Recommendations from the 2025 Taskforce on Columbia University's Research Mission

May 2026

Executive Summary

Meeting the Needs of the Columbia Scientific Research Community

- In Spring 2025, when federal funding for scientific research at Columbia was paused, Acting President Shipman & EVPR Jeannette Wing charged cochairs Angela Olinto & James McKiernan, together with a team of colleagues (see Appendix) to consider a path forward.
- The Taskforce on Columbia's Research Mission had representation from all research-intensive schools, with a Steering Committee & 5 Working Groups:
    - Scientific Strategy
    - Research Operations
    - Faculty and Researcher Support
    - Peer Institution Benchmarks
    - Finance, Data and Analytics
- The Working Groups met across Spring, Summer, and Fall 2025 and discussed recommendations weekly. Working Groups finalized reports late in 2025, and this slide deck summarizes their recommendations (full list of recommendations in Appendix).

Scientific Research @ Columbia University: by the numbers

Columbia Research Snapshot : Faculty Distribution Fall 2024

Of the 1839 Full Time tenure track faculty across schools at Columbia in Fall 2024, 1303 (**71%**) were in research intensive schools or departments [1]

	Tenured	Tenure Track	Tenure of Title[2]	
A&S Natural Sciences	164	62		
A&S Social Sciences	126	48		
SEAS	170	54		
Climate	5	3		
Social Work	21	8		
VP&S	284	194	13	
Dental	8	3	2	
Nursing	11	13		
Public Health	64	49	1	
Research faculty total	853	434	16	**1303**
Other (non-research) faculty	380	156	0	**536**
All University faculty total	1233	590	16	**1839**
%	69%	74%	100%	**71%**

[1] https://opir.columbia.edu/sites/opir.columbia.edu/files/content/Statistical%20Abstract/opir_faculty_gender.pdf
[2] https://facultyhandbook.columbia.edu/content/officers-instruction/procedures-appointment-and-promotion-faculty-unmodified-titles

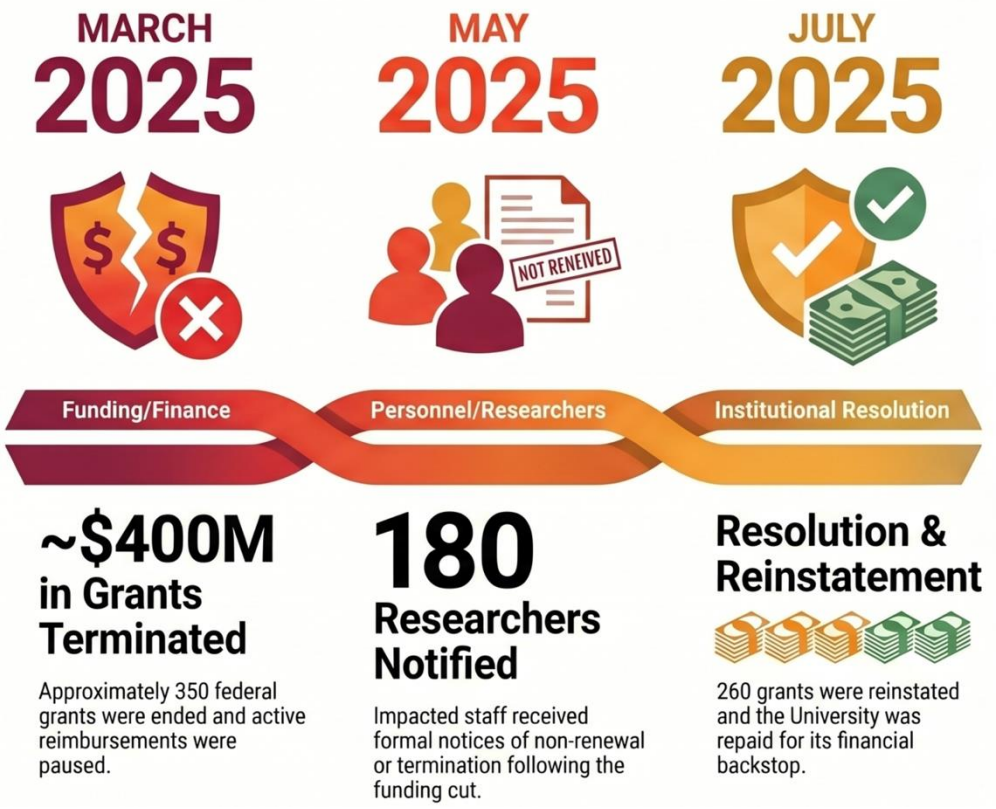
Columbia Research Snapshot: Key Performance Metrics for Research

	Columbia
Total research $ amount, FY25[1]	$1.3B
Total NIH research $ amount, FY25[2]	$598.5M
Business research funding %, FY24	6%
% publications in top 10% most cited, 2020-2025[3]	29%
Average invention disclosures per year, FY 16-25[4]	403
Average Columbia startups launched per year, FY 16-25[4]	20
Average total license revenue per year, FY 16-25[4]	$52M

[1] https://www.finance.columbia.edu/news/financial-statements-released-fiscal-2025
[2] Columbia Sponsored Projects Administration
[3] Open Alex
[4] Columbia Technology Ventures

Columbia Research Snapshot: Grant Disruption

- ~$400 million in federal grants (~350 grants) were terminated in in early 2025, the bulk in March.
- In addition, federal reimbursements were paused for most of the University's active, non-terminated grants. Columbia central administration provided a financial backstop.
- In May 2025 ~180 researchers funded on impacted federal grants received notices of non-renewal or termination.
- After the resolution agreement in July 2025, 260 grants were fully reinstated, federal reimbursements resumed, and the University was repaid for the expenses carried for the active award portfolio.
- In July and September 2025, ~500 Research Stabilization Fund grants (max $100,000 each) were given across schools to ensure continuity of research programs, and to provide seed funding for researchers to pivot and diversify their funding sources.



https://president.columbia.edu/news/supporting-and-strengthening-columbias-research-enterprise
https://www.finance.columbia.edu/news/financial-statements-released-fiscal-2025
https://president.columbia.edu/news/preserving-columbias-critical-research-capabilities

Prioritized Recommendations from the 2025 Taskforce on Columbia's Research Mission

Diversification of Research Funding Streams will be critical

Successful Partnerships as a Roadmap

Partnerships have provided Columbia with significant financial support, specialized infrastructure & equipment, and unique talent pipelines, buffering against federal funding volatility.

These collaborations span industry, philanthropy, and regional consortia. The (Chan Zuckerberg) Biohub and Empire AI are recent exemplars of collaborations with less traditional partners. Both have allowed Columbia to pursue high-risk, cross-sector projects in AI and health innovation in partnerships with pooled interest.

Columbia should participate in or consider leading *additional* regional networks and/ or with non-governmental partners to collectively manage expensive or resource-intensive research infrastructure and core facilities.

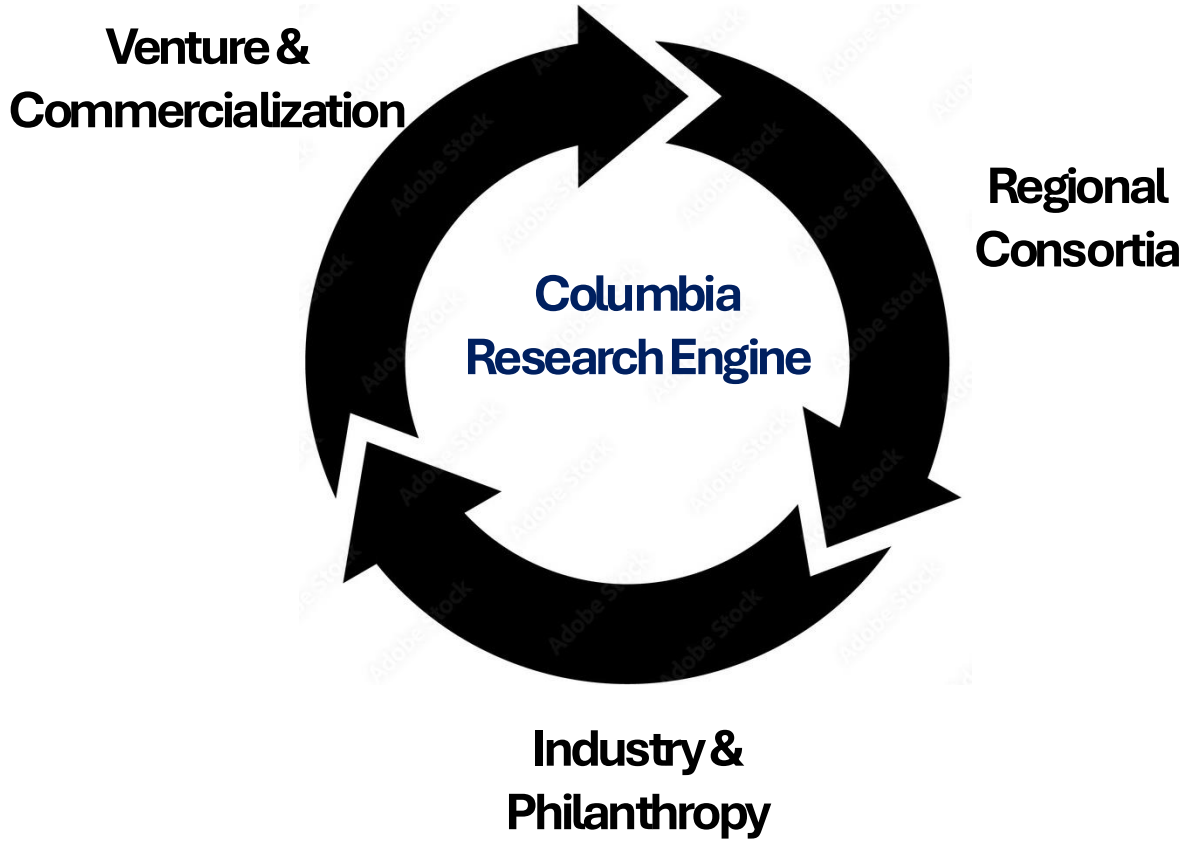
Industry, philanthropy, and foundation awards can also be increasingly sought to support research projects. EVPR office & the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement are already dedicating resources to providing faculty with skills and opportunities to pursue these funding sources.

Diversification of Research Funding Streams will be critical

Commercialization and Venture Support

Columbia's current commercialization apparatus has successfully leveraged venture partnerships, startup creation, and licensing deals that lead to a campus innovative culture.

Columbia should continue to explore venture-backed research arrangements that offer intellectual property or equity positions to investors in exchange for early-stage funding. The SEVP office is currently evaluating how Columbia Technology Ventures and the entrepreneurial infrastructure will evolve.



Columbia could benefit from a Unified Operational Infrastructure

IT/ Digital Strategy

Inter-campus collaboration is stymied by IT incompatibility (Google on Morningside & Microsoft at CUIMC), and some software systems (ARC, Rascal) have less user-friendly interfaces that have led some faculty and administrators to developed manual workarounds. Adoption of new software systems or redesign of current systems would lend ease and transparency. User-friendly interfaces & interconnectivity to other institutional platforms are paramount considerations.

Software and technology updates could be considered, whether a significant redesign of current internally built systems, or licensing of off the shelf software solutions. In Jan 2026 Finance, IT, & EVPR teams launched a study focused on Rascal.

Columbia could benefit from a Unified Operational Infrastructure

IT/ Digital Strategy

A searchable intranet for researchers could be created with a centralized set of resources.

Continued support for established financial dashboards (eg MyGrants, Research Leadership Data Dashboard) and potential expansion and would allow for PI insight into their spending, and potential expansion could allow Department and School-based planning.

Beyond software solutions, Taskforce members hope for additional improvements to other general infrastructure and processes, such as HR, procurement, financial systems, and other general services.

Columbia could benefit from a Unified Operational Infrastructure

Offices of Research

School-based Offices of Research allow for each school to consider local priority and field-specific expertise; consider establishing an office in Arts & Sciences and strengthening others for maximum efficiency.

There is inconsistency in titles & roles across Offices of Research and administrators experience high turnover. Columbia could enhance role-specific training modules and align them with formalized career ladders for research administration and clinical research staff, applied across all schools.

Grants-focused administrators can effectively work remotely, leading to lower costs and fewer space constraints; this may have impacts on other sectors of the University-- the remote work policy could be revisited. AI tools could increasingly be used to screen and compare iterative submissions and proposals. Paralegals and increased staffing, as well as software tools could be considered to ease contract backlogs and to reduce bottlenecks. Redesign of business processes and real-time tracking of proposals and agreements would be welcomed.

Overlapping governance of grant activity between Sponsored Project Administration and school-based Offices of Research have led to duplication of effort, and a desire for streamlined budget forecasting, reconciliation, contract review, and increased support for collaborative grants and team science.

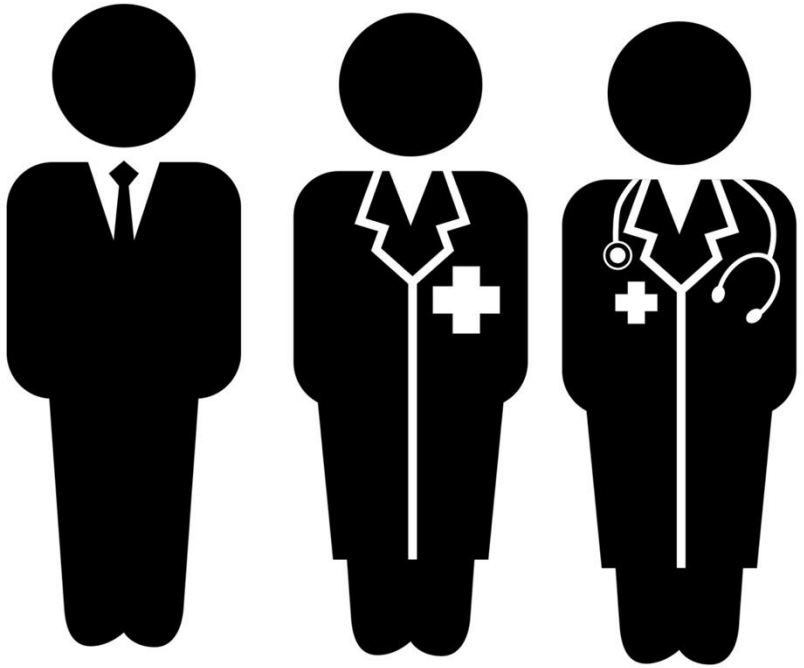
Minimize Operational Bottlenecks

Institutional Review Board

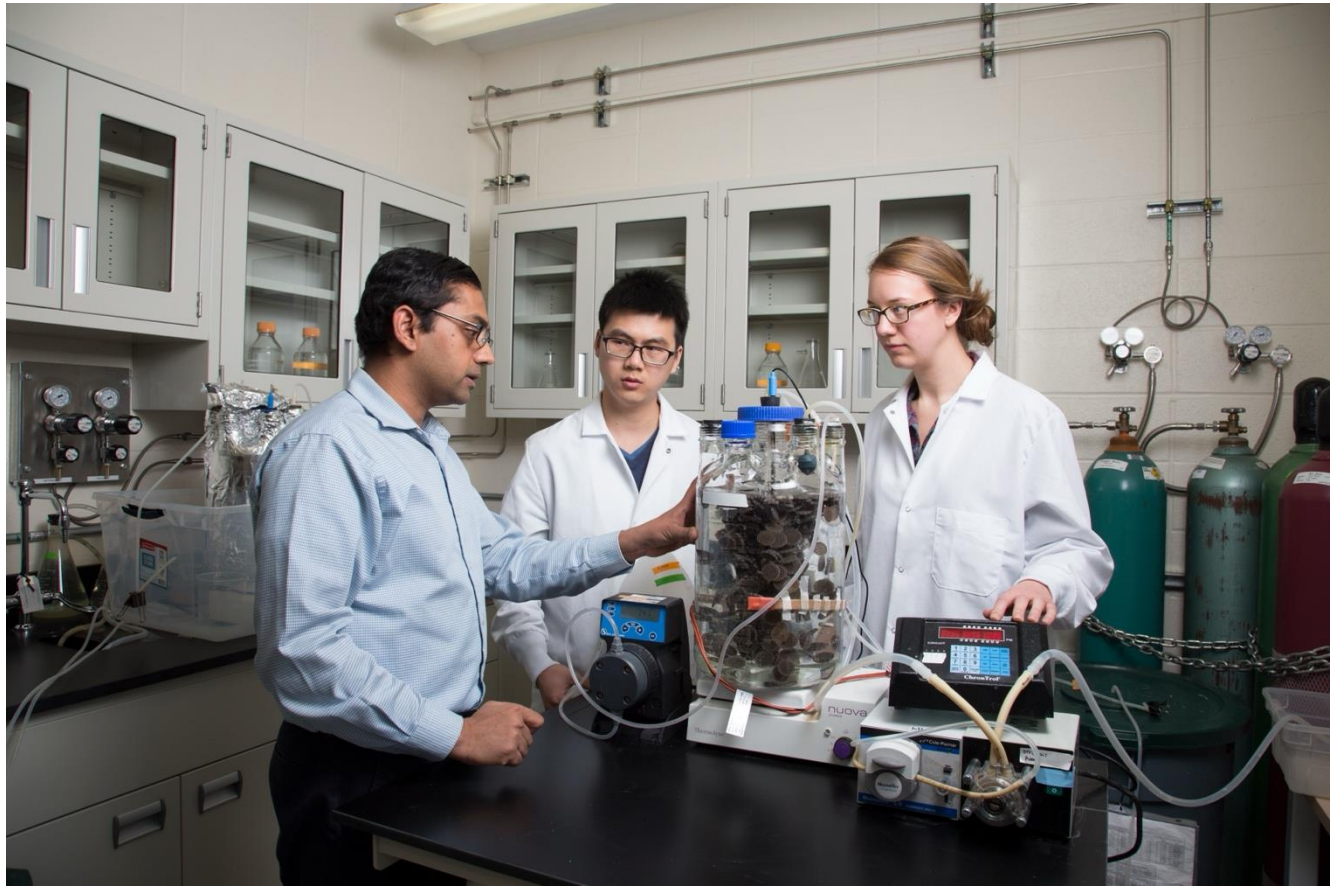
The IRB committees are properly overseen by a University-wide office, but one that handles a large load and could use additional resources. Steady year over year increases in number of protocols compared to staffing has challenged the speed of the approval process.

Fee-for-service external IRB services could be used increasingly to speed progress; current usage is lower than peer institutions. Faculty currently have this option.

Of note, a new Associate Vice President for the Human Research Protections Office (HRPO) and IRB will join Columbia in August 2026.



Minimize Operational Bottlenecks



Shared Resources and Core Facilities

Faculty hope for an ease of use of shared resources/ equipment & core facilities. Establishing a hub or appointing a Director of Shared Resources across campuses could manage, consolidate, develop relationships with cores around the city, alongside development of financial sustainability plans. This effort could further catalog shared equipment and facilities, with an accompanying scheduling tool. This Director or Hub would ideally fall under the EVPR.

Policies Could Be Aligned with the Evolving Needs of Researchers

Encourage Collaboration & Opportunity

Current leave policies could be revised to allow some faculty to pursue deep, sustained engagements with industry and outside research partners– a critical avenue for innovation and funding.

A previously established Conflict of Commitment group could be reestablished to ensure faculty responsibilities are being met.

Columbia could establish and strengthen clear mechanisms to bring in industry experts for part-time appointments, increasing knowledge exchange. Given the complexity of coordination of issues related to HR, Faculty Affairs, Security, Environmental Health & Safety and Finance, Columbia should consider designating specific oversight of these relationships.

Policies Could Be Aligned with the Evolving Needs of Researchers

Tenure Criteria for Team Science-Focused Faculty & Support for Junior Faculty

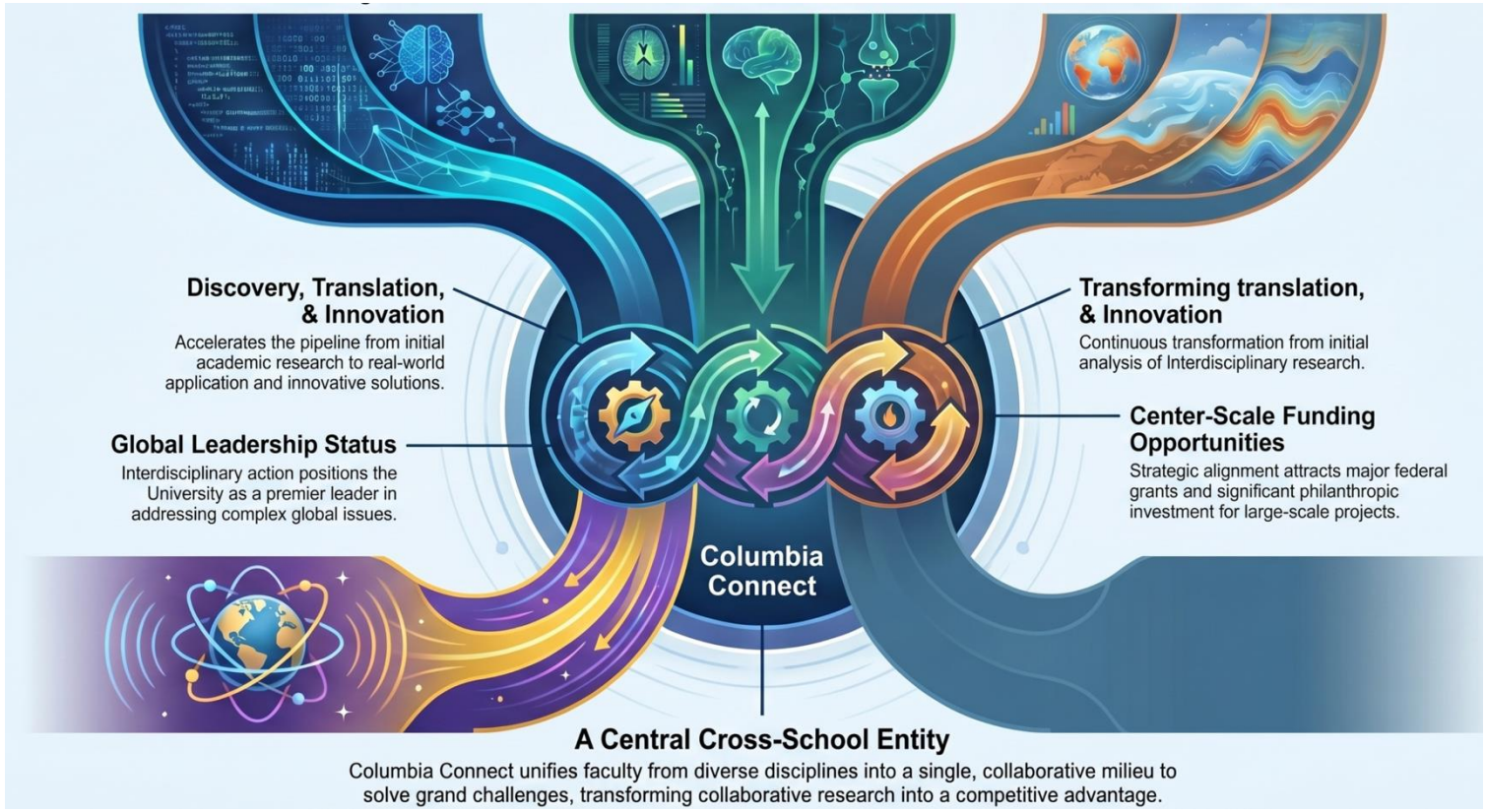
Columbia's rigorous and high standards for awarding tenure might consider emphasizing even further diverse contributions, including team science and non-federal funding (industry & philanthropy).

Junior faculty would benefit from field-specific support and guidance—via mentorship, collaboration, seed grants to encourage collaboration, and training—to navigate the new challenging funding landscape and the AI milieu in which they will increasingly find themselves.

Policies Could Be Aligned with the Evolving Needs of Researchers

Interconnectivity of Campuses

Create a cross-school hub (Columbia Connect) designed to accelerate discovery, translation, and innovation across schools by bringing faculty together from similar themes. Such a collaborative milieu gives Columbia a competitive advantage for grand-challenge, center-scale federal, and philanthropic opportunities in high growth areas where interdisciplinary action is required for global leadership, such as AI, neuroscience, and climate.



Policies Could Be Aligned with the Evolving Needs of Researchers

A More Flexible Researcher Workforce

Beyond tenure-track faculty, policies could be revisited that govern the large professional researcher work force, like the "at CUMC faculty." Currently these colleagues are subject to an inflexible set of deadlines for non-renewals, creating instability and increased stress and costs.

The appointment structure for at CUMC faculty could be rewritten to allow a leave for lapse in funding, a critical safety net available to other researchers.

Leadership Considerations

Roadmap: People, Systems, and Columbia Research Culture

- **Build Stakeholder Buy in**

Solicit commitment from University leadership, Deans, and faculty to actively champion and collectively govern a systems and culture transformation, ensuring it meets the need of the entire research community. A formal endorsement of the vision (President, Provost, Board, Deans of Research-Intensive Schools, EVPR) would institutionalize a culture of continuous improvement and modernization.

- **Consider How and What to Implement**

Provost Office, EVPR, IT, Finance, OGC, HR, and School-based input and consensus are required for the infrastructure and systems upgrade decisions. Many changes will require financial resources to adopt, and investment in personnel to speed transformation and to ensure accountability and coordination. EVP, Finance, IT all already working on consideration of the Rascal platform. Consider revisiting IT systems that are disparate across campuses.

- **Establish Governance of a Transformation Initiative**

A Steering Committee, informed by working groups, and with clear lines for input will ensure institutional initiatives reflect the operational realities at the school level while advancing university-wide strategic goals.

Roadmap II: Transform Research Operations & Systems

- **Clarify Governance & Roles**

Consider implementation of a "central infrastructure, local execution" model . Establish a university-wide adoption of where responsibility for processes lies to provide clarity and consistency, and to eliminate ambiguity. Decision- making authority would remain with PIs, Chairs, Departments, Schools, while collaborating with the EVPR Office.

- **Eliminate Critical Bottlenecks and Modernize IT Infrastructure & Support**

Work with multiple stakeholders (EVPR, CUIMC, OGC, IT) to redesign core business processes to modernize operations. Implement transparent, and consistent enterprise-wide systems for submissions, proposals, contracts, and protocols.

Accelerate the already-underway comprehensive evaluation of current systems (RASCAL, InfoEd, ARC) . Invest in integrated, modern platforms and pilot AI tools for tasks like funding opportunity development, budget forecasting and contract review.

- **Catalyze New Funding Streams**

Provide financial support via seed grants and mentorship/guidance for those faculty pursuing alternate funding and those engaging in cross-campus collaborations. Host structured collaborative design workshops and symposia to facilitate faculty matchmaking, and specific workshops on writing industry and foundation grants. Find partners in other states to foster team projects with greater likelihood of federal funding success.

APPENDIX

All recommendations from Working Group Reports from Summer/Fall 2025

Taskforce on Columbia's Research Mission: Membership

Executive Sponsors	Claire Shipman, Jeannette Wing
Co-Chairs	Angela Olinto & Jim McKiernan
Taskforce Members	Alexis Abramson, Katrina Armstrong*, Shih-Fu Chang, Loftin Flowers, Lorraine Frazier, Ali Gharavi, Ruben Gonzalez, Amy Hungerford, Stavros Lomvardas, Wil McKoy*, Ushma Neill*, Daphna Shohamy, Kathleen Sikkema, Anne Sullivan*, Jonathan Touson* *Steering committee
Scientific Strategy Advisory WG Lead	Dima Amso
Peer Institutions WG Lead	Ali Gharavi
Finance, Admin, and Analytics WG Leads	Wil McKoy & Trevor Harris
Research Operations WG Leads	Jennifer Williamson & Soulaymane Kachani
Faculty & Researcher Support WG Lead	Eugenia Lean
People power	The effort involved 150–210 people across ~100 meetings from May- December 2025

Taskforce on Research Mission:
Additional recommendations

	Report	Initiative
1	Scientific	Identify shared scientific challenges as flagship themes
2	Scientific	Establish a visible, neutral hub led by a Steering Commitee of faculty, researchers, deans
3	Scientific	Cross-school CONNECT team co-hosts structured collaborative design workshops
4	Scientific	Launch flexible seed funding programs
5	Scientific	Align incentives and expectations with collaboration
6	Faculty	Pilot extended leaves and concomitant appointments policy
7	Faculty	Enable a part-time Columbia appointment for industry professionals/outside researchers
8	Faculty	Support flexible, contextual, transparent tenure evaluation
9	Faculty	Provide individual field-specific guidance for securing alternative funding
10	Faculty	Identify online resources and training sessions for faculty securing alternative funding
11	Faculty	Expand leaves due to lapse of funding option to “at CUMC” faculty
12	Faculty	Amending fixed deadlines for LoNs for “at CUMC” faculty
13	Finance	Review standard university-wide research and service sources & uses statements by school, department, & PI
14	Finance	Consider incorporating research and service sources and uses figures into annual budgeting and planning
15	Peer	Leverage international networks to explore partnerships
16	Peer	Consider establishing affiliated research entities
17	Peer	Seek to expand venture-backed research arrangements
18	Peer	Organize or participate in regional or national networks
19	Peer	Consider building capacity in trials in areas outside traditional excellence
20	Peer	Explore a dual-committee model for strategic research planning like Harvard’s balancing risk with new research paradigms
21	Peer	Explore shared resource models with other New York institutions
22	Peer	Coordinated capital campaign to sustain research
23	Peer	Initiate a structured planning process to prepare for multiple federal funding scenarios
24	Operations	Create a university-wide responsibility matrix
25	Operations	Adopt a “central infrastructure, local execution model that provides central support to schools
26	Operations	Consider establishing a framework for administering shared resources, space, and infrastructure investments
27	Operations	Engage users' perspectives

Taskforce on Research Mission: Additional recommendations (2/2)

	Report	Initiative
28	Operations	Define the roles of central vs. local
29	Operations	Central research offices and administrative support offices
30	Operations	Strengthen local research infrastructure and leadership
31	Operations	Address critical bottlenecks in SPA, SPF, IRB, and OGC (with sub-recommendations)
32	Operations	Improve admin systems (InfoEd, Rascal, ARC, PAC, MyGrants)
33	Operations	Pilot AI tools for tasks such as budget forecasting, reconciliation, contract review
34	Operations	Enhance visibility of shared resources
35	Operations	Expand and improve data sharing infrastructure
36	Operations	Develop comprehensive workforce strategy
37	Operations	Define clear career architectures
38	Operations	Integrate workforce analytics
39	Operations	Enhance market competitiveness and employee value proposition
40	Operations	Create institutional infrastructure that incentivizes collaboration
41	Operations	Develop role-specific training frameworks that defines competencies, expectations, & performance outcomes for research administrators
42	Operations	Promote mentorship and cross-school professional development
43	Operations	Centralize training resources
44	Operations	Integrate AI tools and digital learning platforms
45	Operations	Modernize data systems
46	Operations	Establish university-wide research performance metrics
47	Operations	Create a research data governance council
48	Operations	Conduct annual research ecosystem assessments
49	Operations	Promote data-informed decision-making through regular dashboards
50	Operations	Establish an Office of transformation
51	Operations	Institutionalize continuous improvement
52	Operations	Foster a culture in which faculty and staff are active partners in transformation
53	Operations	Serve as a bridge between central and local operations
54	Operations	Implement agile culture