



2024 Pilot and Feasibility Program
Call for Applications
Letter of Intent (LOI) due September 1, 2023
Grant Applications (upon LOI approval) due October 13, 2023

Dr. Gavin Arteel and Dr. Paul Monga, Directors of the Pittsburgh Liver Research Center's Pilot and Feasibility (P&F) Program, are pleased to announce the call for applications for the 2024-2025 grant cycle. The grants will fund new initiatives and/or support new investigators who are pursuing liver-related research that should lead to K/R type funding or other extramural support. Please read and retain the document in its entirety as important and new information is enclosed in the document. For any questions, please email PLRC administrator, Aaron Bell at bellaaro@pitt.edu.

Pilot and Feasibility grants:

1. The PLRC P&F grants are one-year awards for liver-related research. Funds can be used for reagents, animals, and core services, but not for equipment or travel. Under special circumstances and with proper justification, partial salary support may be considered. All funds must be used for the conduct of research. Funding will run from April 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025
 - a. \$25,000 grant(s) will be awarded to individual applicants. The PLRC will fund up to four of these applications. An additional \$25,000 grant, cosponsored by the Community Liver Alliance will be available for applicants from underrepresented backgrounds as defined by [NIH](#) or applications addressing liver diseases in underserved communities, healthcare disparities, pathogenesis of sexually dimorphic diseases or other topics with Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) foci.
 - b. \$50,000 grant(s) will support a team of at least two investigators—a practicing physician and a basic scientist—working together to answer an important question pertaining to liver health and disease. Alternatively, the grant can be multidisciplinary with two faculty from different departments. The synergy, complementarity, integration, and multidisciplinary nature of the proposal should be visible, as applicable. Budget of \$25,000 for each PI should be **clearly justified**. This award is intended to promote team science and/or multidisciplinary science. The PLRC will fund up to one of these applications.
2. These grants are for one year; in rare cases, awardees may apply for a second year of funding. Applicants applying for a second year of funding must provide a report of their progress to date and will be considered on a competitive basis with the entire pool of applicants.
3. The P&F grants provide support for investigators to collect preliminary data sufficient to support a future extramural grant application for independent research and/or to test a novel hypothesis.
4. P&F Grants are **NOT** intended for:
 - a. Bridge funding
 - b. Large projects by established investigators
 - c. Supporting or supplementing ongoing funded research of an investigator.

Expectations:

1. The funds are distributed in two disbursements. The first half of the funds is made available to the PI at the beginning of the funding period. At the mid-point of the award, the PI(s) will present their P&F funded research to the PLRC members at a scheduled event. At this time, the PI(s) will submit a brief mid-year report; once the report has been approved, the second half of the funds will be disbursed.
2. At the end of the funding period, it would be ideal for the PI(s) to have generated sufficient high-quality data to publish in a peer-reviewed scientific journal. The manuscript should acknowledge the support of the PLRC grant number P30 DK120531 and specifically its P&F program. Any presentations (oral or poster) should also acknowledge this support. A statement related to the acknowledgment can be obtained from the PLRC Administrator (Aaron Bell, bellaaro@pitt.edu).
3. At the end of the funding period, it would be optimal for the PI(s) to have sufficient high-quality preliminary data to apply for extramural funding (K, R or equivalent) for the continuation of the project.
4. At the end of the funding period and using the data generated during the P&F award period, the awardee(s) will submit to the PLRC the following: **(1) a project completion report, and (2) any relevant publication(s), and (3) a copy of any relevant submitted grant application(s).**
5. The P&F Program Directors are available to discuss the progress of the project and offer other relevant scientific advice. The PLRC Office will be able to provide any supporting documents or letters necessary for the preparation of a successful grant application.
6. The successful P&F recipients who are junior investigators will be required to identify two longitudinal mentors and have regular meetings with them for career development.
7. PIs will attend and participate in the PLRC Enrichment activities, including monthly seminars and relevant Special Interest Group roundtables.

Eligibility:

All academic full-time faculty (including Instructors, Research Assistant Professors, and Assistant Professors) and senior Post-Docs who are eligible to apply as PI for extramural NIH funding and who are affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh and/or UPMC are eligible to apply. Projects will be considered on any aspect of fundamental or applied research relating to basic liver function, liver pathophysiology, or clinically relevant areas. Projects that will utilize the PLRC Scientific Cores will be given preference. Applicants must fall into one of the following categories of eligibility. Please note that this is a tiered priority scale, with preference being given to junior investigators.

- Track 1 (N). Junior investigators without independent grant support (excluding career development awards) seeking to establish independence in the field of liver research. ***This category of applicant will be given preference.***
- Track 2 (EN). Established investigators with independent grant support—past or present—who have not been involved in liver research and who wish to develop new research directions related to the liver.
- Track 3 (E). Established investigators working in liver-related research who wish to begin a new project representing a major departure from their previous NIH-funded research.

Application Process:

1. PIs who intend to apply for the grant should send a **letter of intent** (LOI) via email to Aaron Bell (bellaaro@pitt.edu) no later than **September 1, 2023**. The LOI should contain the following:
 - a. Cover letter stating the name(s) and the department(s) of PI(s). The letter should include a tentative title of project, 2-3 sentences summarizing the intended proposal, and state whether vertebrate animals and/or human subjects/specimen will be used in the study.
 - b. Current NIH biosketch (for each PI if applicable)
 - c. Other Grants Support page
2. The PLRC P&F Directors will assess the LOI for eligibility of the PI's for the P&F grant application. PLRC office will communicate with each PI by **September 15, 2023** to inform them if they are approved to submit a full application, due by **October 13, 2023**.
3. There will be an opportunity to ask specific grant-related questions to the P&F Directors at a virtual event which will be scheduled soon after the LOI deadline. This session will allow you to ask any questions related to grantsmanship, topic of research, IRB/IACUC, budget, PLRC, PLRC core-usage and other areas. Date will be announced soon.
4. Full grant applications will be due in the PLRC Office by the end of the business day on **October 13, 2023**. Applications should follow the format of a new NIH R01 Grant (except page limits, see below), using NIH application forms ([PHS 398](#)) and must include the following:
 - a. Title and abstract
 - b. Detailed budget for the proposal. **Please be in contact with your departmental grant administrator for assistance in budget planning.** Effort is required of the principal investigator and must be reflected on the budget page. This effort should be cost shared by the department or other entity that will support such effort at the non-federal fringe rates.
 - c. NIH Biosketch for the PI (5 page limit); please use the [format that expires in 2024](#).
 - d. Specific Aims page (1-page limit).
 - e. Research Strategy (5-page limit, excluding bibliography).
 - f. PLRC Core(s) Use and contribution to the mission of the PLRC (1-page limit). This section will include a description of projected PLRC Core usage during the project period. It is expected that each funded project will use one or more of the PLRC Research Cores: [Advanced Cell & Tissue Imaging](#); [Clinical Biospecimen Repository & Processing Core](#); [Genomics & Systems Biology Core](#); [Human Liver Synthetic Biology Core](#). In addition, how the applicant intends to contribute to the mission of the PLRC (e.g., through attendance at meetings, research/sample contributions and conceptual advances) should be detailed in this section.
 - g. For Track 1 (N) applicants, including senior Post-Docs, include a letter of support from either your lab PI, your division chief, or your department chair, that states their support to your submission of a grant application for extramural funding based on the studies proposed in the P and F proposal. Additionally, Track 1 (N) applicants, who don't currently have a career development award (like a K grant), outline short-term and long-term goals and briefly discuss how this P and F grant, if funded, will help meet those goals.
 - h. All institutional regulatory approvals for human, tissue, and animal use should be submitted with the application. While approved IACUC and IRB protocols (where applicable) are not required at the time of grant submission, all applicants are **strongly encouraged** to start the process at the time the

proposals are submitted. Lack of appropriate approvals at the time of final decisions, will result in denial of grant funding. Also complete in your application:

- i. The human subjects section, if you are using **human subjects**.
 - ii. The vertebrate animals section, if you are using **vertebrate animals**.
 - iii. The human embryonic stem cell section if you are using **human embryonic stem cells**.
5. Applications do not require institutional internal review or Dean's signature.
 6. All applicants are encouraged to provide letters of support (LOS) from their academic unit leadership (e.g., Department, Division and Center). All dependent applicants (i.e., without their own space or salary support) are required to provide an LOS from academic unit leadership and their immediate supervisor/mentor.
 7. **All documents should be combined into a single pdf file and emailed to Aaron Bell (bellaaro@pitt.edu) no later than October 13, 2023.**

Review and Decision Process:

1. The submitted grant application would undergo external peer review. Each grant will be reviewed by at least two external reviewers, and eventually by the members of the External Advisory Board (EAB). The scoring will be based on the NIH scale. The applications will be scored based on scientific merit and NIH fundability as deemed by the review panel. Emphasis will be placed on projects that have potential for NIDDK-supported liver research. The overall scores will be communicated via email and letter with the PI by January 15, 2024.
2. A group of top-scoring semi-finalists will be invited to present their proposals to the EAB and PLRC membership. This information will be communicated to the PI in the letter (see 1 above). The presentations have been tentatively scheduled for January 30, 2024, the day of the in-person EAB visit. More information regarding the format and organization of the session will be provided closer to the date. The PI will be required to be present for presentation and Q&A and any additional discussion at the allocated time to be considered for possible funding.
3. Following all presentations, EAB meets and discusses and scores each of the semi-finalists. These scores are transmitted to P&F Program Directors with recommendation to fund or not fund. All decisions are strictly made based on recommendations from EAB members. The final decisions are communicated with each P&F applicant and reviewer comments are also provided as feedback for future, where applicable. The finalists will be required to submit 'Just-in-time' information by Feb. 15 for the final Notice of Grant Award (see 4 and 5 below).
4. Finalists are expected to have relevant IRB and/or IACUC approvals by February 15, 2024 to avoid any delays in approval of final funding by NIH by the start date (see 5 below). Applications that do not have all institutional approvals by NGA date will not be considered for funding.
5. The Notice of Grant Award (NGA) will be made around February 15, 2024 and will outline the approved budget and expected outcomes.
6. Grant start date will be April 1, 2024.