



2021 Request for Applications -- Revised

Career Development Award to Promote Diversity in Lupus Research

Release Date: July 6, 2021

Letter of Intent Due Date: September 1, 2021 [Although the Letter of Intent deadline has passed, eligible applicants interested in submitting the full Career Development Award application are welcome to apply]

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 Career Development Award to Promote Diversity in Lupus Research** is designed to attract outstanding early-career underrepresented minority (URM) scientists and provides them with robust and sustained support to establish a competitive independent research program in areas that reflect [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. The award fosters the development and productivity of independent, early-career URM investigators who will ideally bridge the gap between the bench and the bedside in lupus.

Eligibility

Applicants with an advanced degree (MD, Ph.D., DO or equivalent), who at the time of application hold a faculty, or equivalent, position and lead an independent research team at an academic, nonprofit, or government research institution are eligible to apply. An early-stage investigator (ESI) is a Program Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) who has completed their terminal research degree or post-graduate clinical training, whichever date is later, within the past 10 years. However, PDs/Pis holding R01-type awards are eligible to apply. The LRA recognizes that 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 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, the proposed research must be performed in a US or Canadian-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, the project's title and specific aims, and the names of the three referees for the applicant. The LOI is non-binding and will be used only for the purposes of convening an appropriate review panel. **Although the Letter of Intent deadline has passed, eligible applicants interested in submitting the full Career Development Award application are welcome to apply.**

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 10 pages combined (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 career development activities during the award period. The candidate should explain how this award 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 (8 pages)*
The research plan should state the relevance, significance, feasibility, innovation, and approach of the proposed research. The research plan should provide a detailed rationale, experimental approach, and expected/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 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 scientific workforce.

4. *Mentoring team and mentoring plan (5 pages)*

The award requires a primary mentor and a secondary mentor who will provide counsel and direction to the applicant. Using the [Mentoring Team Form](#), applicants should clearly define each person's role (e.g., primary or secondary mentor) as part of the mentoring team. The mentors should have a prior history of successfully mentoring early career investigators to independence, track records of high-quality investigations, academic accomplishments, and be invested in the career progress of the early career scientist. The primary mentor must be from the applicant's institution and be an active investigator in the area of the proposed research, whereas the secondary mentor may be from the applicant's or outside institution or department and be an active investigator in the area complementary to the proposed research. The mentors' primary functions are to work with the applicant to develop the application, make necessary arrangements with the institutions to conduct the proposed research, enforce the appropriate timelines to accomplish the work, and guide the awardee toward a productive career in their chosen field, including guide the applicant to publish their research findings and apply for funding (e.g., NIH RO1 grant or equivalent). Using the [Primary Mentor Plan Form](#), the primary mentor should provide a clear and focused mentoring plan detailing how the applicant will be mentored, project timelines and milestones that must be achieved by the applicant to complete the proposed research, and whether and how the research proposed by the applicant differs from the research endeavors of the primary mentor. The secondary mentor should in conjunction with the mentee describe, using the [Secondary Mentor Plan Form](#), their plan to guide the applicant toward a productive career in their chosen field that would include but would not be limited to the critical review of the applicant's manuscripts and applications for funding, and career advancements. Furthermore, using the [Mentor's List of Past Trainees](#), each mentor should provide up to five predoctoral and/or postdoctoral trainees within the past 10 years who, following training in the mentors' groups, successfully advanced their careers to the next level either in academia, private sector or government.

The mentoring team should meet with the applicant every 6 months during the funded project period. At each meeting, the awardee will be expected to give a formal presentation of the work accomplished to date, and future plans followed by a discussion with the mentors who will also offer advice for achieving the awardee's stated career goals and successfully completing the award. Mentoring team meetings should be recorded by completing the [Meeting Record Form](#). Documentation of these meetings must be included with each annual progress report.

5. *Institutional Assurance (2 pages)*

Through the applicant's department head, the applicant's institution must provide a letter affirming the institution's commitment to the applicant's academic career and the research project proposed in this application.

6. *Recommendation letters (2 pages each)*

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

7. *Biosketch and explanation of the research overlap between the application and other funded support*

A standard NIH-style biosketch for the candidate, all key personnel working on the project, and both mentors should be submitted. A description of all financial support available to the applicant for their research endeavors as well as a clear explanation of research overlap between the proposed and funded research projects must be included in the application.

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? Does the candidate demonstrate a commitment to a career in lupus research and the enhancement of diversity, inclusion, and equity in the field? Do the letters of recommendation align with the overall impression of the candidate presented in the application, and are they supportive of the investigator's application for a Career Development Award?
- *Career Plan*: Will the proposed career plan enhance the scientific and professional development of the applicant? Does the career plan include an intention to augment the appropriate research skills and training to facilitate continued success as an independent investigator?
- *Relevance*: Is the proposed project aligned with the goals of the Career Development Award mechanism, as well as the mission and strategic priorities of the LRA?
- *Significance*: Will the work stimulate investigation of underexplored pathways and initiate transformative discoveries in lupus that can drive the development of safer and more effective treatments? 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, explorations of novel targets and pathways, and the use of 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 this project be accomplished within a four-year time frame?
- *Mentoring Team and Mentoring Plan*: Do the mentors provide a clear and focused mentoring plan that will guide the awardee toward a productive career in their chosen field? Do the mentors have a record of prior history of successfully mentoring early career investigators to independence? Does the primary mentor propose reasonable milestones that need to be achieved by the applicant to complete the project?
- *Institutional Support*: Does the candidate's institution provide—through the Department Head's Statement—strong assurance of academic commitment to the applicant, their research project, and their career development?
- *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 beneficial collaborative arrangements? Is there evidence of institutional support?

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, in turn, consider all the previous recommendations and will also 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 or rankings to applicants.

Terms of Award

The Career Development Award provides up to \$150,000/year for up to four years, including 10% indirect costs. Funds may be used for any appropriate research costs, including participation in a grant writing/coaching program, if not already offered by the awardee's institution. Any equipment costs need to be strongly justified and, if approved, are only allowed in the first year of the award. The PI must spend at least 60% of time and effort on research relevant to lupus during the time of the award. Grant recipients must attend and present at the LRA annual scientific conference, Forum for Discovery, each year. Travel funds (up to \$2,000 per year), 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 its resources. All recipients of LRA awards must agree to this principle and must take steps to facilitate the availability of data and materials.

LRA Mentorship Resources

Mentors and peer support play a critical role in the development of scientists. In addition to an applicant-selected mentoring team, the Career Development Award recipients will benefit from critical mentoring resources and the support of other members of their cohort provided by the LRA. The mentoring program includes all LRA Career Development 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 publications, grant applications, laboratory and grant management, collaborations, career advancement, etc. The LRA may also offer awardees exposure to relevant industry contacts and/or opportunities, as necessary.

Key Dates

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Response to Applicants: April 2022
Earliest Anticipated Start Date: June 2022

Inquiries

Scientific:
Jana Barlic-Dicen, PhD
Scientific Program Manager
Lupus Research Alliance
jbarlicdicen@lupusresearch.org
+1-646-884-6086

Administrative:
Diomaris Gonzalez
Director of Grant Programs
Lupus Research Alliance
dgonzalez@lupusresearch.org
+1-646-884-6056

proposalCENTRAL:

For help with the electronic application process, please contact the help desk of proposalCENTRAL pcsupport@altum.com ; +1-800-875-2562, grant extension 2.