



2021 Request for Applications

Dr. William E. Paul Distinguished Innovator Award in Lupus and Autoimmunity

Updated February 4, 2021

Release Date: February 17, 2021

Letter of Intent Due Date: June 1, 2021

Earliest Start Date: February 15, 2022

Background

The Lupus Research Alliance (LRA) is the world's leading private funder of lupus research. The organization's mission is to improve treatments for lupus while advancing towards a cure through the support for research. At present, therapy for lupus is empiric and involves a variety of non-specific anti-inflammatory and immunosuppressive agents. While these treatments are frequently beneficial, many patients do not respond adequately and suffer significant side effects. Importantly, many unanswered questions regarding the pathogenesis of lupus remain and new conceptual and therapeutic approaches are urgently needed.

To address these critical knowledge gaps and to markedly advance lupus research, the Lupus Research Alliance established the Distinguished Innovator Award (DIA). This grant mechanism is intended to attract exceptionally creative scientists from all relevant scientific disciplines and to provide them with robust and sustained support to explore bold and paradigm shifting ideas that could lead to ground-breaking discoveries in lupus research. Investigators working in areas outside of lupus are strongly encouraged to apply.

Award Goals

The DIA provides outstanding scientists with substantial support (up to \$250,000 per year for up to four years) to conduct novel research into the fundamental causes of systemic lupus erythematosus and so provide new directions towards a cure. The LRA welcomes novel, hypothesis- or discovery-driven proposals using clinically relevant models in lupus research. The research proposal must aim to uncover the fundamental causes of lupus and present a compelling vision of how the discovery would lay the groundwork for a cure, prevention, or highly effective therapy. Applications will be judged primarily on the novelty and potential of the research proposal, and the strengths and track record of the investigator. Emphasis will be on the rationale for the hypothesis rather than the amount of preliminary data. Continuations of long-term research projects will not be considered. Successful applicants will be outstanding investigators who have demonstrated creativity and productivity in their field of research. We encourage applications from investigators in diverse disciplines including, but not limited to, immunology, genetics, molecular-, cell- and systems biology.

In keeping with the strategic research objectives of the LRA, priority consideration will be given to projects that address understanding of lupus heterogeneity or patient stratification by active disease mechanism or employing global research and technological partnerships to address these priority areas.

Applicants are encouraged to consult with LRA scientific staff to discuss the responsiveness of their proposal to this program.

Eligibility

Applicants must hold a faculty position, at the assistant professor level or above, at an academic institution. The LRA does not impose geographic restriction on its applicants and researchers working outside of the US are also encouraged to apply.

Application Guidelines

Applications must be submitted electronically, via [proposalCENTRAL](#) by 5pm ET on the stated deadline. Paper applications are not accepted.

A two-stage application process will be employed. A 2-page Letter of Intent (LOI) will be used to judge the significance, novelty and alignment of the proposed project concept with the DIA funding mechanism. Applicants whose LOIs have successfully passed this first review stage will be invited to submit full applications. It is anticipated that about 30% of the applicants invited to submit full applications, following the LOI review stage, will be funded.

I. Letter of Intent

A Letter of Intent (LOI) is required and must be submitted electronically, via [proposalCENTRAL](#), by 5pm ET on the stated deadline. It should contain the following information: (Items 1-4 should not exceed **2 pages**. Figures, tables and legends are included within the page limit. However, citations are not counted towards the page limit.)

1. *Brief background*: Provide a succinct contextual framework for the proposed project. This section may be particularly valuable to applicants new to lupus and applying knowledge from other scientific areas—that need to be introduced—to bear on lupus.
2. *Overall objective and preliminary Specific Aims*: State the overall objective and outline the preliminary specific aims.
3. *Project plan*: Describe the *significance*, *innovation*, and *approach* for the proposed project.
4. *Resource assessment*: Assess your ability to carry out this project and outline resources you may need to accomplish it, such as access to proprietary reagents or technologies and key collaborators. If the applicant's primary scientific expertise is outside of lupus, please describe how you intend to apply your unique knowledge to address a critical issue in the pathogenesis and/or treatment of lupus.
5. *Biosketch*: A standard NIH-style biosketch for all key personnel working on the project. This should include a description of other financial support available to the applicant(s) for his/her research endeavors. Applicants who are not based in the United States may submit a copy of their curriculum vitae.

Restriction on number of applications: Only one LOI will be accepted per principal investigator in a grant cycle.

II. Full Application

Full applications may be submitted only by applicants whose LOI has been approved and who have been invited by the LRA to advance to the next stage of the review process. Applications should be submitted via proposalCENTRAL (please log into this site for detailed instructions). The full application site will only be accessible to applicants with approved LOIs.

Review Criteria

The scientific review committee will consider each of the following criteria in assigning the application's overall score, weighting them as appropriate for each application.

- **Novelty of the proposed research:** Does the project employ novel concepts, approaches or methods? Are the aims original and innovative? Does the project challenge existing paradigms or develop new methodologies or technologies?
- **Scientific merit of the research proposal:** Are the conceptual framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well-integrated, and appropriate to the aims of the project? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternative tactics?
- **Relevance** of the project to the fundamental causes of lupus
- **Therapeutic potential:** Potential of project to lead to lupus cure, prevention or a highly effective therapy
- **Investigator:** Does the investigator have a demonstrated track record of innovation, of shifting scientific paradigms and breaking open new areas of research?
- **Environment:** Does the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Do the proposed experiments take advantage of unique features of the scientific environment or employ useful collaborative arrangements? Is there evidence of institutional support?

Terms of Award

The DIA grants will be supported for up to US \$250,000 per year for up to four years. Funds may be used for any appropriate research costs and up to 10% of the total annual budget (US \$25,000) may be allocated to salary of the principal investigator. No portion of the research grant money may be used to pay institutional overhead or other indirect costs. Progress reports are required at the end of each year.

Forming partnerships with the grant recipients is one of the cornerstones of the LRA funding philosophy. Towards this end, awardees are required to attend the LRA's annual scientific conference, Forum for Discovery and share the concepts and progress of their research. Travel funds, provided by the grant award, should be used to attend this meeting.

The LRA is committed to the publication and dissemination of all information and materials developed using the LRA's resources. All recipients of LRA awards must agree to this principle, and must take steps to facilitate availability of data and materials. Ultimately, funding decisions

will be made by the LRA Board of Directors.

Review Process

Grant applications are reviewed by the LRA's Scientific Task Force on DIA, which makes recommendations to the Board of Directors. The LRA reserves the right to consult qualified third parties as necessary.

Review Feedback

For applicants invited to submit full proposals, a summary statement, containing the reviewers' critiques and a synopsis of the review discussions, will be provided within three months of the review date. Applications not recommended to advance to the full proposal stage will not receive written critiques. The LRA does not provide scores or application rankings to applicants.

Key Dates

RFA Release:	February 17, 2021
Letter of Intent Due:	June 1, 2021
Letter of Intent Decision:	July 23, 2021
Full Application Due*:	September 3, 2021
Scientific and Board Reviews:	November 2021
Response to Applicants^:	December 20, 2021
Earliest Anticipated Start:	February 15, 2022

*By invitation only with an approved LOI
^For full applications only

Inquiries

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For help with the electronic grant application process, please contact the help desk of proposalCENTRAL pcsupport@altum.com or +1-800-875-2562, extension 227