the Budget Justification.

APPENDIX

Follow the guidelines contained in NIH [NOT-OD-17-098](#) (released 8/02/17). This CFAR-03 NOFO contains one NOFO-specific appendix:

☐ **CFAR-03 Mentoring Plan (if applicable):** (Limit = 1 page).

Include:

- Brief description of each member of the mentoring team
- Goals of the mentoring plan
- Brief description of each mentoring activity included in the plan
- How, and how often, the mentoring team will meet
- How success at meeting the identified goals will be assessed.

SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

CFAR-03 applications do NOT have to be routed for approval through the PI's Department / School and must NOT be submitted to the Emory OSP.

The application packet should be submitted directly to the CFAR as a single PDF file via an electronic portal, which can be accessed on pg. 2.

APPLICATION REVIEW

- Members of the standing Emory CFAR Study Section evaluate proposals in an NIH-style study section format, with two ad hoc scientific reviewers and one ad hoc community-based reviewer assigned to each proposal. External reviewers will be requested as needed.
- In assigning an NIH-style Impact score (1-9), CFAR reviews are not limited to the three NIH simplified review criteria (importance of the research, rigor and feasibility, expertise and resources). Just under half (40%) of a reviewed application's overall impact score will take into consideration two additional, CFAR-specific criteria: 'Potential to contribute to a future NIH application' and 'quality of writing.' See Review Criteria table (Appendix A) for additional details.
- A written critique will be prepared for each proposal. These critiques, formally known as a "Summary Statement" and informally known as "pink sheets," will be forwarded to the applicant approximately three weeks following completion of the study section.

RELEASE OF FUNDS

A response to the reviewer comments and proof of all required institutional approvals must be received by the CFAR prior to the release of funds. Additional stipulations may also be included in the Notice of Award (NOA).

CONTACTS

Administrative Questions

Deaunna Thomas, MSW

E-mail: deaunna.thomas@emory.edu

Scientific Questions

Rama Amara, PhD

Email: ramara@emory.edu

Drenna Waldrop, PhD

E-mail: drenna.waldrop@emory.edu

Andrés Camacho-González, MD, MSc

E-mail: acamac2@emory.edu

Kimbi Hagen, EdD

E-mail: kbs.hagen@emory.edu

APPENDIX A: CFAR-03 REVIEW CRITERIA

Weight	Item	Section of application scored
30%	Future: Does the proposed project have a high potential of contributing to a future NIH application?	- Entire narrative “Future Plans for NIH Applications” statement “Applicability to NIH/OAR Research Priorities” statement
10%	Writing: Does the quality of writing in the application (including grammar and spelling) meet the standard found in successful NIH applications?	Entire narrative

25%	<i>Factor 1. Importance of the Research</i> Significance - Evaluate the importance of the proposed research in the context of current scientific challenges and opportunities, either for advancing knowledge within the field, or more broadly. Assess whether the application addresses an important gap in knowledge in the field, would solve a critical problem, or create a valuable conceptual or technical advance. - Evaluate the rationale for undertaking the study, the rigor of the scientific background for the work (e.g., prior literature and/or preliminary data) and whether the scientific background justifies the proposed study. Innovation - Evaluate the extent to which innovation influences the importance of undertaking the proposed research. Note that while technical or conceptual innovation can influence the importance of the proposed research, a project that is not applying novel concepts or approaches may be of critical importance for the field. - Evaluate whether the proposed work applies novel concepts, methods or technologies or uses existing concepts, methods, technologies in novel ways, to enhance the overall impact of the project.	- Research Strategy: (a) “Significance” - Applicability to NIH/OAR Research Priorities” statement - Research Strategy: (b) “Innovation”
25%	<i>Factor 2. Rigor and Feasibility</i> Approach - Evaluate the scientific quality of the proposed work. Evaluate the likelihood that compelling, reproducible findings will result (rigor) and assess whether the proposed studies can be done well and within the timeframes proposed (feasibility). Rigor: - Evaluate the potential to produce unbiased, reproducible, robust data. - Evaluate the rigor of experimental design and whether appropriate controls are in place. - Evaluate whether the sample size is sufficient and well-justified. - Assess the quality of the plans for analysis, interpretation, and reporting of results.	- Specific Aims - Research Strategy: (c) “Approach” - CFAR scientific core statement - Letters of support - Inclusion of Individuals Across the Lifespan - Inclusion of Women and Minorities - Vertebrate Animals

	• Evaluate whether the investigators presented adequate plans to address relevant biological variables, such as sex or age, in the design, analysis, and reporting. • For applications involving human subjects or vertebrate animals, also evaluate: ○ the rigor of the intervention or study manipulation (if applicable to the study design). ○ whether outcome variables are justified. ○ whether the results will be generalizable or, in the case of a rare disease/special group, relevant to the particular subgroup. ○ whether the sample is appropriate and has sufficient variation to appropriately address the proposed research question(s). • For applications involving human subjects, including clinical trials, assess whether the participation plans are adequate for the scientific goals of the research. Considerations of appropriateness may include disease/condition/behavior incidence, prevalence, or population burden, population representation, and/or current state of the science. Feasibility: • Evaluate whether the proposed approach is sound and achievable, including plans to address problems or new challenges that emerge in the work. For proposed studies in which feasibility may be less certain, evaluate whether the uncertainty is balanced by the potential for major advances. • For applications involving human subjects, evaluate the adequacy and feasibility of the plan to recruit and retain a population of participants appropriate to the scientific objectives. Additionally, evaluate the likelihood of successfully achieving the proposed enrollment based on specified demographic categories. • Evaluate whether the study timeline and milestones are feasible.	
10%	<i>Factor 3. Expertise and Resources</i> Investigator(s) Evaluate whether the investigator(s) have demonstrated background, training, and expertise, as appropriate for their career stage, to conduct the proposed work. For Multiple Principal Investigator (MPI) applications, assess the quality of the leadership plan to facilitate coordination and collaboration. Environment Evaluate whether the institutional resources are appropriate to ensure the successful execution of the proposed work.	• Biosketches • Dual PI Leadership Plan • Mentoring Plan • Resources page • Letters of support • CFAR scientific core statement