George M. O'Brien Kidney Resource Alliance Opportunity Pool Program
Round 4 Funding Opportunity Announcement (Clinical trials not allowed)

(August 2026)

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
and University of Alabama at Birmingham

Background	The George M. O'Brien Kidney Resource Alliance (OKRA) is a consortium of National Resource Centers (NRCs) whose primary purpose is to provide kidney researchers with specialized resources, tools, technologies, services, and expertise beyond those typically available in an individual lab or institutional core. The consortium includes seven NRCs and a National Coordinating Center. The overarching goal of this OKRA Opportunity Pool Program (OPP) funding opportunity is to provide support for early-stage investigators or investigators new to kidney research who plan to utilize existing OKRA resources. Resubmissions of unfunded applications from previous OKRA Opportunity Pool Rounds are highly encouraged.
Overview	The program provides one year of support to fund projects broadly related to kidney research. During this funding cycle, multiple projects will be awarded. Total costs (including direct and indirect costs) should not exceed a total of $50,000 for the one-year project period. Applications may address a broad array of topics but **must** utilize an existing OKRA NRC resource to address basic and/or clinical questions in kidney research. Before submitting the full application, the applicant must contact the NRC that the applicant intends to utilize to obtain a Support Letter indicating that the NRC can provide the resource(s) requested and that the budget is appropriate. A listing of all OKRA NRCs, their contact information and their resources can be found on the OKRA website https://www.uab.edu/okra/. Clinical trials, as defined by the NIH https://grants.nih.gov/policy-and-compliance/policy-topics/clinical-trials/definition are beyond the scope of this program. Awards are expected to prepare the applicant(s) to submit a future investigator-initiated project (e.g., NIH R01, K01, K08, K23).
Eligibility Criteria	• Only Early-Stage Investigators (ESIs) and established investigators new to kidney research (i.e., investigators who have not received any grants in kidney research and/or published in the area of kidney research) are eligible to apply for this award. • Applicants can only submit one application per round of the OKRA Opportunity Pool Program. • Applicants must have a faculty position or a signed offer letter for a faculty position that starts on or before **January 1, 2027** at the time the application is submitted. • Investigators at non-domestic (non-U.S.) entities (foreign institutions) are not eligible to apply. Furthermore, this funding mechanism strictly supports domestic research activities; funding may not support work at international sites, or formal international collaboration. However, unpaid, informal peer consultation or the use of international resources is permitted with prior approval. For any projects selected for funding that involve an international component, awards will be contingent upon prior approval from NIH. • NRC key personnel are not eligible to apply as PI.

	Additional notes for ESIs regarding eligibility: • ESIs are defined by current NIH criteria: https://grants.nih.gov/policy-and-compliance/policy-topics/early-stage-investigators • ESIs must identify at least one experienced kidney researcher to serve as a mentor during the project. • The NCC will confirm the applicant's ESI status. Applications that are non-compliant will be administratively withdrawn.

Letter of Intent	A letter of intent is requested no later than **September 20, 2026** to assist in administration of the review process, but is optional and is not part of the formal review of the merit of the application. It should be a maximum of one page in length (no smaller than 11 pt Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri font, single line-spacing) and include: 1. Title of the study. 2. PI name, degree(s), primary institution and ESI or New to Kidney Research investigator status 3. NRC(s) from which resources will be requested 4. All members of the study team and their anticipated roles (e.g., mentor, co-investigator). 5. Specific instructions for ESIs: a. In addition, we would like to connect you with peers and near peers to help form a network of knowledge exchange (e.g., share scientific resources, ideas, career experiences). Please indicate in your letter of intent if you would like to participate in this peer networking opportunity regardless of the outcome of funding.
Full Application Instructions	Following submission of the letter of intent, all applicants are invited to submit a full application that will include the following elements: Abstract, Research Plan, Reference List, Protection of Human Subjects/IACUC protocol (as appropriate), NIH-style Biosketches, Budget and Justification, and a Support Letter from the participating OKRA NRC(s). The Support Letter should indicate that the NRC can provide the requested resource and the budget is appropriate (contact information is listed at the end of this announcement). The **Abstract** should be a succinct summary of the project that includes the significance of the proposed study, the hypothesis or aim, and the innovative potential of the study. The Abstract should not exceed 200 words in length. The **Research Plan** should not exceed three pages (no smaller than 11 pt Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri font, single line-spacing, with 0.5" margins). Other aspects of the Full Application (i.e., Abstract, Reference List, Protection of Human Subjects/IACUC protocol, NIH-style Biosketches, and Budget and Justification) are not included within these page limitations. No appendices may be submitted. The research plan must include, within the three-page limit: 1. (Optional for resubmissions): Brief response to the prior review 2. Specific Aim(s) 3. Research Strategy: a. Background and significance b. Innovation c. A detailed description of Methods/Study Design, a Statistical Analysis Plan including assessment of study power, Plans for Implementation, and Logistical Considerations d. Key Measurements and Data to be generated

	Include a **Reference List**. **Protection of Human Subjects** or an **IACUC protocol** should be addressed in a separate document, as appropriate. Indicate whether or not the project involves human subjects or animal research. If yes, please use the relevant attachment for research involving either human subjects or animals. Please include an **NIH Biosketch** for each investigator on the project. Please also include a detailed **Budget and Justification** using the NIH SF424 (R&R) Budget form. Include a signed **Support Letter** from the participating OKRA NRC(s) for the proposed study.
Key Dates	Letter of intent due date: **Sunday, September 20, 2026** by 5:00pm CT. Applicants who submit a letter of intent who are found to be ineligible for this funding opportunity will be notified prior to this date. Full application due date: **Tuesday, October 20, 2026** by 5:00pm CT. Notifications to awardees should be distributed by late 2026/early 2027.
Budget	Applicants may request total costs (direct + indirect costs) up to a maximum of $50,000. A narrative justification should be provided for key personnel and any major equipment (cost greater than $5,000) deemed to be necessary for the proposed project. This is a federal grant, so federally negotiated F&A rates apply. Budgets should be well-justified and account for all study costs, including costs to OKRA NRC(s), if applicable. Salary effort is an allowable expense and should be limited to the scope of the proposed project. Please contact the participating NRC(s) for resource budget and include that component in the budget section of the grant.
Application Submission Instructions	Letters of Intent and Full Applications must be submitted using the submission forms on the OKRA website www.uab.edu/okra. If you have any issues with your submission, please email the OKRA National Coordinating Center okrancc@uab.edu. Full applications will be peer reviewed by independent reviewers using a standardized review form. It will be ensured that reviewers are not in conflict with the reviewing application. Reviews will assess alignment with programmatic priority areas listed above, scientific merit, investigators and mentors, use of NRC resources, and the potential to contribute to the applicant's success in obtaining future independent funding. All applicants will be provided with a summary of comments from the reviewers.
Requirements of Awardees	Awardees are required to submit a progress report twelve months after receiving funding. Awardees will present their findings to the OKRA Steering Committee at the conclusion of the study. It is expected that each study will culminate in publication(s) or submission of applications for other independent awards such as K or R01 awards. Published work must cite OKRA as a funding source. Awardees will become members of the OKRA Consortium and will be expected to participate in reviews for subsequent OPP application rounds.
Contact Information	For questions, please contact: okrancc@uab.edu. George M. O'Brien Kidney Resource Alliance National Coordinating Center University of Alabama at Birmingham

APPENDIX

OKRA National Resource Centers (NRC) and Contact Information

Indiana O'Brien Center for Advanced Microscopic Analysis

Summary

The Indiana University George M. O'Brien Center for Advanced Microscopic Analysis has assembled a unique integrated and synergistic team of physicians, basic scientists, computer scientists and engineers that provides local, national and international users cutting edge fluorescence microscopy and molecular imaging of the kidney. Through their Molecular Imaging and Intravital Microscopy cores, they offer a suite of imaging techniques that cover rodent intravital microscopy, spatial transcriptomics, spatial protein imaging, 3D cytometry, light sheet microscopy and digital image analysis. Their overall mission is to facilitate biomedical research, drug discovery and therapeutic approaches to kidney disease.

Contact Information

If you would like more information regarding services provided by Indiana O'Brien Center for Advanced Microscopic Analysis, please contact:

Joshua Kuhn
kuhnjo@iu.edu

Indiana O'Brien Center for Advanced Microscopic Analysis

The Johns Hopkins O'Brien Center to Advance Kidney Health

Summary

The Johns Hopkins O'Brien Center to Advance Kidney Health is made up of three Cores: a Biomedical Resource Core, a Resource Development Core, and an Administrative Core. These Cores work together to provide a national resource for investigators intent on planning and conducting pre-clinical (basic), clinical or population health research addressing or related to kidney health outcomes. Experts from these cores make recommendations that inform strategies, interventions, and approaches aimed at achieving kidney health.

Contact Information

If you would like more information regarding services provided by the Johns Hopkins O'Brien Center to Advance Kidney Health, please contact:

Deidra C. Crews, MD, ScM
dcrews1@jhmi.edu

O'Brien Center to Advance Kidney Health

The George M. O'Brien Michigan Kidney Translational Core Center (MKTC)

Summary

The George M. O'Brien Michigan Kidney Translational Core Center (MKTC) was established to assist investigators and clinicians worldwide in kidney disease research. Their core objective is to enable muti-omic multi-scalar data integration. MKTC consists of two Biomedical Cores: The Applied Systems Biology Core (ASBC) and Data Analytics Services Core (DASC). They provide specialized core services as well as user-friendly tools to enable kidney researchers and trainees to apply to their work.

Contact Information

If you would like more information regarding services provided by MKTC, please contact:

Wenjun Ju, PhD
wenjunj@med.umich.edu

George M. O'Brien Michigan Kidney Translational Core Center

NU-USC O'Brien Kidney Resource Center

Summary

The Northwestern University–University of Southern California O'Brien Kidney Resource Center supports kidney research by integrating innovations from the physical sciences, including nanotechnology, proteomics, and other emerging technologies, into studies of kidney disease. The Center develops and disseminates new research methodologies, provides investigators with access to advanced technologies and resources, and promotes scientific collaboration through three integrated cores: the Administrative Core, the Resource Development Core, and the Biomedical Resources Core.

The Biomedical Resources Core (BRC) provides investigators with access to nanoparticle-based drug delivery technologies for kidney research. The BRC offers expertise in the formulation and characterization of nanoparticle delivery platforms, including micelles. These platforms can be engineered to deliver therapeutic cargos such as peptides, small-molecule drugs, and short RNAs such as siRNA and microRNA. We also develop kidney-targeting approaches using targeting peptides and optimized formulations to enhance delivery to the kidney and specific renal cell populations. Through NUmouse, we provide established genetically engineered mouse lines, including Cre-drivers, enabling investigators to perform cell-type specific studies. In addition, the BRC provides consultation on in vitro and in vivo study design for therapeutic evaluation and supports the development of grant applications and scientific publications.

Contact Information

For nanotechnology applications and Biomedical Resource Core inquiries, please contact:

Yunxi Chen, PhD
yc_452@usc.edu

For NUmouse transgenic mouse lines, the Resource Development Core, and general Center inquiries, please contact:

The NU-USC team
nephrohub@northwestern.edu

NU-USC O'Brien Kidney Resource Center

Pittsburgh Center for Kidney Research

Summary

The O'Brien Kidney Research Center at the University of Pittsburgh and Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai seeks to enhance the efficiency and productivity of a large number of kidney-related research projects currently in progress; facilitate acquisition of data for new projects; promote collaborations among center investigators; and provide tools to facilitate translational research. These functions depend on the Center's Biomedical Cores: Physiology Core, Model Systems Core, and KIDNIT (Kidney Imaging) Resource Development Core. Our Cores provide physiological, cell biological, genetic, analytical, molecular biological, and drug discovery tools, as well as model organisms.

Contact Information

If you would like more information regarding services provided by Pittsburgh Center for Kidney Research, please contact:

Thomas Kleyman, MD
kleyman@pitt.edu
or
Ora Weisz, PhD
weisz@pitt.edu

Pittsburgh Center for Kidney Research

UAB-UCSD O'Brien Center for Acute Kidney Injury Research

Summary

The University of Alabama at Birmingham – University of California at San Diego (UAB-UCSD) O'Brien Center for Acute Kidney Injury (AKI) Research is an interdisciplinary center of excellence in AKI-related research. The overall mission of the UAB-UCSD O'Brien Center for AKI Research is to improve the health of patients by fostering research targeted to the prevention and treatment of AKI and its complications. The two Biomedical Research Cores (a Clinical Research Core and a Basic/Translational Research Core) and Resource Development Core integrate existing intellectual and technological resources to provide the Consortium a set of services/resources for innovative investigation in AKI-related research.

Contact Information

If you would like more information regarding services provided by UAB-UCSD O'Brien Center for AKI Research, please visit our website or contact:

Paul W. Sanders, MD
psanders@uabmc.edu

UAB-UCSD O'Brien Center for AKI Research

Washington University Kidney O'Brien Center for Chronic Kidney Disease Research

Summary

The Washington University Kidney O'Brien Center for Chronic Kidney Disease Research (WUCKD-NRC) aims to develop and disseminate tools and new technologies for the investigation of chronic kidney disease and fibrosis. The WUCKD-NRC achieves these goals through two Biomedical Cores – the Metabolism Core (Meta-Core) and the Variant Validation Core. These cores offer a variety of services to users including one on one consultation, data generation from user submitted samples and analysis. The Metabolism Core performs fatty acid oxidation assays on tissue ex vivo, targeted and untargeted metabolomics, and stable isotope tracer studies for users after meeting with the Metabolism Core faculty to determine the best metabolic assay to answer a given question. The Variant Validation Core uses laboratory analyses to determine the pathogenicity of variants of uncertain significance found in patients with or at risk of CKD.

Contact Information

If you would like more information regarding services provided by WUCKD-NRC, please contact:

Benjamin Humphreys, MD, PhD
humphreysbd@wustl.edu

Washington University Kidney O'Brien Center for Chronic Kidney Disease Research