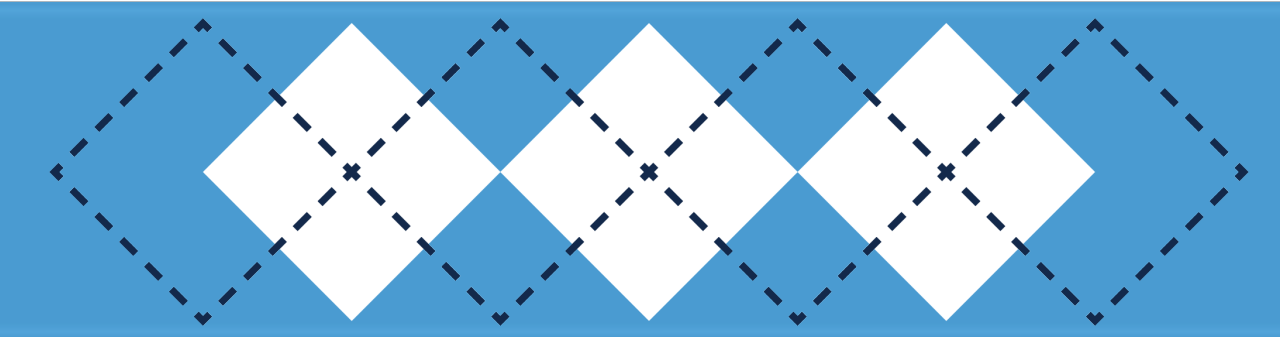




From Idea to Award: Embedding Funding Strategy Into Clinical Development Workflows



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Background

Investigator-initiated trials (IITs) remain a cornerstone of academic oncology research, yet the pathway from scientific idea to funded study has grown increasingly complex. Historically, IITs at academic medical centers have relied on internal pilot funding, departmental resources, or institutional support to advance early-stage concepts. As financial pressures increase and research portfolios expand, diversification of external funding pathways has become essential for sustainable IIT activation. Federal funding is highly competitive, foundation and philanthropic mechanisms are targeted, and productive industry partnerships require early strategic alignment. Academic cancer centers must therefore ensure that promising investigator concepts are not only scientifically innovative but also competitively positioned within a rapidly evolving funding landscape. Structured models that integrate funding strategies early within clinical development are needed to enhance competitiveness, feasibility, and institutional stewardship.

Goals

The goal of this initiative was to implement a centralized funding strategy model embedded within clinical development workflows to support successful IIT funding.

Specific aims were to:

- (1) strategically align investigator concepts with appropriate funding mechanisms early in development through structured assessment of scientific scope, maturity, feasibility, and funding source priorities;
- (2) iteratively refine or reposition concepts to enhance competitiveness, including identification of necessary preclinical data, collaborators, scope adjustments, phased approaches, or alternative funding entry points while preserving scientific intent; and
- (3) establish an adaptable framework supporting longitudinal planning through staged or complementary funding mechanisms rather than single-point submissions.

Examples of CRAFT Content

National Institutes of Health

Interventions on Health and Healthcare Disparities on Non-Communicable and Chronic Diseases in Latin America: Improving Health Outcomes Across the Hemisphere

Link(s) to FOA: [PAR-23-304](#) R01 Clinical Trial Required

Due Date(s): October 05, 2025; February 05, 2026; June 05, 2026; October 05, 2026.

Award Amount: Application budgets are not limited but need to reflect the actual needs of the proposed project.

Summary: The purpose of this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is to support innovative and interdisciplinary team research focused on clinical, health services, and/or community-based interventions that address health and healthcare disparities related to non-communicable and chronic diseases (NCDs) with the highest disease burden and mortality in Latin America and among U.S. Hispanics/Latinos.

Strategy to Apply: This NOFO could be utilized to focus on health coaching for the Hispanic/Latino population and potentially address wearable device research for this patient population.

Community Level Interventions to Improve Minority Health and Reduce Health Disparities

Link(s) to FOA: [PAR-24-231](#) R01 Clinical Trial Optional

Due Date(s): October 05, 2025; October 05, 2026

Award Amount: Application budgets are not limited but need to reflect the actual needs of the proposed project.

Summary: The purpose of this initiative is to support research to develop and test community-level interventions to improve minority health and reduce health disparities.

Strategy to Apply: This initiative is specific to supporting projects that develop and test community-level interventions to improve minority health and decrease health disparities. One specific area of interest for this initiative is promoting screening, detection, help-seeking, and self-management related to acute or chronic illnesses. For this proposal, we would recommend focusing on health coaching and establishing a partnership with an appropriate community partner, possibly a more rural community clinic or patient advocacy group in NC.

Research to Advance the Science of Primary Care

Link(s) to FOA: [PA-24-205](#) R01

Due Date(s): December 09, 2025; June 10, 2026; December 09, 2026

Award Amount: The total costs (direct and indirect) for a project awarded under this NOFO will not exceed \$500,000 in any given year and \$2.5 million for the entire project period. Applications requesting more than \$500,000 in any one year will not be reviewed.

Funds may be used only for those expenses that are directly related and necessary to the project and must be expended in compliance with applicable Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for HHS Awards (45 CFR Part 75) and the HHS Grants Policy Statement.

Summary: The purpose of this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is to build evidence about the characteristics and value of primary care that influence patient outcomes and advance health equity, such as care coordination, continuity of care, and comprehensiveness of care, person-centered, whole healthcare, and trust, and how these can be improved and effectively delivered to strengthen primary healthcare.

Strategy to Apply: CCDA could possibly utilize this NOFO to maybe integrate navigation or coaching in toxicity management or drug adherence to help rural primary care physicians in the care of cancer patients.

Gantt Chart: Prioritized Funding Opportunities

	2025							2026	
	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.
NIH: PAR-25-104		6/25							
PCORI: Phased Large Awards					9/23				1/13
AQHA: PAR-24-154						10/5			

Prepare
Deadline

Industry Opportunities

Please note that most companies have a patient outcomes group. These groups are interested in discussing potential opportunities to measure patient outcomes related to FDA approved products. We have included some opportunities below, but if you have a particular drug product in mind to use, we encourage you to discuss further with the Research Science Liaisons and they can provide additional information/feedback.

Pfizer Medical Grants

Quality Improvement Project: Improving Care of Patients with Metastatic Breast Cancer (mBC) through Innovative Strategies

Link(s) to FOA: [NCCN Pfizer mBC QI RFP](#)

Due Date(s): Letter of Intent: June 9, 2025

Award Amount: \$1.5 Million

Summary: To advance delivery of quality care and/or healthcare provider performance that will lead to the improvement in the overall care of all patients with mBC.

Strategy to Apply: Areas of interest for this proposal that align with the goals of CCDA include optimization of treatment toxicity management, optimization of treatment adherence or integration of ancillary services including palliative care, primary care and supportive oncology or multi-disciplinary teams including subspecialists to co-manage the unique needs of patients with mBC.

Syndax Pharmaceuticals

Link(s) to FOA: NA

Due Date(s): NA

Award Amount: NA

Summary: Syndax Pharmaceuticals has a Health Outcomes group that is interested in additional Patient Reported Outcome studies related to using Revuforj.

Strategy to Apply: Investigators affiliated with the CCDA Pod who are interested in conducting a study that could generate additional patient data on the use of Revuforj are encouraged to contact Adan Sosa, Director of Health Outcomes Liaison at asosa@syndax.com.

Training and Education Opportunities

UNC Resources

- Visit UNC Lineberger Funding and Career Opportunities page for additional information on new funding and career opportunities: <https://unclineberger.org/training/funding-career-opportunities/>
- Get involved in Community Programs and Outreach: <https://unclineberger.org/training/community-programs-outreach/>
- The UNC Office of Research Development provides subscription access to InfoEd Global's SPIN database. The database contains a comprehensive selection of over 40,000 federal, public, and private funding opportunities. All current UNC faculty, staff, students, and postdoctoral scholars are eligible for SPIN user profiles. [Sign up here: SPIN Funding Database](https://unclineberger.org/research-development/consultation-requests/)

Grant Writing Resources

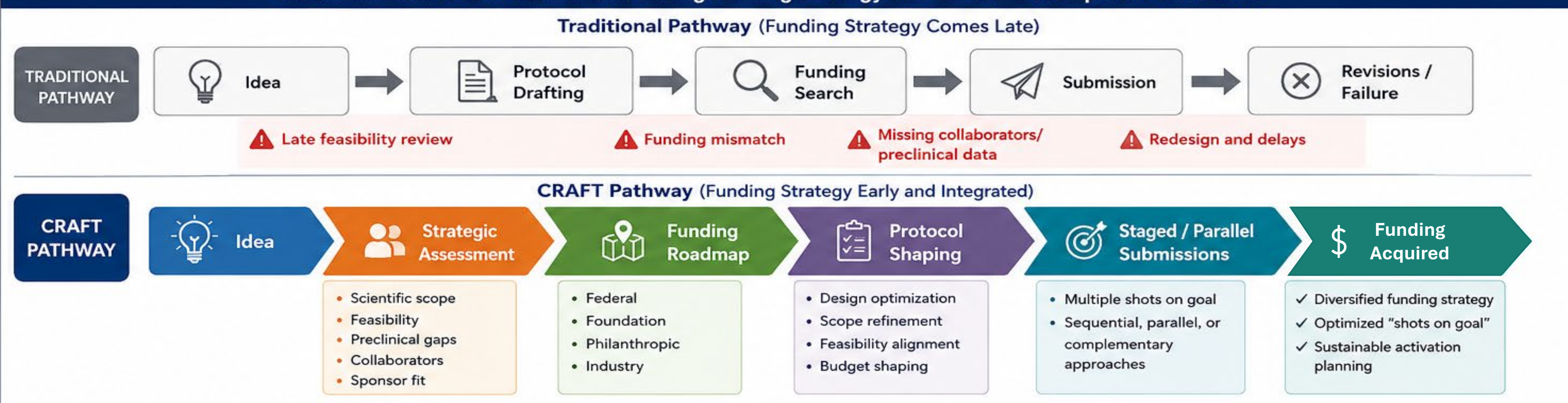
- For background information on proposal development, visit <https://research.unc.edu/researchers/proposal-development/>
- To request proposal development help, visit <https://unclineberger.org/services/request-pre-award-services/> to submit a request.
- Faculty consultations are available through the Office of Research Development to discuss proposal development, research planning, funding questions, federal/sponsor questions, and finding collaborators. To schedule a consultation, visit the following link: <https://research.unc.edu/research-development/consultation-requests/>
- For Grant Writing and Grantsmanship resources visit:
 - <https://tracs.unc.edu/index.php/services/proposal-development/grant-writing>
 - <https://fundingportal.unc.edu/grant-writing-helps/>
 - <https://fundingportal.unc.edu/proposal-writing/>

Solutions & Methods

UNC Lineberger implemented Clinical Development Resources for Advancing Funding and Trials (CRAFT), a centralized model positioning concepts for success prior to submitting to funding sources. Concepts entering CRAFT may include individual IIT proposals, disease-group initiatives, platform-based priorities (e.g., CAR-T, hybrid decentralized trials), or multi-study strategies. Unlike traditional grant offices focused on submission mechanics, CRAFT operates upstream within clinical development to shape scientific scope, funding positioning, feasibility, and mechanism selection.

CRAFT is led by the Clinical Development Team, comprised of PhD-level scientists working in partnership with investigators, finance, regulatory, and industry-facing teams. Through structured, investigator-centered discussions, CRAFT develops strategic funding roadmaps that may include staged, parallel, or complementary mechanisms over the course of 1-2 years. This “multiple shots on goal” approach efficiently increases funding probability. Standardized templates guide feasibility review, protocol shaping, and funding-specific positioning prior to submission, ensuring advancement only when aligned with funding pathways and institutional capacity.

FIGURE 1. From Idea to Award: Embedding Funding Strategy into Clinical Development Workflows



Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Early outcomes demonstrate increased investigator engagement at the concept stage and more deliberate alignment between scientific aims and targeted mechanisms. Concepts are now supported by strategic funding roadmaps that diversify submissions and reduce reliance on single mechanisms. As an early signal of impact, one concept supported through CRAFT secured federal funding to advance hybrid decentralized clinical trial infrastructure. Increased funding diversification has also enabled more strategic allocation of internal institutional resources. The model has strengthened proposal positioning, cross-functional coordination, and institutional stewardship of the IIT portfolio.

Funding strategy must be treated as a longitudinal planning process rather than a single submission event. Early strategic positioning enables thoughtful concept refinement, sequencing of mechanisms, and improved alignment between scientific aims, sponsor expectations, and institutional capacity.