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## **2022 Dr. William E. Paul Distinguished Innovator Award in Lupus and Autoimmunity (DIA)**

### **Request for Applications (RFA)**

**Release Date:** January 6, 2022

**Letter of Intent Due Date:** March 15, 2022

**Full Application Due Date:** June 15, 2022

**Earliest Start Date:** December 2022

#### **Background**

The Lupus Research Alliance (LRA) is the world's leading private funder of lupus research. The organization aims to transform treatment while advancing towards a cure by funding the most innovative lupus 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 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 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. Research proposals 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, with particular emphasis on the rationale for the hypothesis and the supporting preliminary data, and on the track record of the investigator. 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, and molecular, cell, and systems biology.

In keeping with the strategic research objectives of the LRA, priority consideration will be given to projects that address lupus heterogeneity or patient stratification by active disease mechanism or that employ 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 restrictions on its applicants. Researchers working outside of the US are also encouraged to apply.

## **Application Guidelines**

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

Applications will be reviewed using a two-stage process. A two-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 successfully pass 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 11:59 pm ET on the stated deadline. The LOI should contain the following: (Items 1-4 should not exceed **two 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 specific aims***: State the overall objective and outline the 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 the resources needed, 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 the applicant's unique knowledge will be applied to address a critical issue in the pathogenesis and/or treatment of lupus.

5. *Biosketch(es)*: Submit a standard NIH-style biosketch for all key personnel working on the project. Applicants who are not based in the United States may submit a copy of their curriculum vitae. All applicants should include a description of other financial support for their research endeavors.

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 in to 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? Is the rationale for the hypothesis supported by sufficient preliminary data? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternative strategies?
- **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?

## **Resubmission Information**

- A resubmission is considered an application that was not selected for funding in one of the two previous application cycles. An applicant may resubmit the revised application only once.
- If major changes are made to the original application or if the applicant is planning to submit an entirely different/new project, the proposal should not be submitted as a resubmission.
- LOI: A brief half-page resubmission statement (up to 300 words) must be provided at the beginning of the LOI for all resubmissions. It should highlight the changes and explain

how modifications address the reviewers' concerns. The resubmission statement does not count towards the overall LOI page limit.

- Applicants should contact the LRA research staff with any questions.

## **Review Process**

All grant applications will be peer-reviewed by the LRA study section. Results from the peer review meeting will be forwarded to the LRA Scientific Advisory Board (SAB). The SAB will consider the recommendations from the study section in the context of the existing LRA grant portfolio and LRA's strategic research priorities. The SAB will consider all the previous recommendations, provide a lay perspective, and submit their recommendations to the LRA Board of Directors. The LRA Board of Directors will make all final funding decisions.

## **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. 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.

## **Terms of Award**

DIA grants will be supported for up to US \$250,000/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. Indirect costs should not exceed 10% of the total budget. Progress reports are required at the end of each year.

The grant recipient is required to attend the LRA's annual scientific conference, Forum for Discovery, each year. Travel funds provided by the grant award, must 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 submit a data sharing plan.

## **Key Dates**

RFA Release:	January 6, 2022
Letter of Intent Due:	March 15, 2022
Letter of Intent Decision:	April 28, 2022
Full Applications* Due:	June 15, 2022
Response to Applicants^:	October 2022
Earliest Anticipated Start:	December 2022

\*By invitation only with an approved LOI

^For full applications only

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**ProposalCentral:**

For help with the electronic grant application process, please contact the help desk of ProposalCentral at [pcsupport@altum.com](mailto:pcsupport@altum.com) or +1-800-875-2562, extension 227.