



2021 Request for Applications

Postdoctoral Award to Promote Diversity in Lupus Research

Release Date: July 6, 2021

Letter of Intent Due Date: September 1, 2021

Full Application Due Date: December 1, 2021

Earliest Start Date: June 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 various mostly non-specific anti-inflammatory and immunosuppressive agents. While these treatments are frequently beneficial, many patients do not respond adequately and/or suffer significant side effects. Importantly, even patients with low disease activity accrue organ damage over time. There are many unanswered questions regarding the pathogenesis of lupus, and new conceptual and therapeutic approaches are urgently needed.

Importantly, addressing the challenges of lupus will also require a talented and tenacious workforce capable of decoding the inherent complexity of the disease and devising innovative medicines. To harness the collective power of diverse minds and address the underrepresentation of specific groups in lupus research, the LRA has developed several initiatives to foster the development of talented and promising young scientists from these groups.

Program Goals

The LRA Postdoctoral Award to Promote Diversity in Lupus Research is designed to attract qualified and promising underrepresented minority (URM) scientists and provide them with robust and sustained support to help them generate scientific data and unique research ideas necessary to ultimately transition to an independent researcher role in areas that reflect the [strategic research priorities of the LRA](#). These priorities include: defining lupus heterogeneity, stratifying patients by active disease mechanism to advance new therapeutics, and establishing motivated and collaborative global research/technology teams. This award fosters the development of the URM postdoctoral investigators with an interest to bridge the gap between the bench and the bedside in lupus.

Eligibility

Applicants should have an advanced degree (MD, Ph.D., DO, or equivalent) from an accredited institution and currently hold a postdoctoral or clinical fellowship at a US- or Canada-based institution. Applicants must have no more than 4 years of postdoctoral research experience at the time of application submission. Time spent conducting postgraduate clinical training that does not involve research is not considered a part of the 4-year research training eligibility limit. The LRA recognizes personal circumstances can impact career timelines (e.g., care of a parent/spouse/child/dependent or personal health issues). Applicants who have taken leave from their career and thus fall outside the eligibility timeline are encouraged to contact LRA staff before submitting their application.

Eligible applicants must be members of a racial or ethnic group found to be underrepresented in the science and engineering fields compared to their representation in the US population. As defined by the [National Science Foundation \(NSF\)](#), individuals considered an underrepresented minority (URM) include Blacks or African Americans, Hispanics or Latinos, American Indians or Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders. There is no citizenship requirement; however, postdoctoral research training must be performed at a US- or Canada-based institution.

Application guidelines

Applications must be submitted electronically, via [proposalCENTRAL](#), by 11:59 pm ET on the stated deadline. Paper applications will not be accepted.

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

Letter of Intent

Applicants should submit a letter of intent (LOI) via [proposalCentral](#), indicating their intention to apply. The LOI should include the applicant's name, degree, position, institution, as well as the project's title and specific aims, and the names of the applicant's referees for this application. The LOI is non-binding and will be used only for the purposes of convening an appropriate review panel.

Full application

Applications must be submitted electronically. Please log in to [proposalCENTRAL](#) to access the application instructions and templates. Parts 1-2 of the application should not exceed 9 pages (excluding references). Submissions must be completed using one-half-inch margins & 12-point Times New Roman font or its equivalent. The application should contain the following information:

1. *Career Goals (2 pages)*

The candidate should describe their current and long-term research and career objectives as well as their *plan for training and career development activities during the award period*. The candidate should describe how the skills and knowledge obtained during the mentored postdoctoral training will enhance their research productivity, facilitate their development of new approaches and/or directions for investigation, and ensure their commitment to a career in lupus research and/or translation.

2. *Research plan (6-7 pages)*

The research plan should state the significance, feasibility, innovation, and approach of the proposed research. The research plan should provide a detailed rationale, experimental approach, and expected as well as alternative outcomes for the proposed studies. The candidate should also describe their current research and its relation to the proposed research, including any preliminary supporting data. The candidate should detail how they will separate scientifically from their mentor and advance to research independence. The plan should include objectives, milestones, and associated timelines for the award period.

3. *Diversity Statement (1 page)*

The diversity statement, provided by the applicant's institution, should describe how the support of this specific candidate will address the issue of diversity within the national, and more specifically, lupus scientific workforce.

4. *Mentor Training Plan (2-3 pages):*

The application must include a statement from the primary mentor that provides: 1) information on the mentor's research qualifications and previous experience as a research supervisor, including mentoring of URM scientists/clinicians; 2) a plan on how the applicant will be mentored during the award period, including how the candidate's scientific and professional independence will be promoted; 3) a description of the planned career development activities, including any formal course-work; 4) a statement identifying the components, reagents and/or models in the proposed research that the candidate can inherit when they ultimately transition to research independence.

5. *Recommendation letters (up to 2 pages each):*

Three letters of support assessing the scientific abilities and potential of the applicant must be submitted by the application deadline. These are confidential and will not be released to the applicant. The recommendation letters must be submitted directly to the LRA by the referee via [proposalCentral](#).

6. *Biosketches*

A standard NIH-style biosketch for the candidate and the mentor should be provided. These should include a description of all financial support available to the applicant for their research endeavors.

Review Criteria

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

- *Candidate:* Is the candidate appropriately trained and well-suited to carry out this work? Is the work proposed appropriate to the experience level of the principal investigator? Is the candidate likely to transition to an independent role based on research productivity, training, and recommendation letters? Does the candidate demonstrate a commitment to a career in lupus research?
- *Career Plan:* Will the proposed career plan enhance the scientific and professional development of the applicant? Is the plan likely to enhance their research productivity, facilitate their development of new approaches and/or directions for investigation, and ensure their commitment to a career in lupus research and/or translation? Will this development plan position the candidate for a successful transition into an independent career?
- *Training Plan:* Does the mentor have relevant prior experience to advise the awardee effectively? Will the training plan and the projected career development activities provide the required framework and support for the awardee?
- *Relevance:* Is the proposed project aligned with the goals of the Postdoctoral Award as well as the mission and strategic priorities of the LRA?
- *Significance:* Is the project based on novel explorations of lupus biology—including innovative studies that use human material to address the physiological, cellular, molecular, and/or genetic basis of human lupus? Does this project prompt investigations into the fundamental mechanisms of lupus and its complications, explore novel targets and pathways, and use novel technologies and interdisciplinary approaches?
- *Approach:* 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?
- *Innovation:* 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?
- *Feasibility:* Can the project be accomplished within a two-year time frame?

- *Environment:* Does the scientific environment in which the work will be performed contribute to the probability of success? Do the proposed experiments take advantage of unique features of the scientific environment or employ beneficial collaborative arrangements?

Review Process

All grant applications will be peer-reviewed by a study section of the LRA, the results from which will be considered by the LRA Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) in the context of the LRA grant portfolio and LRA's strategic research priorities. The SAB will make funding recommendations to the LRA Board of Directors, which will consider all the previous recommendations and provide a lay perspective, including patients' concerns and expectations, as well as deliberations on the business aspects of funding the recommended grants. The LRA Board of Directors will make all final funding decisions.

Review Feedback

Summary statements containing the reviewers' critiques will be provided within three months of the decision notification date for applications receiving a full review. Applications not recommended for full review will receive abridged feedback. The LRA does not provide application scores nor rankings to applicants.

Terms of Award

The Postdoctoral Award provides up to \$85,000/year for up to two years. Indirect costs are not allowed for fellowships, and no deductions will be made for income tax, Social Security, etc. Funds may be used for salary and activities aimed at enhancing the training experience of the awardee, including participation in a grant writing or other relevant training programs, if not already offered by the institution. The purchase of a personal computer (up to \$2,000) is allowed only during Year 1 of the award. Award funds are **not** to be used for laboratory supplies or equipment. The PI must devote at least 75% of their effort to the project outlined in the fellowship application. Grant recipients must attend and present at the LRA annual scientific conference, Forum for Discovery, each year. Travel funds (up to \$2,000), provided by the grant award, must be used to attend this meeting.

Mentor and peer support play a critical role in the development of scientists. The LRA will offer a coaching program through which awardees will benefit from crucial mentoring resources and the support of other members of their cohort. The coaching program includes all LRA Postdoctoral Award recipients and is guided by two established lupus investigators appointed by the LRA. The group will meet twice a year—once in person during the LRA annual scientific conference—to discuss questions or issues related to career advancement, publications, grant applications, collaborations, etc.

The LRA is committed to publishing and disseminating all information and materials developed using its resources. All recipients of LRA awards must agree to this principle and must take steps to facilitate the availability of data and materials.

Key Dates

Release Date:	July 1, 2021
Letter of Intent Due Date:	September 1, 2021
Full Application Due Date:	December 1, 2021
Response to Applicants:	April 2022
Earliest Anticipated Start Date:	June 2022

Inquiries

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For help with the electronic application process, please contact the help desk of proposalCENTRAL

pcsupport@altum.com ; +1-800-875-2562, grant extension 2.