2026 Tufts CTSI Small Grants to Advance Translational Science Program

Request for Applications

The Tufts CTSI Small Grants to Advance Translational Science (S-GATS) Program invites proposals for innovative and collaborative projects that advance the science of translation. The program supports projects aimed at overcoming persistent barriers to translation across various diseases and health conditions, while also encouraging the exploration of novel opportunities and pathways that could accelerate progress.

The S-GATS Program encompasses the broad scope of translational science research, welcoming projects that address specific translational challenges—such as inaccurate predictions of drug toxicity or efficacy, poor data interoperability, and ineffective clinical trial recruitment—as well as those that seek to leverage untapped opportunities within translational science.

Successful S-GATS projects should aim to strengthen the translational process by improving its efficiency and effectiveness. Applicants are expected to:

1) **Identify a Translational Challenge or Opportunity:** Clearly define a translational challenge, roadblock, or opportunity that the project aims to address. This may involve addressing a known obstacle or exploring new pathways for advancement in translational science.
2) **Propose a Proof-of-Concept Study:** Design a proof-of-concept study that demonstrates, in one or more use cases, an innovative and broadly applicable disease-agnostic and/or disease-universal research product(s). These products may include research methods, technologies, operational processes, medical treatments (drugs/biologics/devices/digital applications), and behavioral interventions. They should have the potential to significantly enhance translation of pre-clinical, clinical, health services, and policy research into tangible improvements in clinical care and health outcomes.
3) **Develop a Dissemination and/or Implementation Plan**: Provide a preliminary strategy for disseminating and/or implementing the developed product(s), ensuring that other investigators, clinicians, and key stakeholders can and will effectively adopt and utilize the product(s) in their own translational research or clinical practice.

The application process requires an initial submission of a competitive Letter of Intent (LOI), due on **Thursday, September 25, 2025,** and, if invited, a full proposal, due on Tuesday, December 9, 2025. To ensure that the proposed research projects are responsive to the 2026 RFA**, prospective applicants must consult with the S-GATS Program team prior to the LOI submission.** Prospective applicants will receive a link to the LOI submission form following this consultation. To schedule a consultation or ask a question, contact the S-GATS Program team at sgats@tuftsmedicine.org.

Award Information

Number of Awards: Four to six projects (depending on award budgets)
Award Ceiling: $50,000 in direct costs. Cost sharing and indirect costs are not allowed.
Project Period: May 1, 2026 through April 30, 2027. Project extensions are not allowed under any circumstances.
Key Dates:

- *Translational Science Is Improving the Process* information sessions (recommended):
  - Thursday, August 28 2025 at 8:00 AM and Wednesday, September 3 2025 at 4:00 PM
- Competitive Letter of Intent due (required): **Thursday, September 25, 2025 at 11:59 PM**
  - *Interested applicants should email the S-GATS Program team at sgats@tuftsmedicine.org to schedule a required initial consultation and receive the link for the Letter of Intent submission. Consultations will be offered through Wednesday, September 24, 2025.*
- Invitation to submit full proposal: by Thursday, October 30, 2025
- Proposal due (by invitation only): Tuesday, December 9, 2025 at 11:59 PM
- Award announcement: February 2026

About the S-GATS Program

Established in 2022, the Small Grants to Advance Translational Science (S-GATS) Program is a funding opportunity available through Tufts CTSI and supported by the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS), one of the centers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). It aims to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of translational research. NCATS defines a core principle of translational science as understanding and addressing common causes of inefficiency and failure across various targets, diseases, and therapeutic areas. By tackling these shared challenges and exploring new opportunities, the S-GATS Program seeks to improve health outcomes, extend life, and reduce the burden of illness and disability.

In alignment with translational science principles identified by NCATS, the S-GATS Program supports innovative translational science projects that build the evidence base for effective scientific and operational approaches in translational research. The program is designed to accelerate the pace of such research by funding the development of research products that have broad, target/disease-agnostic or target/disease-universal applications. It prioritizes actionable research that addresses unmet scientific needs, enhances public health outcomes, and/or ensures that research findings are relevant and accessible to affected populations. In line with the NCATS mission and local priorities, the program funds projects across the full translational spectrum, from T.5 to T4.

To be considered for funding, applicants need to: 1) specify the common translational research challenge to be addressed or opportunity to be explored; 2) present a proof-of-concept study that demonstrates, through one or more use cases, innovative and broadly applicable research product(s); and 3) provide a preliminary plan for the near-future broad and intentional dissemination and/or implementation of the research findings ensuring that other investigators can adopt and utilize the developed products in their own translational research. To support collective action for health improvement, applicants should also have an integrated strategy for engaging key partners, such as members of the public, patient advocates, healthcare providers, policy makers, regulatory bodies, industry representatives, and other stakeholders relevant to their proposed translational science projects. Engagement of these partners should extend beyond traditional team science, encompassing a broad and inclusive approach throughout various stages of the research process and dissemination/implementation efforts.

Examples of Types of Projects that May Be Supported

- ***Improving Clinical Research Efficiency****:* Innovate or validate research methods or processes to overcome scientific uncertainties and operational inefficiencies, speeding up the delivery of new treatments and interventions to patients. Examples:
    - ***Create*** *a roadmap for leveraging historical data in rare genetic disorder trials to reduce resource burdens*
    - ***Compare*** *collaborative approaches for developing informed consent materials that improve comprehension among study participants with varying levels of communication ability*
    - ***Evaluate*** *a framework for the development of performance standards to establish confidence in alternative test systems and models*
    - ***Validate*** *a self-administered neurocognitive screening tool to reduce participation barriers in clinical trials and ensure research findings apply in real-world settings*
- ***Advancing Data Science and Artificial Intelligence:*** Create or integrate cutting-edge data tools to enhance accessibility, transparency, and decision-making, providing data-driven insights to scientists, clinicians, and patients. Examples:
    - ***Develop*** *a computerized clinical decision support tool to reduce unnecessary diagnostic imaging*
    - ***Create*** *a searchable database from a retrospective analysis of neuroradiology errors to inform error-reducing strategies*
    - ***Standardize*** *geographic data validation processes in electronic health records to improve public health responses*
    - ***Integrate*** *medical and oral health records through advanced informatics solutions for holistic patient care*
- ***Accelerating Dissemination and Implementation****:* Transform how innovations, scientific discoveries, and evidence-based interventions are disseminated or adopted in health care and community settings. Examples:
    - ***Develop*** *a behavioral change framework to reduce over-treatment of mental disorders in private practice*
    - ***Assess*** *economic evaluation tools for implementing oral health interventions in low-income communities*
    - ***Design*** *adaptable dietary interventions to help prevent chronic diseases across varied population groups*
    - ***Test*** *a protocol for including community-based organizations in crafting lay summaries*

- ***Enhancing Predictive Efficacy and Toxicology:*** Develop advanced models that mimic human biology to improve drug testing, reduce patient risks, and deepen understanding of disease mechanisms. Examples:
    - ***Develop*** *organoid models to predict chemotherapeutic toxicity and efficacy of drugs*
    - ***Build*** *a reference dataset for interpreting high-throughput transcriptomic screens in toxicity testing*
    - ***Incorporate*** *genetic diversity into cell-based test systems to predict neurotoxic responses*
    - ***Develop*** *methods for extracting imaging features in pathology studies of animal models*
- ***De-risking Therapeutic Development:*** Develop advanced models and manage drug discovery programs to cut risks, time, and costs in translating research breakthroughs into treatments. Examples:
    - ***Develop*** *a bioinformatics integration platform to expedite preclinical drug discovery studies*
    - ***Optimize*** *drug repurposing strategies with a focus on rare diseases*
    - ***Innovate*** *needleless auto-injector systems through refined tissue testing protocols*
    - ***Assess*** *public-private models for advancing 'first-in-class' therapeutic agents*
- ***Building Network Capacity and Competence:*** Foster cross-disciplinary collaborations and create novel training paradigms to equip researchers with skills for engaging in translational science. Examples:
    - ***Adopt*** *a hub-and-spoke network model to ensure timely specialty care in geographically isolated rural areas*
    - ***Create*** *a toolkit for adapting data hackathons in a range of healthcare settings*
    - ***Develop*** *a virtual peer-to-peer mentorship framework to support capacity building in translational science*
    - ***Design*** *resources for training research staff in best practices for remote or decentralized clinical trials*

Applicant Eligibility
Applications must designate a Principal Investigator (PI) with a primary appointment or position at one of the Tufts CTSI partner or collaborator organizations. Medical residents, fellows, post-doctoral fellows, or medical students are not eligible to serve as PIs. However, they may be included in key personnel along with collaborators not affiliated with Tufts CTSI.

Project Eligibility
Applicants must propose projects focused on advancing the science of translation, not just projects that are translational in nature. This call is intentionally broad to encourage diverse approaches, welcoming those tackling entrenched roadblocks as well as those seeking new avenues in translational research. Projects should aim to understand scientific or operational principles underlying a step of the translational process, thereby making the development and dissemination of interventions that improve human health more predictable and efficient. **Although critically important, S-GATS funding does not support basic, discovery-oriented science projects or projects focused on crossing a particular step of the translational process for a particular target or disease.**

Foreign Components
Projects involving a foreign component are not allowable. A foreign component, as defined by the NIH, includes conducting any part of a project outside of the U.S., involving collaborators employed by foreign institutions or non-U.S. vendors, or using of foreign support or resources.

Clinical Trials
Clinical trials, as defined by the NIH, are permitted but generally discouraged due to the extended timeframe required for NCATS prior approval. If a clinical trial is proposed, it must be feasible not only within the scope and timeline of the award itself, but also with regard to the pre-award coordination and regulatory clearance required before project launch.

Funding Scope and Restrictions
S-GATS funding is not intended to supplement or extend projects already supported by other sources. Proposed budgets must be between $25,000 and $50,000 in direct costs and be fully supported with Tufts CTSI funds awarded through S-GATS funding mechanism. Indirect costs and cost sharing, including the use of supplemental funding or third-party in-kind contributions, are not permitted.

All awards will be issued as subawards from Tufts University to the project PI's home institution. Collaborations with investigators and partners at other institutions are permitted and will be supported through separate subawards issued directly by Tufts University. **Third-tiering of subawards—i.e., issuing a subaward under a subaward—is not permitted.** Due to restrictions set by Tufts CTSI's funding agency on the parent award, **unspent funds cannot be carried forward beyond the end of the budget period.**

Application Process

The S-GATS Program accepts full proposals *by invitation only*. All applicants are required to submit a competitive LOI presenting a concise description of their planned proposal. The LOI should describe the project and its proposed methods of study in adequate detail so that their merit and translational science focus can be assessed. **Applicants are required to consult with the S-GATS Program staff prior to submission of the initial LOI.** Sign up for a virtual consultation at sgats@tuftsmedicine.org.

How to Apply

The 2026 S-GATS Program has a two-step application process that includes a competitive LOI and, if invited, a final proposal. Both must be submitted via Tufts CTSI's REDCap online submission portal. **Unique LOI and proposal submission links will be provided by the S-GATS Program staff.** Incomplete and late submissions will not be accepted.

- **Competitive Letter of Intent:** The LOI should total no more than three pages in length, including any references. The submission should also include a biosketch of the Lead Principal Investigator. Detailed instructions and application templates will be provided by the S-GATS Program staff. LOI submissions will be accepted through **Thursday, September 25, 2025.**
- **Proposal (by invitation):** All LOI applicants will be notified of their status by Thursday, October 30, 2025. For those invited to submit full proposals, detailed instructions and program-specific form templates will be available in REDCap on the same day. Full proposals must be submitted by **Tuesday, December 9, 2025**.

Letter of Intent Review

The LOI review process is designed to help identify the most promising and scientifically sound translational science projects to move forward and to support further project development. All competitive LOIs will undergo an administrative review by the S-GATS Program staff for their alignment with the program's objectives. Project ideas that are deemed responsive to the 2025 RFA will be reviewed and scored by at least two scientific peer reviewers for their translational relevance, scientific rationale and rigor, feasibility, clarity, and potential for impact. Successful projects will be selected in consultation with the Tufts CTSI Research Collaboration Team, Biostatistics, Epidemiology, and Research Design (BERD) Center, Dissemination and Implementation Core, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement, and Community and Stakeholder Engagement programs, as appropriate.

Proposal Development Support

Applicants invited to submit a full proposal will have access to complementary support to strengthen their applications. This includes tailored assistance with developing an interest holder engagement plan. Additionally, applicants proposing prospective enrollment of human subject participants are encouraged to take part in a brief preparatory session on recruitment and retention. Participation by at least one member of the study team is expected.

Proposal Review and Funding Decisions

All complete proposals will be peer-reviewed by at least two reviewers with relevant expertise. Final funding decisions will be made by the Tufts CTSI Senior Leadership Team based on recommendations of the Scientific Review Committee with input of Stakeholder Expert Panel. Key funding considerations include the overall impact score, project feasibility, clear strategy and intentional focus on optimizing health for all, budget justification, available funds, and distribution across the translational spectrum. A minimum of four and a maximum of six research projects will be funded. The final number of awards will be dependent on the volume of meritorious applications received and their individual budget requests. All applicants will be informed of the outcome of their submission via email. Reviewers' comments will be provided to all primary applicants, regardless of whether or not they are awarded funding.

Review Criteria

Scientific Peer Review Process

The reviewers will be primarily selected from the pool of Tufts CTSI Scientific Review Committee members, which includes past Tufts CTSI award recipients. They may also include reviewers from Tufts CTSI partner organizations and Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) External Reviewer Consortium (CEREC) II, of which Tufts CTSI is a part. The review process will follow NIH guidelines for peer review using the modified criteria listed below.

Translational Challenge and Opportunity Identification – Evaluates the clarity, relevance, and potential impact of the translational challenge or opportunity the project seeks to address.

1. Is the translational challenge, roadblock, or opportunity clearly defined and well-articulated?
2. Does the project address critical unmet needs or unexplored pathways in translational science?

Innovation and Scalability – Assesses the originality, interdisciplinary collaboration, and potential scalability of the proposed solutions.

1. Does the project propose an innovative solution to the identified challenge or opportunity that could advance the science of translation?
2. Can the project's findings be adapted and scaled for implementation in diverse a range of real-world settings?
3. Does the project engage relevant non-academic partners and interest-holders to enhance translational research impact?
4. Is there a clear, actionable plan for disseminating results beyond traditional academic channels and facilitating adoption in various settings?

Proof-of-Concept Study Design – Evaluates the rigor, appropriateness, and potential impact of the proposed study design.

1. Is the study design well-constructed, with appropriate methodologies to address the research questions?
2. Is there a strong rationale for the chosen methods, including data analysis techniques?
3. Does the proposal address potential challenges and outline alternative strategies?
4. Will the project contribute to translational science, even if the initial objectives are not fully met?

Feasibility – Assesses the practicality of the project concerning the timeline, budget, and resource availability.

1. Is the project realistic and achievable within the 12-month timeframe and $50,000 budget?
2. How well do the applicants demonstrate that the necessary resources, expertise, and skills are in place to support successful project execution?
3. Does the project have a well-defined management and organizational strategy?

Overall Impact and Advancement of Translational Science – Evaluates the project's potential to produce significant advancements in the science of translation, with a focus on long-term impact and sustainability.

1. How likely is the project to contribute to significant advancements in translational research and/or improve clinical care or health outcomes?
2. Does the project have the potential to generate broadly applicable and sustainable outcomes?
3. Is there a clear pathway to real-world application and broader scientific impact?

Tufts CTSI Stakeholder Expert Panel Review

Regardless of the translational phase, all proposals must include a plan for engaging relevant stakeholder groups, including in dissemination activities. This plan will be reviewed separately by at least two members of the Tufts CTSI Stakeholder Expert Panel. Comprising community members with diverse professional and cultural backgrounds, the panel will evaluate the applicant's ability to identify relevant stakeholder groups, align

the project and its outcomes with the interests, priorities, and broader concerns of these groups, and implement a rigorous and effective engagement strategy based on the criteria below.

Inclusion of Relevant Groups – Assesses the applicant's ability to identify relevant stakeholder groups, justify their inclusion, and engage them, in order to enhance the project's relevance and impact.

1. How clearly and effectively does the project identify and justify the inclusion of stakeholders relevant to the proposed stage of research?
2. To what extent does the project reflect a well-reasoned and intentional approach to selecting and engaging stakeholders?
3. Does the project omit any key stakeholders without sufficient justification, potentially limiting its relevance or impact?
4. How well does the project incorporate stakeholders who could facilitate translation of findings into real-world settings?
5. How effectively does the project engage populations affected by the condition or process under study in a way that enhances relevance or applicability?

Specificity – Assesses the applicant's ability to clearly describe the timing, methods, and purpose of stakeholder engagement, including planned contributions and compensation.

1. How clearly does the project describe which stakeholders will be engaged during the grant period?
2. To what extent does the project provide a clear and appropriate timeline for their recruitment and engagement?
3. How well does the project articulate the planned methods or strategies for engaging those stakeholders?
4. How clearly does the project describe the research activities that stakeholders will inform or contribute to?
5. To what extent does the project offer a reasonable and appropriate plan for compensating stakeholders for their contributions, if appropriate?

Feasibility – Assesses the feasibility and appropriateness of the proposed stakeholder engagement plan in relation to the project's timeline, resources, and objectives.

1. To what extent does the project propose an appropriate number of stakeholders for engagement, given the one-year timeline?
2. How feasible is the proposed stakeholder engagement plan based on the team's capacity, supporting documentation, and proposed approach?
3. How well does the proposed engagement strategy align with the project's scope and goals?

Research Impact – Assesses the alignment of proposed stakeholder engagement with the project's stage, purpose, and goals, and the extent to which it meaningfully contributes to the research process beyond implementation.

1. To what extent are the proposed stakeholders a practical and appropriate fit for the project's current stage and objectives?
2. How likely is the engagement of stakeholders to meaningfully inform the conduct of the research?
3. To what extent are stakeholder involved in activities beyond direct implementation, such as project planning, instrument design, interpretation, or dissemination?
4. How well does the proposed engagement plan support and advance the overall goals of the research project?

Review Scoring Framework
All applications will be evaluated using the National Institutes of Health (NIH) 9-point scoring scale, which ranges from 1 (Exceptional) to 9 (Poor). This rubric is used by both Scientific Reviewer Committee and Stakeholder Expert Panel members to assess the overall impact of each application based on its strengths and weaknesses. The table below outlines the scoring descriptors and corresponding impact levels.
Scientific reviewers will also assess how well the project aligns with the principles and goals of translational science, as this is a core objective of the program.

Score	Impact	Descriptor	Strength/Weaknesses*
1	High	Exceptional	Exceptionally strong; essentially no weaknesses
2	High	Outstanding	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
3	High	Excellent	Very strong with some minor weaknesses
4	Moderate	Very Good	Strong but numerous minor weaknesses
5	Moderate	Good	Strong but at least one moderate weakness
6	Moderate	Satisfactory	Some strengths but also moderate weaknesses
7	Low	Fair	Some strengths but at least one major weakness
8	Low	Marginal	Few strengths but also a few major weaknesses
9	Low	Poor	Very few strengths with numerous major weaknesses

Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure
All submitted applications will be treated as proprietary and confidential. Materials will be shared only with Tufts CTSI and members of the 2026 S-GATS review committees for the sole purpose of application evaluation. Reviewers are expected to maintain strict confidentiality and may not disclose or use any application content outside the review process.

Post-Review Opportunities
In addition to review by the S-GATS Program Scientific Review Committee and Tufts CTSI Program Leaders, applications may also be reviewed by the Tufts CTSI Research Collaboration Team. This additional review is intended for projects not selected for S-GATS funding and aims to identify those that may benefit from further development, support for submission to other funding opportunities, or connection to potential collaborators.

Applicants may be contacted by Tufts CTSI Navigators or other members of the Research Collaboration Team regarding future research opportunities.

Additional Resources
- Case Studies in Translational Science
- Stakeholder Engagement Plan Overview
- Translational Science Principles
- Opportunities and Challenges in Translational Science
- Distinguishing between Translational Science and Translational Research in CTSA Pilot Studies

Questions?

We are here to help. Please contact us at sgats@tuftsmedicine.org with any questions or to schedule a virtual consultation.

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