



Title: FY28-Collaboration Initiative
RFA
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Request for Applications (RFA): FY2028 NRI Collaboration Initiative

Faculty Grants Supported by Nebraska Research Initiative Funds

Key Deadlines and Resources

Annual Meeting Registration Deadline

Annual Meeting:
Friday, October 16, 2026

Required Registration Closes:
Friday, October 9, 2026

To be eligible for funding, Principal Investigators (PIs) must [register](#) and participate in Collaboration Initiative Annual Meeting sessions. If a Principal Investigator cannot attend the annual meeting, the PI **must** request a waiver from the Office of the Provost via [email](#) by the registration deadline. In these cases, a Co-Investigator may represent the research team at the meeting with prior approval. Applications from research teams without representation at the annual meeting may be removed from consideration.

Application Deadline

Funding applications submitted by:
Friday, January 15, 2027, 5:00 p.m. Central Time

Routing signatures received by:
Friday, January 29, 2027, 5:00 p.m. Central Time

Principal Investigators can [start a new application](#) or [continue an application](#) in the NuRamp system.

Program Website

The [University of Nebraska Collaboration Initiative](#) program website includes the purpose of the initiative, information & links to register for the annual meeting, a description and instructions on applying for the funding opportunity, and a listing of previous recipients.

Request for Applications

Introduction

The primary purpose of the **Collaboration Initiative** is to enhance the competitiveness of the University of Nebraska (NU) faculty for federal extramural funding by fully leveraging the intellectual capacity and research resources across the NU campuses. The **Fiscal Year 2028** request for applications focuses on a single, flexible grant type:

Single-year seed grants are designed to facilitate research collaborations among faculty in any discipline that would lead to federal funding.

Grant Descriptions¹

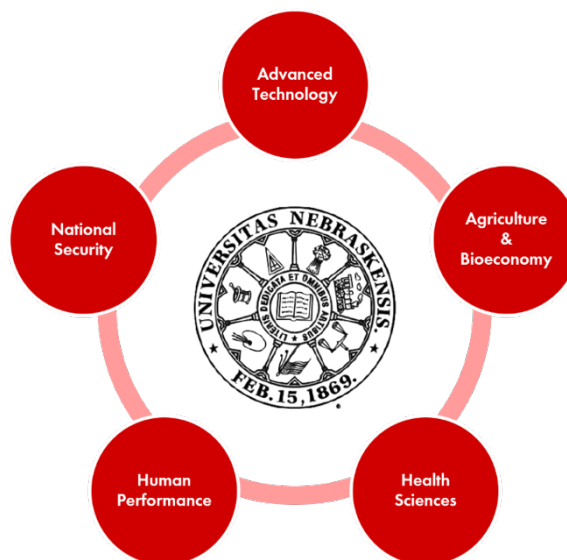
Award amount: \$10,000 to \$100,000 total for one year

Grants are available to support new and existing research collaborations across **two or more Nebraska campuses**² to 1) generate preliminary data critical to federally funded research grant proposals or resubmissions, **or** 2) develop capabilities that allow the University of Nebraska's National Strategic Research Initiative (NSRI) to seek contract funding from its sponsor, U.S. Strategic Command, other Department of Defense entities, or any additional federal agencies.

Research collaborators must confirm: 1) that their [research topic](#) fits the objectives of a federal funding agency's grant program portfolio, or matches an [identified NSRI priority topic](#), and 2) is directly aligned with the [NU Strategic Plan](#), and [College/Department/Center Operational Strategic Initiatives](#).^{3, 4} Researchers unfamiliar with their College or Unit strategic initiatives should contact their Dean or Director for more information. Preference will be given to applications that clearly explain this alignment.

Investigators must explain how their proposal seeks to address one or more of the relevant University of Nebraska System-identified Common Research Areas: Advanced Technology, Agriculture and the Bioeconomy, Health Sciences, Human Performance, and National Security. Preference will be given to applications addressing needs within these common research areas.

Note: Applications may support one or more of these areas.



¹ The total award budget for a single year of programs described in this RFA will be approximately \$3 million. All awards are subject to funding availability, eligibility, and determinations of application suitability. It is anticipated that most award notifications will be available before June 15, 2027. Funding will commence on July 1, 2027.
² Note: IANR is considered part of the Lincoln campus. We will fund collaborations between the Lincoln and Medical Center campuses.
³ NU Strategic Plan: Odyssey to Extraordinary - Foundational Pillars & Strategic Priorities.
⁴ NU Strategic Plan: Strategic Initiative Dashboard.

General Eligibility

Assistant, Associate, or Full Professors and equivalent-rank faculty with formal **research apportionments** employed by any NU campus are eligible to submit funding applications as the Principal Investigator (PI) and participate as Co-Investigators. Professors of practice, clinical faculty, and postdocs may participate as Co-Investigators and contribute toward a project's goals but may not serve as the Principal Investigator. The primary focus of the program is to strengthen the federally fundable research competitiveness of faculty who are likely to maintain a longer-term employment relationship with NU.

Faculty may serve as the lead PI on **one** grant associated with this year's RFA; there is no limit on participation as a Co-Investigator. Collaboration Initiative-funded PIs and Co-Investigators are not restricted from seeking new funding for federally fundable topics not previously researched with prior-year Collaboration Initiative support.

If a proposal's PI has not received extramural research funding⁵ in the last three years (as either a PI or Co-Investigator), they **must identify** at least one Co-Investigator who is both grant-active and willing to serve as a research mentor to the team. The research mentor need not be actively involved in the research itself, **but a description of their role and activities associated with the mentoring process must be included in the project narrative (one short paragraph).**

Collaboration Requirements

Proposals will not be considered for funding unless **meaningful**⁶ **multi-campus** and appropriate disciplinary collaborations are documented. Meaningful collaboration requires direct involvement in the proposed research project, with clearly described roles on the research team.

The research team must include faculty from more than one NU campus unless the NSRI exception described below applies. If appropriate, because of unique expertise/resource availability, **additional** collaborations with researchers at other institutions are allowed. Funding for collaborators outside the University of Nebraska system will not typically be permitted; in rare cases, this stipulation may be waived if there is not adequate expertise within the NU System and these external collaborators provide a billable service to the project.

For NSRI priority-topic projects, the multi-campus collaboration requirement may be satisfied through collaboration with an NSRI content expert and a PI or Co-Investigator from a single campus. The collaboration requirement can still be met (without an NSRI expert) if the PI/Co-Investigators are from multiple campuses.

Collaborations are to be driven by mutual interest and disciplinary/expertise needs. Investigators seeking funding for projects without multi-campus participation are not eligible for this program; they should contact their campus research office to explore campus-specific internal funding opportunities.

5 For general eligibility, extramural research funding includes funding from federal agencies, foundations, industry sponsors, state agencies, nonprofit organizations, or other external sponsors.

6 Meaningful collaborations should be evident from the proposal's narrative or budget justification and be suitable for the planned contribution of the Co-Investigator. Ongoing contributions of the team should be strongly considered in the eventual federal grant application.

Annual Meeting

An annual meeting to facilitate multi-campus collaborations, gain perspectives from past NRI funding recipients, and review the RFA will be held on **Friday, October 16, 2026** (in-person). Potential PIs must participate to be eligible for funding unless an approved waiver is granted by the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost. PIs **must** request a waiver from the Office of the Provost via email by the registration deadline. In these cases, a Co-Investigator may represent the research team at the meeting with prior approval. Applications from research teams without representation at the annual meeting may be removed from consideration.

Potential team members, Co-Investigators, former and current Collaboration Initiative grantees, and others looking to participate in research teams are **strongly** encouraged to attend. Participants will be expected to informally discuss their potential research projects with other attendees within a small group and be receptive to engaging other collaborators.

Application Format and Content

To ensure focus and investments on the University's strategic initiatives, the FY2028 NRI Collaboration Initiative application requests additional information about strategic alignment, common research areas, project goals, and federal grant competitiveness. Although the overall format of the online application is similar to previous funding cycles, PIs should be aware that the organization and structure of the application has changed.

The online application consists of five sections requiring online text entry and file uploads.⁷ The sections include:

1. **Administrative Information:** Application Title, PI and Co-Investigator contact information, Proposal Abstract/Summary, Targeted Federal Grant Program, and the Application narrative.
2. **Budget Information:** Total requested amount, budget detail (personnel, equipment, travel, and other), budget justification, and planned distribution.
3. **Principal Investigator and Co-Investigator CVs:** Biosketches of the PI and all Co-Investigators.
4. **Strategic Alignment, Project Goals, and External Reviewers:** Strategic Initiative and alignment, identification of strategic research areas, project goals, and a list of potential external reviewers.
5. **Compliance Information:** Necessary compliance approvals and Export Control information.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

If a PI or Co-Investigator has multiple appointments, list each individual appointment & department so that all relevant departments or units are included in the approval process.

Reference specific federal funding source(s) and include the announcement or program number(s).

Strong applications are aligned tightly to the potential federal extramural funding opportunity.

Section 1: Administrative Information

Specify the application title and complete the fields for the PI and all Co-Investigators. Identify the correct campus, college, and department for each investigator. Provide a proposal abstract/summary that briefly outlines the proposed work and identifies the topic area being addressed (see list below). Complete the fields used to identify the federal agency and funding program being targeted for application.

⁷ Note: Please ensure that any documents you upload meet Title II accessibility requirements, including providing accessible formats or alternative text where needed, so all users can access this content.

Potential Topic Areas

When identifying the topic area of your proposal, broadly interpret the topic areas to avoid the use of the “other” field unless the topic being studied clearly cannot be characterized by any of these pre-identified selections.

- Aging/Quality of Life While Aging
- Agriculture and/or Life Sciences: Crop, Food, and Animal Sciences
- Biology and Chemistry: Structure/Function
- Behavioral/Mental Health: Prevention, Diagnosis, and Care
- Biomechanics
- Bioeconomy: Feedstocks, Processing, and/or Policy
- Cancer Prevention, Screening, and Early Interventions
- Clinical Trial Collaborations: Disease Prevention, Diagnostics, and Therapies
- Computing, Information Sciences, Data Sciences, and Bioinformatics
- Disease Mechanisms, Preventions, and Treatments
- Drug and Vaccine Discovery, Delivery, and Development
- Early Childhood: Policy and Practice
- Education and Educational Sciences
- Engineering and Material Science Applications/Use-Inspired Research
- Humanities and Creative Arts
- National Security: AI, Machine Learning, and Quantum Enhanced Tools
- National Security: Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Countermeasures
- National Security: Food, Agriculture, and Environmental Protection
- National Security: Threat Detection, Mitigation, and Response
- Natural Resources: Climate, Energy, and Habitat
- Physical Sciences: Basic Chemistry, Physics, Astronomy, and Earth Sciences
- Virology, Bacteriology, and/or Fungal Infections
- Water Resource and/or Water Safety Management

Upload the Project Description/Narrative (as a PDF document)

The project description/narrative may not exceed eight pages.⁸ The eight-page limit includes all references, tables, figures, and any appendices. Use a minimum 11-point font size and one-inch margins. The narrative must include the following elements:

- **Application Type/Purpose:** In a single sentence, clearly state the application type/purpose as one of the following: 1) to generate preliminary data critical for a new federal extramural grant application, 2) to address reviewer concerns to make a federal extramural grant resubmission more competitive, or 3) to address an NSRI-identified topic specifically geared to seeking a new NSRI task order or contract with the DOD or other applicable agency.
- **Long-Term Objectives:** Clearly state the research question(s) to be addressed in an eventual federal extramural funding application or contract. Cite the federal agency or federal funding source(s) and the announcement or program number(s) (or equivalent) from which the team will seek funding and explain how the proposed research aligns with the stated objectives of the funding source. Confirm when the team plans to submit the application for federal extramural funding, or, for NSRI, respond to a government solicitation or task order. *[Note: The final report requires—at least—a draft federal funding proposal. At the conclusion of a funded project, the expectation is that a new application be submitted during the next available application acceptance period for the specified federal grant program.]*
- **Significance, Innovation, and Impacts:** Describe the significance of addressing the long-term research goals (solves or addresses a scientific problem and/or helps meet an educational or societal need). Describe why the eventual federal extramural funding application represents a conceptual innovation

⁸ Eight pages is a maximum; for some award types and request amounts, much shorter narratives would be appropriate.

and/or an innovative approach, and how anticipated achievements will lead to a societal benefit or broader impact.

- **Specific Aims and Approach:** Clearly describe the research question(s), hypotheses to be tested, and short-term goals to be achieved if the proposal is funded. Describe the approach (work plan), including the timeline for completion of key project milestones, and explain how the proposed effort will better position the research team to obtain federal research funding.
- **Roles and Responsibilities:** Clearly describe the roles, responsibilities, unique expertise, and expectations for the PI and all Co-Investigators. As appropriate, describe how the team's expertise is suited to address the specific aims and approach. Describe any existing collaborations and how they will be strengthened. Include a management plan that describes how the PI will manage the project and research team to ensure timely completion of the proposed studies, meaningful data acquisition, data sharing, data management, quality evaluation, and accountability. Include a process for making key decisions and managing conflict. If a mentor is required, indicate who that person is and outline their planned mentoring activities.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Clearly explain the purpose of your proposal and how it aligns with the indicated federal extramural opportunity.

Ensure the research team has the necessary expertise and describe the use of existing resources, such as CORES or shared facilities.

Include realistic timelines; overly ambitious projects are less likely to succeed.

Section 2: Budget Information

Enter the total requested budget, the proposed expenditures using the Year 1 fields, upload a Budget Justification document as a PDF file, and enter the amounts to be provided to each researcher (PI & Co-Investigators). Budget total amounts are automatically calculated in NuRamp.

Please note the following budget guidelines:

- F&A costs are not allowed.
- Allowable expenses include support for technicians, postdocs, undergraduate students, graduate research assistants (GRA), publication costs, and equipment. Tuition remission and health insurance for GRAs are allowable expenses.
- Funds from this program must not be used for construction, renovation, administrative assistance, or release time from teaching.
- Personnel expenses aggregated on the budget form must be justified individually.
- Academic year salaries for PIs and Co-Investigators are not allowable expenses.
- Summer salary expenses are only allowed for a single individual (PI or Co-Investigator), and only if they do not have summer salary support (not to exceed 0.5-month total). Individuals with 12-month appointments are not eligible for summer salary. No salary savings can be accrued for any employee.
- Faculty researchers who are "soft-funded" and associated with a service center may bill or invoice their time as a service using approved service center rates.
- The budget justification must outline how Co-Investigator expenditures will be audited and monitored by the PI and provide a clear rationale linking budgetary resources, collaborative roles, and responsibilities.

Section 3: PI and Co-Investigator(s) CVs

Use the current biosketch or CV format acceptable to the federal funding agency being targeted for funding. The same format must be used for all CVs. *Combine all the CVs into a single PDF file; the PI's CV should be first.*

Section 4: Strategic Alignment, Project Goals, and External Reviewers

Complete the Strategic Alignment Online Form

Identify the strategic research areas relevant to your application (you may check more than one area). Provide a brief narrative indicating how this application supports your specific department, college, or unit operational strategic initiatives that support the overall NU System Strategic Plan.⁹ Preference will be given to applications that clearly detail this alignment.

Complete the Project Goals Online Form

List up to five primary goals, objectives, or specific aims of the proposed research. These should match the specific aims, activities, or actions listed in the uploaded project narrative. If there are fewer than five goals, leave the extra fields blank. *This section is not available to external or internal reviewers; this information is used to pre-populate all post-award reports.*

Complete the Potential External Reviewers Online Form

Applicants should provide contact information for at least five potential external reviewers who have disciplinary expertise in the work being proposed.

These individuals should not be contacted, and they must be free of real or potential conflicts of interest.

Such conflicts include:

- 1) Having a personal relationship, including a family relationship or friendship, with any PI or Co-Investigator,
- 2) Supervising the doctoral work of any PI or Co-Investigator,
- 3) Having their doctoral work supervised by any PI or Co-Investigator,
- 4) Being a co-author on a publication with any PI or Co-Investigator within the past 5 years, or
- 5) Being a colleague within the same organization as any PI or Co-Investigator within the past 5 years.

Please do not include any reviewers from in-state institutions, including the University of Nebraska System and its campuses, the Nebraska State College System, the Nebraska Community College System, or any private Nebraska-based higher education institutions. Do not include any reviewers from international institutions or any reviewers from Federal Agencies who might be associated with your application.

Section 5: Compliance Information

Complete the compliance information requested in NuRamp, including necessary compliance approvals and export control information.

⁹ If investigators have questions related to campus or college-specific strategic initiatives, they should contact their campus research office, college, department, center, or unit.

Review Process

Administrative Screening

Applications will be screened for administrative compliance before external review. Applications that do not satisfy RFA requirements may be removed from consideration. The Office of the Provost may, at its discretion, permit applicants to correct minor administrative defects; however, applicants should **not** assume that corrections will be permitted after the submission deadline. The application deadline is final.

Applications may be removed from consideration for issues including, but not limited to:

- Application submitted after the deadline.
- Required routing signatures not received by the routing signature deadline.
- PI does not meet eligibility requirements.
- PI did not participate in the required annual meeting and did not receive an approved waiver.
- Project team does not satisfy the multi-campus collaboration requirement or approved NSRI exception.
- Budget includes unallowable costs.
- Project narrative exceeds the eight-page limit, including references, tables, figures, and any appendices included in the narrative PDF.
- Project narrative does not meet minimum formatting requirements.
- Required application components are missing, incomplete, or not uploaded in the required format.
- Application does not identify a targeted federal grant program or NSRI priority topic.

External Review and Funding Decisions

After proposals are screened for eligibility and administrative compliance, proposals and potential external reviewers are categorized by research area and expertise. The Office of the Provost assigns two relevant external reviewers to each proposal based on this categorization. Paid external reviewers then review their assigned proposals. The primary evaluation criteria will be reviewers' evaluative summaries.¹⁰ Reviewers will also use the following **scoring rubric**¹¹ to assist them with providing the evaluative summary:

- a) Justification/description of significance, innovation, and impact (**25 points**).
- b) Evidence of research alignment to priorities of the identified federal funding agency and identified program (**25 points**).
- c) An approach/work plan that is both scientifically sound and one that will enhance the identified federal research funding application (**35 points**).
- d) Meaningful collaborations/roles/responsibilities defined for PI/Co-Investigators (**5 points**).
- e) Budget and facilities adequate to support the plan of work (**5 points**).
- f) Realistic and achievable timetable (**5 points**).

Upon completion of external reviews, the Office of the Provost confirms the relevance of the strategic alignment and research areas, validates the external reviewer submissions, evaluates each proposal's scores and evaluative summaries, and ranks the proposals accordingly. The Office of the Provost makes final funding decisions.

¹⁰ Reviewers provide written comments and group applications into three categories (**Exemplary: Definitely fund** (highest tier/greatest likelihood of external funding), **Very Good: Strongly consider for funding** (mid-tier / modest chance for external funding), **Needs Improvement or Inadequate: Do not fund** (lowest tier / unlikely to gain external funding). Historically, applications are not funded if they receive any Needs Improvement reviews; those with combinations of Exemplary and Very Good reviews tend to be on the "funding line." The Office of the Provost will make final funding decisions.

¹¹ External reviewers are free to assign whatever value they choose to each scoring rubric section based on their expertise and understanding of the application.

Post Award Management, Obligations, and Reporting Requirements

PIs will be required to submit a brief project initiation report 90 days after the award start date. The final report is due 60 days following the award's end date. Awardees are expected to submit the identified federal proposal during the next available submission cycle unless sponsor timing, solicitation availability, or other documented constraints prevent submission.

The final report must include either a mostly complete draft of the extramural funding proposal to a federal agency or the submitted proposal depending on timing and sponsor constraints. All reports will be submitted using a form linked to the application through [NuRamp](#). An SAP expenditure report for all collaborators receiving funding, with detailed line items, must be attached to each report.

Continued access to current and future award funds from the University of Nebraska depends on maintaining satisfactory progress and strict adherence to all award conditions. Failure to meet these requirements will result in disqualification from future University of Nebraska award opportunities. The University of Nebraska Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost administers this program.¹²

¹² Questions regarding the RFA and award management should be sent by email to: Michael Jolley, mjolley@nebraska.edu.