



PILOT PROJECT PROGRAM ■

Request for Applications (RFA) | Year 2, Call 1

Announcement Date	: October 1, 2026
Letter of Intent Due	: October 16, 2026, 5:00 PM HST (required)
Invitations Issued	: October 23, 2026
Full Application Due	: November 16, 2026, 5:00 PM HST (by invitation only)
Award Notification	: December 30, 2026 (anticipated)
IRB/IACUC Approvals	: Due January 30, 2027
NIGMS Review	: February 26, 2027 (anticipated, if applicable)
Start Date	: March 1, 2027 (anticipated) ¹
Maximum Award	: \$50,000 direct costs
Indirect Costs	: Not allowed (no RTRF will be provided)
Project Period	: 12 months
Number of Awards	: At least 2

The Pacific Center for Artificial Intelligence and Data Science in Medicine (PAC-AID), supported by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) Program (NIH P20GM161995), invites applications for its Pilot Project Program.

> 1. PROGRAM PURPOSE

The PAC-AID Pilot Project Program supports innovative biomedical and health-related research that meaningfully incorporates artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), data science, biomedical informatics, or related computational approaches.

The program is designed to support promising investigators who have the potential to develop into future PAC-AID Research Project Leaders (RPLs). Pilot projects should generate preliminary data, establish feasibility, and strengthen investigators' competitiveness for future independent NIH research funding, particularly R01-level support.

Priority will be given to scientifically strong projects that align with the PAC-AID mission and demonstrate a clear pathway toward future independent NIH funding.

> 2. RESEARCH SCOPE

PAC-AID Mission

To advance the health of Hawai'i and the Pacific by making artificial intelligence and data science work for everyone we serve.

¹Subject to completion of all applicable NIGMS, institutional, and regulatory requirements.

PAC-AID seeks to advance biomedical AI through research infrastructure, training, and representative data that reflect the diversity of Hawai'i and the Pacific, including Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and distinct Asian populations, with the goal of translating complex health data into discoveries and tools that improve health for all.

Proposed projects must include a substantive AI, ML, data science, or computational component. Priority will be given to projects that leverage Hawai'i data (or other Hawai'i-specific resources) and have the potential to lead to NIH R01 funding.

Relevant areas may include, but are not limited to:

- AI and machine learning for biomedical and clinical research;
- Biomedical informatics and health data science;
- Precision medicine and predictive modeling;
- Medical imaging and digital pathology;
- Computational genomics and multi-omics;
- AI-enabled biomarker discovery;
- Natural language processing and large language models for biomedical applications;
- Integration of clinical, genomic, imaging, environmental, behavioral, or population-level data;
- Development and validation of AI/ML models and computational pipelines relevant to biomedical and health sciences;
- Biomedical dataset development, curation, and analysis;
- Responsible, reproducible, interpretable, and equitable AI in medicine;
- AI and data science approaches relevant to health needs in Hawai'i and Pacific populations; and
- Application of AI and data science approaches to address research questions across diverse biomedical research areas.

AI or data science should be an integral component of the proposed research, rather than an incidental analytical tool.

> 3. ELIGIBILITY

The PAC-AID Pilot Project Program is intended to support independent investigators who demonstrate strong potential to develop into future PAC-AID Research Project Leaders (RPLs) and compete successfully for independent NIH research funding. Early Stage Investigators (ESIs) are particularly encouraged to apply.

Applicants must:

- Hold an eligible appointment within the University of Hawai'i System or the Research Corporation of the University of Hawai'i (RCUH) and be eligible to serve as an independent investigator and Principal Investigator under applicable institutional policy;
- Meet applicable NIH/NIGMS eligibility requirements for COBRE Pilot Project Leaders;
- Demonstrate potential for continued development toward research

- independence and future extramural funding; and
- Propose research aligned with the PAC-AID mission.

Full Professors are not eligible to apply.

A Pilot Project Leader (PPL) may not simultaneously receive research support as a COBRE Research Project Leader (RPL) or as a project lead from another IDeA parent award (e.g., COBRE, INBRE, or IDeA-CTR), consistent with NIGMS requirements.

> 4. FUNDING

Applicants may request up to \$50,000 in direct costs for a 12-month project period. The Pilot Project Leader must devote at least one person-month of effort to the Pilot Project. Indirect costs are not allowed (no RTRF will be provided).

Pilot investigators will have access to consultation with the PAC-AID Medical Artificial Intelligence (MEDAI) Core, including expertise in AI/ML, bioinformatics, data science, computational analysis, and data management. Applicants anticipating substantial use of MEDAI Core resources are encouraged to consult with Core leadership during application development.

Awards are contingent upon availability of funds and completion of all applicable institutional, regulatory, and NIGMS requirements.

Funded investigators will be expected to complete the proposed project and milestones within the award period, participate in relevant PAC-AID activities, provide progress updates as requested, acknowledge PAC-AID/NIH support, and report resulting publications, presentations, grant submissions, awards, and other research products.

Pilot Project funds may not be used to support research activities already funded by another source.

> 5. TWO-STAGE APPLICATION PROCESS

Applications are accepted in two stages. A **Letter of Intent (LOI) is required**. PAC-AID leadership will review LOIs and invite the most promising applicants to submit a full application. Only invited applicants may submit a full application.

- [1] **Letter of Intent**, due October 16, 2026, 5:00 PM HST.
- [2] **Invitations** to submit a full application sent by October 23, 2026.
- [3] **Full Application** (invited applicants only), due November 16, 2026, 5:00 PM HST.

Letter of Intent Contents

Submit the LOI as a **single PDF** using the same formatting as the full application (11-point Arial font, margins of at least 0.5 inch). The LOI must include:

- **Cover information:** project title; PPL name, degree(s), title, department, and UH/RCUH appointment; whether the PPL is an Early Stage Investigator; key collaborators and their roles; anticipated use of the MEDAI Core; and whether the project will involve human subjects, human biospecimens or data, or vertebrate animals.
- **Project Description (1 page maximum):** the research question and specific aims; the AI/data science approach and why it is integral to the research; data sources, including any Hawai'i data or other Hawai'i-specific resources; and the anticipated next-stage funding mechanism (with particular emphasis on R01-level funding) and approximate timeline for submission.
- **NIH Biographical Sketch** for the PPL. SciENCv certification is not required at the LOI stage.

Current and Pending (Other) Support is **not** required with the LOI. It is required only with invited full applications.

LOI Review

LOIs will be reviewed by PAC-AID MPIs Drs. Youping Deng and John Shepherd for eligibility, responsiveness to this RFA, alignment with the PAC-AID mission, the extent to which AI/data science is integral to the proposed research, investigator potential, and potential for future NIH funding. Invitations are not a commitment to fund. Applicants not invited may receive brief feedback and are encouraged to apply in a future call.

> 6. FULL APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS (BY INVITATION)

Invited applications must be submitted as a **single PDF** and include the following components. Unless otherwise specified, applicant-prepared sections must use 11-point Arial font with at least 0.5-inch margins. Figure legends may use a 10-point font.

Face Page & Project Summary

Provide the PHS 398 Face Page and Project Summary using the current NIH PHS 398 forms and instructions.

Specific Aims (1 page)

State the overall objective and specific aims of the proposed project.

Research Strategy (4 pages)

Address the Significance, Innovation, and Approach of the proposed research, including study design, data sources, AI/data science methodology, analysis plan, preliminary data (if available), expected outcomes, and potential challenges and alternative strategies. Applicants should clearly describe the AI/data science methodology to be used, including any advanced AI approaches as applicable, and explain why the selected methodology is appropriate for the proposed biomedical research question.

Relevance to PAC-AID and Future Funding (1 page)

Describe how the project aligns with the PAC-AID mission and how AI/data science is integral to the proposed research. Explain how the Pilot Project will generate preliminary data, methods, or other research products that will position the investigator for future independent NIH funding and potential development as a PAC-AID RPL. Identify the anticipated next-stage funding mechanism or opportunity, with particular emphasis on R01-level funding, and the approximate timeline for submission.

Milestones and Timeline (1 page)

Provide specific, measurable project milestones and a brief timeline for completing the proposed work within the 12-month project period.

NIH Biosketch and Current & Pending (Other) Support

Provide the NIH Biographical Sketch Common Form and NIH Biographical Sketch Supplement, prepared and certified through SciENCv, for the PPL and other senior/key personnel, as applicable. Provide the Current and Pending (Other) Support Common Form, prepared and certified through SciENCv, for the PPL. Any potential scientific, budgetary, or effort overlap with the proposed Pilot Project must be clearly identified.

Budget and Budget Justification

Provide a detailed budget and budget justification for all requested costs. Requested costs must be directly related to the proposed Pilot Project.

Human Subjects, Vertebrate Animals, and Other Regulatory Requirements

Applications involving human subjects, human biospecimens or data, vertebrate animals, or other regulated research must provide applicable NIH and institutional regulatory information. Selected projects must provide all required regulatory documentation, including IRB/IACUC approvals, as applicable, before the project may begin. Projects involving human subjects and/or vertebrate animals are subject to applicable NIGMS prior approval requirements.

Letters of Collaboration, if applicable

Include letters documenting essential collaborations or commitments to provide critical resources necessary to complete the proposed project, as applicable. Letters should be limited to the collaborator's intent to collaborate and/or commit resources as described in the application and should not include endorsements of the proposed project.

> 7. REVIEW CRITERIA

Invited full applications will undergo administrative review for eligibility and completeness, followed by scientific peer review and review by the

PAC-AID Advisory Committee (AC), consistent with COBRE program requirements. Reviewers will use the NIH 1-9 scoring scale, with 1 representing the highest score. Applications will be evaluated based on:

- [1] **Significance and Innovation**, including the novelty and appropriateness of the proposed AI/data science approach;
- [2] **Investigator Potential**, including the applicant's potential to develop into a future PAC-AID RPL and an independently funded investigator;
- [3] **Scientific Approach and Feasibility**, including the likelihood that the proposed work can be completed within the 12-month project period;
- [4] **Alignment with the PAC-AID Mission**, including the extent to which AI/data science is integral to the proposed research;
- [5] **Potential for Future NIH Funding**, with particular emphasis on whether the Pilot Project is likely to generate the preliminary data, methods, or other research products needed to support a competitive R01-level application; and
- [6] **Overall Impact**.

Particular emphasis will be placed on the investigator's potential for research independence and the likelihood that the proposed Pilot Project will position the investigator for future NIH R01-level funding.

> 8. KEY DATES

Activity	Date
RFA Announcement	October 1, 2026
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Anticipated NIGMS Review/Approval, if applicable	February 26, 2027
Pilot Projects Begin	March 1, 2027

* Dates are subject to change.

> 9. SUBMISSION AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Letter of Intent Deadline: October 16, 2026, 5:00 PM HST

Full Application Deadline (by invitation): November 16, 2026, 5:00 PM HST

Submit the LOI and, if invited, the full application as single PDFs to:
PACAIID_COBRe@cc.hawaii.edu

LOI email subject: PAC-AID Pilot Project LOI - [Applicant Last Name]

Full application email subject: PAC-AID Pilot Project Application -
[Applicant Last Name]

Questions regarding eligibility, scientific scope, application requirements,

or PAC-AID resources may be directed to:

Scientific Contacts

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