

**2026 Deep South Mentored Career Development Program (K12 Award)
— Request for Proposals —**

Instructions for Application
(Available at <https://www.uab.edu/ccts/k12>)

Deadline for Pre-Application: October 17, 2025, 5:00 PM (CT)
Deadline for Invited Full Application: February 6, 2026, 5:00 PM (CT)

To submit a proposal for the 2-year K12 Award Program, please review the two-phase application instructions described below.

I. OVERVIEW

The Center for Clinical and Translational Science (CCTS) Partner Network, is pleased to announce the **Mentored Career Development (K12 Award) Program in Clinical and Translational Science**, funded by the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS). **Beginning August 2025**, we will be accepting Pre-Applications from **junior faculty committed to conducting translational research that addresses health outcomes in diseases/conditions that disproportionately affect the Deep South**.

In alignment with the CCTS mission, this program seeks to help build a culturally engaged and pluralistic faculty committed to teaching and working in an environment where differences are valued and respected. Applicants of all backgrounds, affiliations and mission-aligned scientific disciplines are encouraged to apply.

The mission of the CCTS Mentored Career Development (K12 Award) Program is to prepare independent investigators to pursue careers focused on translational research. This opportunity will **support K12 Scholars for a period of two years with 75% salary support**. Selected candidates must commit a minimum of 75%* of time to research and career development. Additional support is provided for skill development through didactic training and research related expenses (see table). Our research and training base includes a partnership of eleven institutions, offering a large and diverse pool of experienced mentors.

	<u>CCTS K12 Award</u>
Minimum commitment of academic effort to the program	75%*
Training related expenses (including up to \$2,500 travel) (e.g., research expenses, tuition/fees, travel, analyst effort, etc.)	Up to \$30,000

*50% min. for surgeons w/ justification required

II. ELIGIBILITY

Candidates must be U.S. citizens, non-citizen nationals (people born in American Samoa, Swains Island, or the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands), or have permanent residency status. Eligible applicants will have earned a clinical or research doctorate, including PhD, ScD, DrPH, MD, DO, DC, ND, DDS, DMD, DNS or equivalent doctoral degree. Candidates must be junior-level, full-time faculty or be able to provide assurance from Division/Department leadership of a faculty appointment on or before May 1, 2026.

Candidates must be able to: demonstrate a commitment to conducting translational research; identify at least two established faculty members to serve as their mentors (applicants are encouraged to consider a co-mentor from a Partner Network Institution; contact Jeanne Merchant for a mentor list); and **commit a minimum of 75% protected time** (50% for surgeons with justification) to career development research training.

Individuals are NOT eligible for appointment as scholars if they:

- Have simultaneously submitted or have an application pending peer review for any other Federal career development award, or a research project grant (R01).

- Have simultaneously submitted or have an application pending peer review for any non-Federal research grant, contract, or cooperative agreement over \$100,000 direct costs per year;
- Have been or are currently a PD/PI on any other Federal mentored career development awards;
- Have been or are currently supported on an institutional K12 grant or KL2 (or similar grant);
- Have been or are currently a PD/PI on a Federal research grant (such as R01, R29, P01) or subproject leaders on Program Project (P01) and Center Grants (P50); and/or
- Have been or are currently a PD/PI on peer-reviewed non-Federal research grants, contracts or cooperative agreements over \$100,000 direct costs per year.

Please contact Jeanne Merchant (jmerchant@uabmc.edu) if you have any questions regarding eligibility requirements. Required elements for participants in the K12 program include: Mentored K12 project, CCTS Clinical and Translational Science Training Program (CTS-TP), Biostatistics, Epidemiology, and Research Design (BERD) consultation, and Training Interdisciplinary & Emerging Research Scholars (TIERS) seminars. Other individualized elements will be included in the Individual Development Plan (IDP) developed for selectees with their mentors.

III. ITEMS TO BE SUBMITTED

A. Pre-Application

Please submit the following as a Pre-Application to be considered for the K12 program:

1. Pre-Application Research Plan

PLEASE NOTE: All human health-related translational research topics are welcome; the review committee is especially interested in research proposals that address *health outcomes in diseases/conditions that disproportionately affect the Deep South* as well as those with a *focus on dissemination and implementation science*. For basic scientists, proposals must include translation into humans (cannot be *only* animal models/cells).

- Font size: must be 11 points or larger (smaller text in figures, graphs, diagrams and charts is acceptable as long as it is legible when the page is viewed at 100%)
- Line spacing: must be no more than six lines per vertical inch
- Margins: Provide at least one-half inch margins (top, bottom, left, and right) for all pages. No applicant-supplied information can appear in the margins.
- Text color: must be black (color text in figures, graphs, diagrams, charts, tables, footnotes and headings is acceptable)
- Page Limit: 2 pages (**references are not subject to page limits**)

This section should be organized as follows:

- **SIGNIFICANCE**
 - Explain the importance of the problem or critical barrier to progress in the field that the proposed project addresses.
 - Please provide a clear and concise description of the central theme and goals of the research.
 - Please comment on how the proposed work fits the definition of Translational Research. Translational research refers to the multidirectional and multidisciplinary integration of fundamental, patient-oriented, and population-based research, with the goal of improving health and health care delivery.
- **INNOVATION**
 - Explain how the application challenges and seeks to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms.
 - Describe any refinements to or novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, Instrumentation or interventions to be developed or used, and any advantage over existing methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.

- **APPROACH**
 - Be sure to **include explicit statements of aims** (specific aims) and corresponding hypotheses.
 - Describe the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project. Include how the data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted as well as any resource sharing plans as appropriate.
- **REFERENCES CITED**
 - Provide a bibliography of all references cited. Each reference must include the names of all authors, the article and journal title, book title, volume number, page numbers, and year of publication.
 - References are outside of page limit.

2. Curriculum Vitae (CV) for applicant

3. NIH Biosketch document for primary mentor. (<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm>)

4. Letter of support from primary mentor describing mentor's contribution to candidate's research/career development activities, including a mentorship plan to enable the candidate's success in pursuing an independent science career. Also include primary mentor's funded research projects that may be a foundation for the scholar's research. Mentor must agree to provide annual evaluation of the candidate's progress as required for the annual progress report.

The 1-2 page letter should include a list of project/career development benchmarks organized in six-month intervals for the duration of the award. Benchmark deliverables may include scheduled meetings between mentors and the recipient, educational plans/coursework and a research plan timeline.

5. Letter from the applicant's immediate supervisor, to include: a) a brief statement of applicant qualifications, b) indication of support for a minimum of 75% protected time to complete training and research, c) list of current research projects in which the applicant is or will be involved, and d) commitment to applicant's research career development. (1-2 pages)

The timetable for submission and review of Pre-Applications is as follows:

- Pre-Application due: Friday, October 17, 2025 at 5:00 p.m. CST

B. Invited full application

If selected for full application, please submit the following:

1. Specific Aims (Limited to 1 page). State precisely the goals of the proposed research and summarize the expected outcome(s) including the impact that the results of the proposed research will exert on the research field(s) involved. List succinctly the specific objectives of the research proposed.
2. Candidate, Career Development Plan, Research Plan, and Mentoring (limited to 12 pages), comprised of the following components:
 - A. The Candidate—(2-3 pages suggested)
 - 1) Candidate's background
 - 2) Career goals and objectives
 - 3) Explanation of how this training program will promote the candidate's career
 - 4) Statement describing commitment to a research career

B. Career Development/Training Activities: This should include plans for didactic training/coursework and for applied training in a short-term external rotation (mini-sabbatical) if proposed.

Didactic Training - Scholars are strongly encouraged to participate in an MSPH/MPH program or courses (if they don't already have a public health degree) to address specific training goals tailored to their background, experience, career objectives and interests.

Mini-Sabbaticals (strongly encouraged) - Mentored immersion experiences are intended to fulfill learning objectives based on the applicant's specific interests, and research and/or training goals. The nature and timing of opportunities varies but most can be completed in a week or two. Example mini-sabbatical opportunities are available upon request. Scholars are encouraged to complete a mini-sabbatical over their 2-year research training period, in a place other than their home institution. Scholars can propose off-site educational and methods oriented short courses and workshops that help achieve their career development objectives. The program will try to accommodate these as training funds and program goals allow. Scholars can design any mini-sabbatical that helps achieve their career goals.

C. Mentoring: Identify a primary mentor who will supervise the proposed career development and research experience. Candidates are encouraged to identify co-mentor(s) to help the primary mentor provide expert advice in all aspects of the research career development program. The inclusion of a co-mentor from one of the Partner Institutions as part of the mentoring team is encouraged. The primary mentor *should be an active investigator in the area of the proposed research* and be committed both to the career development of the candidate and to the direct supervision of the candidate's research. The mentor, or a member of the mentoring team, should have a successful track record of mentoring and a *history of significant extramural grant funding*. A list of mentors submitted with the parent K12 application are available upon request, but a candidate's mentor(s) do not have to be from that list of mentors. The candidate must work with the mentor(s) in preparing the application.

D. Research Plan: Research Strategy (Significance, Innovation, Approach) – (6 pages); Bibliography not counted toward page limit. As part of the research strategy, please include specific plans for transitioning to an individual K award or an R-series award by the end of the 2-year training period.

Item 2 (without bibliography) is limited to 12 pages. All tables, graphs, figures, diagrams, and charts must be included within the 12-page limit.

3. Lay summary of proposed research (up to 30 lines). Provide a lay summary introducing the proposed research to a non-scientific reviewer. Summarize the purpose and objectives of this research in nontechnical, lay language.
4. Budget and Budget Justification: Applicants should include salary support for themselves of at least 75% annually (50% minimum for surgeons). *Please note:* UAB employees should only include their UAB salary as the base (not HSF, VA, Children's Hospital, etc., if their support is divided). The K12 Program award includes support for up to \$30,000 annually (see summary of support table) annually toward the Scholar's research and career development related activities *including* up to \$2,500 travel to present research at scholarly meetings in the continental United States. Travel should include attending the ACTS Conference each year. You should vet your proposed budget with your departmental financial officer before submitting. Please provide a detailed budget (using NIH form pages 4 and 5 of the PHS 398 grant application) to include the candidate's base salary and fringe at the proposed protected time, budget justification for how the candidate proposes to use this support.
 - Examples of allowable categories include tuition, fees, books, consultants, research mentorship, supplies, equipment, effort for technical personnel, travel, data, and statistical services. Please note that consultant and/or research assistant expenses for *non-CCTS Institution employees* (i.e., consultants, freelancers, etc.) should be listed in your Training-Related Expenses category, not in Personnel (which is reserved only for the K12 applicant's salary support). The only exception is for

CCTS-institution-employed staff (such as lab technicians), whose pay should be included in the Personnel section with the K12 scholar. Even if included in the Personnel table of the budget form, any support other than the Scholar's salary and fringe will come from the \$30,000 Training-Related Expenses category. If you have questions, please contact Jeanne Merchant.

- Expenses for mini-sabbaticals will need to be paid from the annual research training-related expenses allowance; candidates will need to take travel/housing into consideration in budgeting for other research training-related costs.
5. NIH Biosketch for **applicant and each mentor** (<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm>)
 6. NIH-style Other Support document for **applicant and each mentor**. (<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/othersupport.htm>)
 7. Letters of support (up to 2): these can be the same ones submitted with the pre-application or they can be revised. Letters (to be included in application packet) can be addressed to:

Kenneth G. Saag, MD, MSc
Anna Lois Waters Professor of Medicine
Director, Division of Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology
Vice Chair, Department of Medicine
University of Alabama at Birmingham
Contact MPI, CCTS K12 Award

The timetable for submission and review of full applications is as follows:

- Full application due: Monday, February 6, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.
- Awardees notified: March 2026

IV. SCORED REVIEW CRITERIA

Reviewers will consider each of the four review criteria below in the determination of scientific and technical merit, and give a separate score for each.

1. Candidate

How does the candidate's training and accomplishments to date prepare them for a career in translational and/or patient centered research? Does the candidate have the potential to develop as an independent and productive researcher? Is the candidate's academic, clinical (if relevant), and research record of high quality? Is there evidence of the candidate's commitment to meeting the program objectives to become an independent investigator in research? Candidates must: (1) demonstrate a commitment to conducting translational research; and (2) have identified at least two established faculty members who have agreed to serve as their mentors.

2. Career Development/Training Activities/Plan to Provide Mentoring

Does the applicant's career development plan sufficiently address perceived or stated needs for additional skills development and academic training (e.g., didactic coursework, mini-sabbaticals, other career development enrichment)? What is the likelihood that the plan will contribute substantially to the scientific development of the candidate leading to scientific independence? Are the candidate's prior training and research experience appropriate for this award? Are the content, scope, phasing, and duration of the career development plan appropriate when considered in the context of prior training/research experience and the stated training and research objectives for achieving research independence? Are there adequate plans for mentor(s) monitoring and evaluating the candidate's research and career development progress?

3. Mentoring

Are the mentor's research qualifications in the area of the proposed research appropriate (including a history of significant extramural grant funding)? Do(es) the mentor(s) adequately address the candidate's potential, strengths, and areas needing improvement? Is there adequate description of the quality and extent of the mentor's proposed role in providing guidance and advice to the candidate? Is the mentoring plan for the investigator well formulated? How will each of the mentors contribute to the applicant's career development plan (minimum of two mentors)? Is there a well-formulated mentorship plan? Are there adequate plans for monitoring and evaluating the career development awardee's progress toward independence? How will mentorship duties be divided? Is there evidence of the mentor's, consultant's, collaborator's previous experience in fostering the development of independent investigators? Is there evidence of previous research productivity and peer-reviewed support?

4. Research Plan

Are the proposed research question, design, and methodology of significant scientific and technical merit? Is the research plan relevant to the candidate's research career objectives? Is the research plan appropriate to the stage of research development and as a vehicle for developing the research skills described in the career development plan? Will the proposed research provide data which will provide a pathway for future federally funded translational research?

5. Resonance with CCTS Mission

Is the proposed research resonant with the stated CCTS mission of addressing health outcomes in diseases that disproportionately affect the Deep South?

V. **FORMATTING**

Include applicant name in header of each page (Last name, First name, Middle)

Please use Arial typeface and a font size of 11 points or larger. (A symbol font may be used to insert Greek letters or special characters; the font size requirement still applies.) Type should be typical single space. Font should be black.

Use at least one-half inch margins (top, bottom, left, and right) for all pages, including continuation pages.

Appendices are not allowed.

VI. **TIMELINE and SUBMISSION PROCESS**

Both Pre- and Full Applications must be submitted via the REDCap link. Full applicants will have a personalized upload portal. Uploaded documents must be in PDF format. Full applications must be **received no later than 5:00pm Central Time on February 6, 2025**. Please note that your application does not have to be submitted to Office of Sponsored Programs (if applicant is UAB-based).

RFA Launch	08/14/25
LOI/Pre-Application Due	10/17/25
Applicants invited for full proposals	Late Nov 2025
Due Date for full proposals	02/6/26
Awardees notified	March 2026

QUESTIONS MAY BE DIRECTED TO:

Jeanne Merchant, MPH (jmerchant@uabmc.edu, 205.492.9744)
Administrative Program Director, CCTS K12 Program