



## MIDAS COVID-19 Urgent Grant Program

Request for Proposals Version 1.4, updated 12-08-2020

Revision 8-17-2020: Added budget requirement Checklist Form Page to indicate indirect cost for New Initiative Funding.

Revision 9-3-2020: Added instructions for letters of support or collaboration for New Initiatives.

Revision 9-09-2020: Modified Supplemental funding to rolling application program.

Revision 12-08-2020: Modified review process for Supplemental funding.

The MIDAS Coordination Center (MCC) is now seeking applications for COVID-19 modeling projects. The MIDAS COVID-19 Urgent Grant Program is made possible through NIGMS supplemental funding to the MCC. The goal of the COVID-19 Urgent Grant Program is to rapidly provide funds to researchers in the MIDAS network to accelerate the development of models of COVID-19 spread and the impact of possible public health interventions. Projects can include any type of modeling methods to address an important aspect of COVID-19. New multidisciplinary partnerships and use of innovative modeling methods are encouraged. Investigators not currently eligible for [NIH urgent COVID-19 supplements](#) are especially encouraged to apply.

### Grant Information

Two types of awards will be funded:

**Supplemental funding for ongoing work**– MIDAS members may request up to \$10,000 in total (direct and indirect) funds to supplement ongoing COVID-19 research. No pre-existing grant funding needs to be in place for these awards. Approximately 10 Supplemental awards will be made. Supplemental funding could be requested to cover publication costs, equipment, student salaries, or other small-scale cost in support of ongoing COVID-19 modeling research. Supplemental funding projects will need to be completed before 06-30-2021 (for more information, see the section about the award process). Proposals for supplemental funding will be accepted on an ongoing basis, with reviews taking place bimonthly, at the end of the month, starting in November 2020 (see Key Dates). Proposals for supplemental funding that were not accepted for funding maybe resubmitted if the team believes the reviewer comments can be adequately addressed.

**New Initiative funding** – MIDAS members may request up to a total (direct and indirect) of \$100,000 for projects that significantly expand COVID-19 modeling capabilities or explore new directions of modeling research. Approximately five projects will be funded. New Initiative funding could be requested to add new data or outcomes to COVID-19 modeling research, or to

address gaps in the existing COVID-19 modeling landscape. Enhancements to existing models could include, among others, adding economic outcomes, taking into account environmental or social drivers of infection, or incorporating more complex human behavior. New Initiative funding may also be requested to develop new modeling resources, such as open data or software. New Initiative projects will need to take place within the 10-01-2020 to 06-30-2021 period (for more information, see the section about the award process).

Examples of acceptable New Initiative projects (these are examples, many other types of COVID-19 modeling will be acceptable):

- Combining COVID-19 transmission models with qualitative economic models of effects on the labor market
- COVID-19 transmission models that consider environmental determinants, or social determinants of health
- COVID-19 modeling based on the outcomes of serology surveys and/or studies of immune dynamics
- Improving COVID-19 modeling through more realistic inclusion of human behavior, such as psychological stress and disinformation
- Developing new open-access COVID-19 data or software resources

Clinical, animal, or laboratory-based studies will not be funded.

**Eligibility criteria:**

To apply for either for supplemental or new initiative funding, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- PI's must be MIDAS members. Co-investigators may be from the broader community. Any infectious disease modeler working within the [mission](#) and [vision](#) of the MIDAS network can request MIDAS membership [online](#). MIDAS membership should be requested before 07-21-2020 for new initiatives and before 08-07-2020 for supplemental funding to enable sufficient time for processing and acceptance of requests before application due dates.
- PI's must be faculty members, postdocs, or senior research professionals. Postdoc PI's need to have a Co-PI who is a faculty member.
- PIs must be based at an academic or non-profit institution in the United States.
- [Early Stage and New Investigators \(NIH definition\)](#) and PI's from [underrepresented groups \(as defined by the NIH\)](#) are encouraged to apply.
- PIs who are ineligible to apply for NIH urgent COVID-19 supplemental funding ([PA-18-935](#) or [PA-20-135](#)) are particularly encouraged to apply.
- Co-Investigators may be from any academic or non-profit institution and may include community partners. Co-investigators maybe based outside the United States. NIH regulations about reporting and approving foreign project components apply.

**Key Dates**

Supplemental Funding Awards (up to \$10,000):

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| MIDAS Membership Application Deadline* | No specific deadline, but confirmation of active MIDAS member status must have been received before applications can be accepted for review. Note that processing of MIDAS membership requests can take up to one week. |
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| Application Deadline | Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis until available funds have been disbursed. Reviews will take place bimonthly at the end of November and January. To be included in a review, the application should have been received one week before the start of the review period. |
| Notice of Award      | Reviews will take place bimonthly. Notices of award for selected applications will be sent one week after the bimonthly review period.   |
| Funding Begins**     | The earliest start date should be no earlier than one month after the bimonthly review period.   |

#### Supplemental Funding Review and Award Periods

| Application period | Submission deadline | Review period   | NOA    | Earliest start date |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------|--------|---------------------|
| Oct-Nov 2020       | Nov 23              | Nov 30 - Dec 14 | Dec 21 | Jan 14              |
| Dec-Jan 2020-21    | Jan 24              | Jan 31 - Feb 14 | Feb 21 | Mar 14              |

#### Funding for New Initiatives (up to \$100,000)

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|--|--|
| MIDAS Membership Application Deadline* | 5 p.m. EDT on Tuesday, July 21, 2020       |
| Letter of Intent Deadline              | 5 p.m. EDT on Tuesday, July 28, 2020       |
| Invitations for Full Proposals Sent    | Tuesday, August 18, 2020                   |
| Full Proposal Deadline                 | 5 p.m. EDT on Wednesday, September 9, 2020 |
| Notice of Award                        | Wednesday, September 30, 2020              |
| Funding Begins**                       | Thursday, October 1, 2020                  |

\* For non-MIDAS members only, existing MIDAS members can ignore \*\* Exact date may vary. The award process cannot commence until required regulatory approvals have been obtained.

## Application Process

### Powered by PlnCh® Submission Platform

The MCC is partnering with the University of Pittsburgh Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI) to use the online grant submission form, *Powered by PlnCh®*, to collect and review all applications. When applicants first log in they will be asked to create a profile for themselves, and then to create a new project. When creating a new project, the following fields are required before applicants will be able to upload their submission:

- Project title (50 character limit)
- Short project description (200 character limit) – a brief plain language summary of the submission
- Project summary (250 word limit) – abstract for the submission

These fields are not meant to be part of the grant review process, but we cannot guarantee that reviewers will not see the information. These fields can be edited up until the first application deadline. Once a project is created, applicants will be taken to a new page where they will be able to attach their submission PDF. If you have any questions while using the system, please

contact Will Hierholzer, CTSI Program Manager for Pilot Funding, at [wih22@pitt.edu](mailto:wih22@pitt.edu) or 412-282-3845.

## 1. Supplemental Funding (\$10,000 max)

Applications for Supplemental Funding should be combined into a single PDF file. The complete application should be loaded into the [online submission platform \(Powered by Pinch\)](#) no later than one week before the end of a review month, to be considered during that review.

Applications submitted later will be reviewed in the next bimonthly review. Use letter-size pages, a font no smaller than Arial 11, and page margins of 0.5-inch or more. Access the online submission platform for Supplemental Funding [here](#).

Final applications should have the following sections, and each section should begin on a new page.

**A. Cover Letter** (1-page limit): The cover letter should include the project title, name of the PI, and a statement about eligibility (or not) for NIH supplemental COVID-19 funding ([PA-18-935](#) or [PA-20-135](#)). For resubmissions, the cover letter should include a statement that summarizes how reviewer concerns were addressed.

**B. Research Plan** (3-page limit, including tables and figures): The research plan should describe the proposed research including its significance to the broader COVID-19 research program of the investigator. The plan should place the proposed research in the context of ongoing COVID-19 related research and describe the relevance of the proposed research to mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic (see also Review criteria). For resubmissions, the research plan should include a section that addresses reviewer concerns.

**C. References** (no page limit): Literature cited does not count toward the 3-page limit.

**D. Budget with Budget Justification** (no page limit): Use [PHS 398 Forms Pages 4 and 5 and the Checklist Form Page](#). The Budget Justification should include sufficient detail for reviewers to assess whether appropriate resources have been requested. Grant funds may not be budgeted for salary support for faculty PI's or faculty collaborators. Effort is required of the principal investigator and must be reflected on the budget page. This effort should be cost shared by the department or other entity or grant that will support such effort. Any salary support requested in a submitted budget should reflect federal fringe benefit rates. Any requested equipment must be explicitly justified as critical to the execution of the proposed research.

**E. NIH Biosketches** (5-page limit for each biosketch): Include biosketches for the Principal Investigator and key members of the research team. Use new [NIH Biosketch format as of September 2017](#).

**F. Human Subjects** (no page limit): Applications proposing human subjects research must address Protection of Human Subjects, Adequacy of Protection Against Risks, Data and Safety Monitoring Plans, Inclusion of Women and Minorities, and Inclusion of Children.

Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) approval is not required prior to submission. However, for all projects involving human subjects HRPO approval is required before contracting of awards by the MCC.

In this section, applicants must describe any human subject issues, as well as the sources of materials that will be obtained from human subjects. If human subjects are involved, provide a description of their involvement and characteristics, specific risks to subjects who participate, and protection against those risks. Reviewers may consider whether significant delays in approval are an anticipated barrier for project completion when selecting projects. Evidence of prior or ongoing review by an Institutional Review Board or Human Research Protection Office is encouraged. Similarly, this section should discuss if other special regulatory approval is required prior to funding.

**G. Resource Sharing Plan** (no page limit): List all data and modeling code/software used and generated by the proposed research, and how these resources will be made available to members of the MIDAS network or more broadly. If resources cannot be made available, include a strong justification.

### **Review criteria**

The review of Supplemental Funding proposals will be conducted by the MIDAS Coordination Center. Review of proposals will address the significance, investigators, and approach of the proposed research, including the fit of the proposed research into the PI's broader research program:

1. **Significance:** Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field or in the research program of the PI?
2. **Investigators:** Are the PD/Pis, collaborators, and other researchers well suited, sufficient, and able to conduct the project?
3. **Approach:** Are the strategies, methods, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project?
4. **Relevance for COVID-19 research in general and immediate relevance for the COVID-19 research program of the PI.**

## **2. New Initiatives (\$100,000 max)**

New initiatives will require submission of a letter of intent (round 1) and of a full application (round 2) by those invited to move to the next round.

### **Round 1: Letter of Intent**

Please submit a 1-page or shorter letter of intent that summarizes the proposed research. Letters should be submitted through the [online grant application portal](#). Access the online submission platform for New Initiative Funding [here](#). Each submission must include the following sections:

**Study Title:** Include the title of the proposal at the top of the page, along with the PI name and contact email.

**Abstract and Scope of Work:** Please provide a high-level overview of the study and the proposed work. Be sure to indicate how the study will have a direct impact on the current COVID-19 pandemic.

**Study Team:** Please provide the names and affiliations of all members of the study team and a brief description of their roles (25-50 words per person).

**NIH Eligibility:** Please provide a brief statement as to the eligibility of the PI for NIH supplemental COVID-19 funding ([PA-18-935](#) or [PA-20-135](#)).

Applications should be in the form of a single PDF document; please use letter-size pages, Arial size 11 font with margins of 0.5 inches or larger. Letters of Intent must be submitted before 5 p.m. EDT on July 28, 2020. Additional or supplemental materials cannot be accepted after the deadline and will not be reviewed.

### **Round one review criteria**

The review of New Initiative Funding proposals will be conducted by a review panel comprising members of MIDAS and of the broader scientific community. Proposals will be reviewed based on their likely short-term impact on COVID-19 modeling research and on mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of round one evaluation will determine which investigators will be invited to submit a full proposal for the second round. Advancing projects will be notified by August 18, 2020.

### **Round 2: Full Packet Submission**

Applications should be combined into a single PDF file. The complete application should be loaded into the [online application site \(Powered by Pinch\)](#) before 5 p.m. EDT on 9 September, 2020. Additional materials or supplemental materials cannot be accepted after the deadline and will not be reviewed. Use letter-size pages, a font no smaller than Arial 11, and page margins of 0.5-inch or more.

Final applications should have the following sections, and each section should begin on a new page.

**A. Research Plan** (5-page limit, including tables and figures): This section should include the same elements as a traditional NIH proposal (Specific Aims, Significance, Innovation, Approach) to best allow reviewers to address the review criteria (below).

**B. References** (no page limit). Literature cited does not count toward the 5-page limit.

**C. Budget with Budget Justification** (no page limit): Use [PHS 398 Forms Pages 4 and 5 and the Checklist Form Page](#). The Budget Justification should include sufficient detail for reviewers to assess whether appropriate resources have been requested. Any salary support requested in a submitted budget should reflect federal fringe benefit rates. Any requested equipment must be explicitly justified as critical to the execution of the proposed research.

**D. NIH Biosketches** (5-page limit for each biosketch): Include biosketches for the Principal Investigator and key members of the research team. Use new [NIH Biosketch format as of September 2017](#).

**E. Human Subjects** (no page limit): Applications proposing human subjects research must address Protection of Human Subjects, Adequacy of Protection Against Risks, Data and Safety Monitoring Plans, Inclusion of Women and Minorities, and Inclusion of Children.

Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) approval is not required prior to submission. However, for all projects involving human subjects HRPO approval is required before contracting of awards by the MCC.

In this section, applicants must describe any human subject issues, as well as the sources of materials that will be obtained from human subjects. If human subjects are involved, provide a description of their involvement and characteristics, specific risks to subjects who participate, and protection against those risks. Reviewers may consider whether significant delays in approval are an anticipated barrier for project completion when selecting projects. Evidence of prior or ongoing review by an Institutional Review Board or Human Research Protection Office is encouraged. Similarly, this section should discuss if other special regulatory approval is required prior to funding.

**F. Resource Sharing Plan** (no page limit): Include all data and modeling code/software used and generated by the proposed research, and how these resources will be made available to members of the MIDAS network or more broadly. If resources cannot be made available, include a strong justification.

**G. Letters of support and/or collaboration** (no page limit): Include any letters at the end of the application.

#### **Review Criteria:**

Review of round 2 proposals will address the NIH review criteria. Reviewers will score final applications on an NIH scale (1-9) in the following domains:

1. Overall Impact: The likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field, especially research on COVID-19 modeling.
2. Significance: Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field? Is the project of immediate relevance for COVID-19 research and mitigation?
3. Investigators: Are the PD/Pis, collaborators, and other researchers well suited, sufficient, and able to conduct the project?
4. Innovation: Does the project shift current research or clinical practice paradigms use novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions?
5. Approach: Are the strategies, methods, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project?
6. Environment: Are the personnel, equipment, and other physical resources available to the investigators to perform the proposed research within the time frame allotted?

#### **Award Process**

Awards will be made for proposals that will have been recommended by the scientific review panels and that will have been prioritized by the MCC based on programmatic considerations, to ensure a diverse COVID-19 modeling research program. Awards will be made to receiving institutions as subcontracts to the MCC NIH award at the University of Pittsburgh and will be subject to NIH regulations. Maximum budget amounts listed reflect the total project cost (direct and indirect cost) and the receiving institutions will be expected to allocate costs that maximize the benefit of these funds in support of urgent COVID-19 research. The contracting process will

only start after all applicable regulatory approvals have been shared by the PI with the MCC. The contracting timeline will depend on regulatory and administrative procedures at the University of Pittsburgh and at the receiving institution. The project period for Supplemental Funding projects will begin no earlier than one month after the review and end on 06-30-2021. The period for New Initiative projects will be within 10-01-2020 and 06-30-2021. The start date may be modified if needed for administrative or programmatic reasons. In case research cannot be completed before the end of the budget period, investigators may apply for a no cost extension, 30 days or more prior to the project period end date.

## Contact

For any questions, contact the MCC by email at [questions@midasnetwork.us](mailto:questions@midasnetwork.us) or by phone at 412-624-7693.