CBC | CHICAGO BIOMEDICAL CONSORTIUM

2026 Request for Applications

Contents

PROGRAM OVERVIEW:

The Chicago Biomedical Consortium Hub for Innovative Technology and Entrepreneurship in the Sciences (CBC-HITES) provides Chicagoland academic innovators with the support needed to develop scientific and technical discoveries into biomedical applications.

CBC-HITES is a proof-of-concept biopharma and health technology center funded by the NIH Research Evaluation and Commercialization Hub (REACH) program. Hubs are designed to provide academic innovators with product development education, industry connections, project management, and necessary funding to develop biomedical applications.

CBC-HITES is a funding and analytics resource for academic researchers from Chicagoland institutions built on the processes and infrastructure created by the Chicago Biomedical Consortium and is housed in Northwestern Medicine's Comprehensive Transplant Center.

WINDY CITY INNOVATION AWARD

Awards up to $75k in direct costs only, given over one year for projects with at least one faculty member from one of our member institutions or their affiliates.

SUPPORT:

CBC-HITES provides support in the form of market, competitive, clinical, manufacturing, and feasibility analysis; experimental review and project management; connection to experts and venture; and many other resources needed to move inventions into the commercial sphere. We demystify the commercialization process by providing support at every stage:

- **Pre-funding guidance**
  - Evaluate ideas for commercial attractiveness
  - Identify appropriate scientific pathways that meet business needs
  - Solicit and share feedback from venture capitalists and industry experts as well as federal-level feedback and guidance on regulatory issues
- **Post-funding support**
  - Integrate insights from relevant clinical trial results
  - Develop milestone-driven timeline for value creation
  - Manage project progress and troubleshoot challenges
  - Access to network with industry experts and consultants
  - Guide to additional funding sources
- **Beyond funding**
  - Access cumulative knowledge of expert advisory boards from the private sector
  - Provide support across development and commercial lifecycle

CBC-HITES WCI AWARD DETAILS AND ELIGIBILITY

PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

- **INCLUSION / *What are we looking for*?**
    - **Therapeutics,** including but not limited to small molecules, macromolecules, peptides, nucleic acids, cell/gene therapies
    - **Medical devices,** including but not limited to interventional and diagnostic devices
    - **Drug discovery platform** technology that has potential to generate novel chemical matter and has an identified lead proof-of-concept therapeutic program
- **EXCLUSION / *What will we not review?***
    - We will only consider "hard tech" innovations, meaning there needs to be potential for physical IP innovation. Programs where the innovation is a **software program, algorithm, or AI-based decision tool** are not eligible
    - We will not consider **research tools** that do not directly generate novel chemical matter
- **To be competitive for the award, we recommend the project meet the following criteria:**
    - Innovation must have the potential to **address significant unmet needs** in human health, as defined by the limitations of current approaches
    - For therapeutics:
        - There is strong **evidence supporting the target and/or mechanism** as being central to disease biology in the proposed indication.
        - There is some **proof of mechanism and/or proof of efficacy data** for your therapeutic, either in vitro or in vivo
        - There is a path to generate novel chemical matter
    - For devices
        - There is a **physical prototype** device that has **generated proof of principle and/or validating data**
    - For drug discovery platform
        - A **lead indication** has been identified
        - A **molecule** targeting that indication has been developed using the platform

APPLICATION EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

- Applicants can submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) of up to 11 pages by May 5, 2026, for screening.
- If LOIs pass the screening stage and move to the CBC-HITES analysis stage, applicants will be invited to draft a full application.
- Within one month, applicants will be required to submit a draft of the full application to be reviewed by the CBC-HITES team.
- Once a draft is finalized, applicants will submit the full application through a link provided by the CBC-HITES team.

FACULTY AND LABORATORY ELIGIBILITY

- Faculty from University of Illinois Chicago, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, University of Chicago, or Northwestern University, Loyola University, Illinois Institute of Technology, Northern Illinois University, Rosalind Franklin University, Rush University, Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, and Discovery Partners Institute, or their affiliate institutions, applying with an innovation in **therapeutics, drug discovery platforms,** or **medical devices** may be eligible for up to $75k over one year.
- Applicants must include at **least one tenured**, **tenure-track, or research faculty with research programs at one of the partnering institutions.**
- CBC-HITES welcomes teams composed of post-docs, students, and trainees who have at least one eligible submitting PI. Faculty with full-time appointments on the clinical track at one of the nine partnering institutions are also eligible to apply.
- Applicants must have their **own designated laboratory space.** Although collaborative proposals are encouraged, there is **no specific requirement for cross-institutional collaboration.**
- The technology driving the application **CANNOT be licensed** to any company or **supported by a sponsored research agreement.**
- Applicants may have created a company to pursue translation of their innovation, but there is no expectation or requirement for so doing. CBC-HITES encourages applications before company formation.
- Multiple applications can be submitted from each institution.
- A PI is limited to one active CBC-HITES application at a time.
- There is no expectation that awards will be distributed evenly among the CBC-HITES institutions.
- Research teams should not already be funded for the same (or closely related) specific aims and/or milestones.
- Specific aims or experimental plans described in LOI cannot be under review at other funding institutions/agencies to support the same (or closely related) specific aims and/or milestones.
- The project should be focused on the development of an innovation built around a compelling hypothesis and focus on gathering data that advances the hypothesis and discharges key translational risks.
- The CBC-HITES funds cannot be used for administrative tasks (i.e., patent filing, federal application, or legal fees).
- CBC-HITES does not allow facilities & administrative (F&A) or indirect costs on any funded project.

WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR

We are excited to support bold, data-driven projects that have the potential to create meaningful biomedical impact. While projects may be at an early stage, competitive applications typically show a clear path toward translation. We are seeking both single target/drug combinations – especially where there is a therapeutic hypothesis with a direct mechanism of action on a disease-relevant pathway, and a genetically validated or otherwise well-characterized target. We are enthusiastic about projects with a tool compound or hit, defined pharmacodynamic and/or efficacy biomarkers, and ideally efficacy data benchmarked to a marketed or late clinical-stage therapeutic. We are also open to evaluating therapeutic discovery platforms with well-justified lead indication and medical devices with a strong competitive advantage.

Even if your project is in its earlier phases, we encourage you to apply if you can clearly articulate the scientific rationale, translational potential, and future development path.

REVIEW PROCESSES

REVIEW PROCESS GOALS:

The goal of the review process is to ensure that CBC-HITES staff works with applicants to evaluate and develop their ideas to move them along the path to commercialization. CBC-HITES staff and our Entrepreneurial Fellows work closely with the applicant teams and each institution's technology transfer office to help Chicagoland academic scientists navigate and accelerate the translation of their innovative discoveries into impactful healthcare solutions.

REVIEW PROCESS OVERVIEW:

CBC Entrepreneurial Fellows and staff will form a dedicated team that reviews the submitted LOI. The research and conclusions from this analysis are presented to an external Review Board made up of experts, industry professionals, and investors selected based on their subject-matter expertise. The CBC-HITES team will also work with applicants to develop the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Common Application, that is reviewed by (1) external reviewers and (2) the NIH Technology Guidance Committee.

REVIEW PROCESS TIMING:

PROCESS STEPS (responsible party)	**TIMING**
1. Pre-submission preparation (submitting PI)	By May 5, 2026 at 7:00 AM CT
2. LOI preparation and submission (submitting PI)	By May 5, 2026 at 7:00 AM CT
3. LOI screening and prioritization (CBC)	~1-week post-application submission
4. Draft Full Application (submitting PI)	~4 weeks (concurrently with CBC LOI Analysis)
5a. Faculty Q&A (submitting PI) 5b. LOI Analysis (CBC)	~3-5 days post-screening ~4 weeks post-screening
6. Intellectual property content review (technology transfer office)	~1 week
7. Review Board decision (CBC)	~1 week
8. External Review of NIH Common application (CBC reviewers)	~2 weeks

9. Technology Guidance Committee review (NIH)	~2 weeks

Please note: The review and evaluation of applications are subject to the volume of submissions received. While we strive to provide timely feedback, the review process may be extended depending on the number of applications in the review queue. Applicants will be notified of any significant delays.

REVIEW PROCESS STEPS

Step 1. Pre-submission

Please engage with your institution's technology transfer office early in the LOI development and submission process to ensure that your intellectual property is protected or that the protection process has been initiated. We will work closely with your technology transfer office to ensure that no confidential information is shared during our review board meetings. However, if the innovation has not been disclosed to the patent office, the application may not advance unless there are pending plans for disclosure.

Step 2. LOI preparation and submission

See **LOI Preparation** for instructions on how to prepare and submit the LOI.

Step 3. LOI screening and prioritization

CBC-HITES staff will determine application eligibility based on the criteria outlined in 'Award Details and Eligibility' above. For eligible applications, CBC staff and Entrepreneurial Fellows will screen and score each LOI using a standardized rubric that assesses the project maturity and commercial potential. Projects with the lowest scores will not advance. High-scoring projects will be prioritized based on their commercial potential and grouped into cohorts for a more in-depth review.

At this stage, applicants will be notified whether their project has advanced to the next step. At this point, applicants will be asked to begin to draft a full application. If the application cannot be completed in the allotted time, LOIs will not move on to the full review.

Step 4. Draft NIH Common Application

If applications move past the screening stage (Step 3) of the review, submitting faculty will be invited to draft a full application (ie, NIH Common Application) for review by the CBC-HITES team. This application must be completed concurrently with the LOI analysis to ensure timely award funding if the project is chosen for funding. If faculty cannot complete the NIH Common Application in the allotted time, their applications will not move forward and will not be eligible for funding.

Step 5. CBC Analysis

If applications reach Step 5, submitting faculty will receive an email indicating next steps in the process. The CBC-HITES team will also send a list of outstanding questions that arose during the screening process. Faculty are expected to respond to questions in detail, using available data and images in a Word document or PowerPoint format. CBC-HITES will use answers to questions to aid in the analysis of the project.

Step 6. Intellectual property content review

Working with the applicant's Technology Transfer Office, we will ensure that no confidential information is not shared during our Review Board meeting.

Step 7. Review Board

The CBC team presents the analysis to Review Board, a committee made up of experts, industry professionals, and investors selected based on their extensive subject-matter expertise. The analysis is presented, discussed, and the committee validates the CBC-HITES recommendation to either proceed with funding or return the application with explanations of the gaps that need to be filled.

Step 8. External Review

NIH Common Applications are reviewed and scored by external reviewers. This is required by the NIH REACH program. These reviews are shared with the NIH Technology Guidance Committee in Step 9.

Step 9. Technology Guidance Committee Review

Qualified applications will be reviewed by the Technology Guidance Committee composed of federal experts assembled by NIH which include NIH Entrepreneurs-in-Residence, experts from the FDA, and experts from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for additional input.

Step 10. Funding

The final funding decision will be made by CBC-HITES based on compiled scores from the Review Board and the NIH Technology Guidance Committee.

LOI PREPARATION:

All LOIs **MUST** be prepared according to the guidelines listed below. All pages and documents listed below should be assembled into a **SINGLE PDF** document in the order listed. **Portfolios will not be accepted at this stage.**

To submit your application, please follow the below steps:

Step 1: Fill out the online form. All fields marked by asterisks (*) are required.

Online application includes:

- Submitter information
- Intellectual property questions
    - General technology transfer questions to assess the submitter's interactions with the US Patent Office.
    - Technology transfer questions related to **this technology.**
    - Name and contact information for your institutional Technology Transfer representative, if applicable.
- Biological specimens
    - Please indicate if embryonic stem cells, or human or animal subjects will be used in this research. Appropriate documentation (ie, approved IACUC or IRB protocols) will be required for funding.

Step 2: Attach your LOI in PDF format. The LOI must conform to the following guidelines:

- Name the PDF file with "HITES_LOI_NAME" followed by the last name of the PI designated as contact person (e.g., HITES_LOI_Smith.pdf).

- The body of the LOI is limited to 11 pages; Include the following sections with the indicated titles and

in the indicated order.

Use at least size 11 font, 0.5-inch margins, and standard letter paper size (8.5" x 11").

- On **page 1,** a one-paragraph lay-language summary of the project *(max. 150 words)*
- On **pages 2-10**, include an overview of the translational potential of the project by using the section headings and prompts below (please answer to the best of your ability and reach out to the CBC team for assistance)
- On **page 11**, include relevant cited scientific references *(do not to exceed one page; please follow the NIH format)*

Please provide detailed responses to the following prompts to the best of your ability. We encourage you to include images, diagrams, or other visual materials to strengthen your application.

1. **Innovation:**
    a. What is the proposed innovation that is the focus of this application?
    b. What is the proposed patient population, healthcare setting, or research setting that will benefit from the proposed innovation?
2. **Problem/unmet need:**
    a. What is the problem that is being solved by the proposed innovation? Why is the current standard insufficient?
3. **Benefits:**
    a. How does the proposed innovation differ from the status quo /current standard?
    b. What new capabilities does this innovation enable that are not currently available?
    c. What additional benefits will your innovation provide?
4. **Scientific evidence**:
    a. What is the current stage of development of the innovation (e.g., therapeutics: target identification or validation, hit identification, lead identification, lead optimization, preclinical development; drug discovery platforms: proof-of-concept or technology validation, clinical validation, regulatory submission, market entry; devices: prototype development, testing, validation)?
    b. What experiments and development activities have been done to date to advance the innovation?
    c. What evidence is there to support your approach that is independent of your proposed innovation (e.g., genetic evidence for target and/or mechanism, another groups' work, etc)?
    d. What data have been generated to demonstrate the potential of your innovation to address the problem?
    e. What are the key open questions around the proposed innovation?
    f. What is the next key experiment that will significantly de-risk your project?
5. **Discuss how you plan to use the awarded funds**
    a. How will the award funds be used to advance the innovation toward commercialization? Please be specific about your plans, including what milestones you would need to achieve to move forward with commercialization. Please include any expected collaborations or partnerships.
        i. What key experiments or development activities are planned to further validate the innovation?
        ii. What is the next pivotal experiment or milestone that will significantly reduce the technical or commercial risk of the project?
        iii. What is the go/no-go criteria for each milestone?
        iv. **Please note:** to be eligible for NIH REACH funds, all experimental aims and milestones MUST support the commercialization of a product. If an aim/milestone would be better suited for an R01 grant, it is likely that it will not be within scope for this award.

6. **Funding:**
    a. Has this project received any funding for translational work, or are the aims/milestones submitted here under review at any other organization? If yes, please elaborate and indicate how this proposal differs from that work.

LOI SUBMISSION:

Completed LOIs **MUST** be submitted online along with the online application. Clearly designate the administrative contact person on the LOI. The contact person listed will be responsible for interacting with the CBC-HITES team.

Please designate the lead PI on the LOI as the administrative contact person and submit online.

Deadline to submit application:* ***May 5, 2026*