

**Center for Pre-Clinical Cancer Research (CPCCR)
Requesting Proposals for Full Projects as a Principal Junior Investigator - 2027-2030**

Important Dates

October 20th , 2025 Announcement of RFA

December 15th , 2025 Proposal Due Date

Objective: GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENT

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

The LSU School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM) is home to the NIH-funded Center for Pre-Clinical Cancer Research (CPCCR) – (PD/PI - Joseph Francis) funded by NIH: NIGMS as a Center of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE). In preparation for the Phase II of this grant submission in June 2025, we are soliciting application for 1-2 full projects and the others submitting will be considered as a pipeline of investigators for subsequent years of funding when the current Principal Junior Investigator (PJI's) rotate out of the program. The goal of this COBRE program is to increase the number of NIH funded investigators at LSU and SUBR in the field of cancer research with the use of pre-clinical cancer models and enhance cancer research in Louisiana funded by NIH and other sources.

The CPCCR is now soliciting grant applications from LSU and SUBR faculty. Assistant professors in a tenure-track position are preferred. Other faculty in research or clinical track appointments may apply provided that there is evidence for substantial support from their home departments with regard to space and their independent research efforts. Full projects require submission of a grant application conforming to the NIH Exploratory/Developmental Research Grant Program (R21) guidelines that can be found in the website: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/r21.htm>. The application should be written as an NIH R21 application intended for submission to NIH with all appropriate sections completed including face page, budget, etc. The application should include an explanation of the type of preliminary results that will be funded by the COBRE that are needed to render this application competitive for NIH R21 or R01 funding.

In the interests of competitiveness for NIH R funding, it is critically *important* for applicants to articulate the potential translational application of the proposed work to human health. The applicant should also consider the overall fit of the aims of the application for the goals of this COBRE, which are to promote excellence in research in the broad area of Cancer research in general and specifically preclinical models for cancer research. PIs can send their queries regarding this to Dr. Joseph Francis (PI) and Dr. Gus Kousoulas (Co-I). The expected start date for this project is March 1, 2027, with funding through February 28, 2030. The selection and distribution of these projects by the Administrative Core (AC) and the External Advisory Committee (EAC) will be based on the quality of the proposal and the goals of the CPCCR program. Proposed projects should be consistent with the program's focal research areas. Specifically, the CPCCR COBRE will uniquely provide a multi-prong approach to support (i) exploratory cancer research, (ii) mechanisms of tumorigenesis and tumor progression as well as (iii) translational assessment that will lead to the development of successful therapeutic strategies in humans. The CPCCR COBRE is focused on human cancer disease modeling for identifying relevant pre-clinical disease mechanisms and novel therapeutic strategies for human cancer.

All interested researchers are encouraged to contact the PI and Co-I prior to submitting a proposal to ensure that the proposed research is eligible for inclusion in this program. The completed SF424 application (all sections) should be compiled as a PDF document and submitted via email to:

Joseph Francis, PhD (PI) Email: jfrancis@lsu.edu

Gus Kousoulas, PhD (Co-I) [Email: vtgusk@lsu.edu](mailto:vtgusk@lsu.edu)

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Eligibility

The project is open to investigators at existing **LSU, Pennington, LSUHSC and SUBR**

Total Funds Available

The Full project funding is \$150,000 per year Total Direct Costs for up to 3 years Starting March 1, 2027, through February 28, 2030.

Proposal Guidelines (Overview)

The proposal should be submitted via email as a single PDF formatted file to Drs. Francis and Kousoulas no later than 4:30 pm CT, Dec 15th, 2025. **LATE** submissions will **NOT** be accepted.

Proposal Guidelines (Detailed)

For general formatting instructions follow the current **SF 424** forms and guidelines, which can be found on the NIH Grant application website <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/forms-f/research-forms-f.pdf>. The proposal should contain the following items:

I. PHS 398 Forms: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html> _

1. PHS 398 Face Page, signed by the applying Institution's Authorized Representative (form page 1). Please take special care in completing numbers 4 and 5 on the Face Page regarding human subjects and vertebrate animals. If the answer is "no" for question 4, do not answer questions 4a-d.
2. PHS 398 Project Summary (form page 2)
3. PHS Research Grant Table of Contents (form page 3)
4. Detailed Budget (form page 4 and 5) and Budget Justification (Continuation Page)
 - a. PI's budget (form page 4) 1 year (March 1, 2024– February 28, 2026) Budget \$150,000 Total Direct Cost/year (form page 5 and Continuation Page for budget justification). See *Section IV. Allowable Costs for further details and explanation*
5. PHS 398 NIH Checklist (398 checklist page)
6. *Fringe / Indirect costs rate agreement (contact your Office of Sponsored Programs for copies of these documents)*

NOTE: While not required by NIH, any voluntary cost sharing, and matching commitments of any kind (e.g., private sector, federal, institutional) that are pledged in the proposal must be clearly defined in the budget justification and honored in full if selected for funding. Please clearly define all cost sharing by adding a section in the budget justification stating what is being cost shared, fringe benefits associated with any salaries cost shared, any indirect charges associated with the cost share, and provide the amount of total cost share so that it is clear what funds are being requested and what funds are being cost shared.

II. Research Plans/Project Description (6-page limit, use NIH Continuation Format Page):

1. **Cover page (Limit to 1 page - not part of 6-page limit)**
 - o Project title
 - o Performance site(s)
 - o Lead project investigator or investigators if more than one person
 - o Key personnel (personnel who are in the budget); include Collaborators and Mentors
 - o Identify if the project includes human subjects and if any exemptions are claimed
 - o Identify if vertebrate animals are included
2. **Abstract and Specific Aims (Limit to 1 page or less, not part of 6-page limit)**

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3. **Background and Preliminary Results (Limit to 1 page - part of 6-page limit):** Describe rationale, significance, and potential impact. Include preliminary results only as needed to address these topics. Preliminary results are not a required element.
4. **Research Plan and Timeline (Limit to 5 pages - part of 6-page limit):** Describe research approach(es) and Innovation.
 - a. Describe the specific aims of the research project in an area that is a focus of the INBRE. Delineate the hypotheses to be tested. Preliminary studies are NOT required for INBRE applications, but applicants with preliminary results should describe them. In the absence of preliminary results, applicants should describe the rationale and scientific basis for the proposed research and provide a strong research plan. Concisely state the importance and health relevance of the proposed research to the specific aims.
 - b. Describe the nature and scope of any scientific research collaborations
 - i. Project Timeline (March 1, 2027, through February 28, 2030)
5. **Investigators (limit to 1 page; use tables to present information where possible, not part of 6-page limit):** For project leaders, mentors, key personnel, and collaborators: Identify the institution, education level(s), and role in project.
 - a. **The candidate**
 - i. A single investigator at the awardee or network institutions should supervise each research project. Each investigator is responsible for ensuring that the project's specific aims are met. The research excellence of these projects will be enhanced by effectively using the scientific and technical strengths of collaborating investigators and/or mentors.
 - ii. Individual development plan, including plans for developing a sustainable research program. See NIGMS website for more information.
<https://www.nigms.nih.gov/training/strategicplanimplementationblueprint/pages/individualdevelopmentplans.aspx>
6. **Environment and Resources** (use Resources format page):
Provide details; use table format where possible.
 - a. Research environment
 - b. Research and Institutional Commitment
 - c. Technical support
 - d. Details of COBRE core resources that will be utilized during the project
 - e. Other

Additional Information. As appropriate to the project, include the following sections: There are no page limits on these sections.

- a. Human Subjects*
- b. Inclusion of Women, Minorities, and Children
- c. Vertebrate Animal Care and Welfare*
- d. Data Sharing
- e. Biohazards*
- f. Literature Cited/Reference List

**(if applicable, approval letter needs to be attached)*

III. NIH Biographical Sketch

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Research project investigators and mentors must provide a biographical sketch as indicated in the PHS 398 instructions. This section must not exceed four pages per person.

Allowable Costs:

Funds will be provided to continue building and strengthening research infrastructure and capacity at the lead and partner institutions. Funds allocated to partner institutions are to cover expenses including but not limited to salary, research support, and equipment acquisition.

Sharing resources between COBRE and LBRN (INBRE) investigators is strongly encouraged. If a core facility already exists for equipment and instrumentation supported by a COBRE program, these should not be proposed de novo in Full project application. However, if duplicate equipment is to be requested under this FOA, it should be appropriately justified.

Salary costs are allowable to the extent that they are reasonable; conform to the established policy of the organization consistently applied regardless of the source of funds; and reflect no more than the percentage of time devoted to the NIH-funded project. If full-time 12-month salaries are not currently paid to comparable staff members, the salary proposed must be appropriately related to the existing salary.

Other Allowable Costs Include:

- o Research equipment and instrumentation for laboratories
- o Supplies for research
- o Salary support for undergraduate and graduate students and technical staff

Project Selection Criteria

SELECTION: All proposals will be reviewed by the COBRE Administrative core and selected applications will be issued a notice of award subject to EAC and NIH approval. It is anticipated that funding will begin **March 1, 2027**.

MAJOR REVIEW CRITERIA: The goals of this NIH-supported research are to advance our understanding of all aspects of cancer biology and to enhance human health throughout the lifespan. Diversification of the biomedical research workforce and developing the next generation of independent investigators are also important objectives of the NIH extramural research portfolio and a specific goal of the NIH: NIGMS COBRE funding mechanism. A single-digit score and a bulleted list of strengths and weaknesses for each of the six review categories, as well as an overall priority score, using the following NIH-based scoring scale will be used. (Note that an application does not need to be strong in all listed categories to be judged)

Collaborations and Utilization of Cores: Applications that demonstrate a trans-disciplinary approach and potential for funding in cancer will be considered highly responsive to this RFA. Use of Cores supported by CPCCR Preclinical Cancer Research Molecular Core and Preclinical Core should be included in the overall experimental design. A timetable should be included that outlines plan for seeking subsequent or supplemental extramural support.

Significance: Does this study address an important health problem in cancer? If the aims of the application are achieved, how will scientific knowledge or clinical practice be advanced in the field of cancer? What will be the effect of the study on the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventive interventions that drive this field?

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Innovation: Is the project original and innovative? For example: Does the project challenge existing paradigms or clinical practice or address an innovative hypothesis or critical barrier to progress in the field? Does the project develop or employ novel concepts, approaches, methodologies, tools, or technologies?

Investigators: Are the investigators appropriately trained and well suited to conduct the proposed collaborative study? Is the proposed research appropriate to the experience level of the principal investigator and collaborators? If the principal investigator is a junior faculty member, has the applicant designated a senior mentor and a brief description of a mentoring plan? Does the investigative team bring complementary expertise to the project?

Approach: Are the conceptual or clinical framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well integrated, well-justified and appropriate to the aims of the project? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problems and propose alternative strategies?

Environment, Collaborations and Partnerships: Does the scientific environment in which the study will be performed contribute to the probability of success? Does the proposed study benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, or subject populations, or employ useful collaborative arrangements? Will there be collaborations to address the scientific questions in the proposed research area? Will the research fit into the mission of the CPCCR?

Impact	Score	Descriptor	Additional Guidance on Strengths and Weaknesses
High	1	Exceptional	Exceptional strong with essentially no weaknesses
	2	Outstanding	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
	3	Excellent	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses
Medium	4	Very Good	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
	5	Good	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
	6	Satisfactory	Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses
Low	7	Fair	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
	8	Marginal	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
	9	Poor	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses