Request for Applications
2026 Lupus Research Alliance-Genentech Award on Immune Resetting Therapies for Lupus
$150,000 per year over 1 or 2 years

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BACKGROUND

The Lupus Research Alliance (LRA) is the largest private funder of lupus research worldwide. The organization aims to transform lupus treatment while advancing towards a cure by funding cutting-edge, innovative research.

At present, treatment for lupus is mostly empiric and involves largely 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. Thus, new conceptual treatments and potential curative approaches with robust and longer-lasting effects are urgently needed. In recent years, the notion of therapeutically resetting or reprogramming the immune system by specifically targeting the autoreactive immune response shows promise as a viable therapeutic strategy to achieve durable, drug-free remission

Engineered cell therapies (ECTs) have emerged as a powerful potential therapeutic approach to treat and possibly cure lupus. A small, academically led clinical trial using CD19-directed Chimeric Antigen Receptor T cell (CAR-T) therapy demonstrated complete remission for over three years, with continued effect, in patients with severe lupus nephritis who were previously resistant to standard-of-care medications. Thus far, this treatment approach, although very involved, has shown relatively low toxicity or side effects. Since the release of preliminary results of this landmark study, there has been an

upsurge of both academic and commercial research activities applying CAR-T and other engineered cell therapy approaches to treat lupus, with many different clinical trials listed on clinicaltrials.gov, many other IND-approved and early phase evaluations initiated, and numerous biotech companies launched on this premise. Different engineered cell platforms, receptor targets, antigen-binding domain designs and engineering methods are being evaluated pre-clinically and clinically. Other types of potentially "immune resetting" agents are now being pursued, such as T cell engagers and CAR-NK cell therapies.

However, much remains to be learned about the mechanism by which these agents may reset the immune system, methods to measure their effect, and the extent of long-term immune reprogramming. Further, some of these biologic agents are costly and involve risky and burdensome administration, which limits access and prohibits care in lower socioeconomic settings, underscoring the need for improved technologies.

To enable accessibility across all patient demographics and socioeconomic statuses, as well as heterogeneous lupus pathologies, improved and alternative immune-resetting approaches should also be explored. Further, a deeper mechanistic understanding of immune reprogramming achieved with existing and emerging therapies would contribute to the development of better and more individualized/precision therapies, as well as predictive and response biomarkers or companion diagnostics.

To promote a variety of strategies and seed a robust pipeline, the LRA has collaborated with Genentech, a member of the Roche Group, to establish the **Lupus Research Alliance-Genentech Award on Immune Resetting Therapies for Lupus (LGA-IRT)** as a new funding mechanism to support the development and mechanistic understanding of safe and accessible immune resetting therapies for lupus patients.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The aim of the program is to remove barriers to patient access by supporting the development of immune-resetting therapies that are cost-effective, with reduced patient burden and risk. The LGA-IRT will provide **$150,000 per year** for two types of projects:

1. **Pilot - one-year,** innovative, high-risk/high-reward proof-of-principle projects on novel technologies or methodologies to achieve immune resetting.
2. **Mechanistic - two-year** mechanistic research projects to more deeply understand current or emerging immune resetting therapies.

Research Emphasis

This program provides funding for projects that advance the development and mechanistic understanding of specific immune cell-depleting or modulating therapies for lupus. These include engineered cell therapies and biologics such as antibodies and bispecific T cell engagers. Other types of therapeutics with strong rationales and the potential for immune resetting will be considered**. Projects must have clear and direct relevance to people living with lupus**.

Projects can encompass the following research areas, including, but not limited to, the examples listed:

Pilot: novel technologies that can achieve immune-resetting and remove barriers to access (1-year projects)

- Development of innovative strategies for achieving “immune reset”-like remission effects in lupus using modalities other than ECTs, such as bispecific antibodies or other immune cell-depleting agents.
- Development of novel ECTs for lupus, with an emphasis on technologies that would improve therapy accessibility, such as faster or cheaper manufacturing, efficacy without pre-conditioning lymphodepletion, efficacy without needing to withdraw from immunosuppressive lupus therapies, or designs that minimize the risk of cytokine release syndrome.
- New and improved construct design and gene editing approaches for use in lupus engineered immune-resetting agents
- Evaluation of ECTs or other immune resetting agents with different antigen-binding domains or lupus specific autoantibody- expressing cellular targets

Mechanistic: mechanistic understanding of current or emerging immune-resetting therapies (2-year projects)

- Innovative analyses of the mechanistic underpinnings and critical factors associated with immune modulation and immune reset after B cell depleting therapies, including analyses of B cells pre- and post-treatment, other lymphoid populations and localized immune microenvironments within tissues. This may be done using pre-clinical animal models or samples from patients that have undergone treatment with B cell depleting agents.
- Biomarker discovery and development identifying markers associated with predicting patient response and/or remission pre- or post- B cell depleting therapy.
- Design and development of novel lupus experimental model systems, including mouse models, that would better enable the study of engineered cell therapies (ECTs) or antibody therapy, including their efficacy with or without preliminary lymphodepletion, the role of lymphodepletion in immune reset, critical mechanisms of action, or response-related biomarkers.

All proposals should be centered around a well-defined translational plan to advance the project to the next development stage. For project proposals outside of the scope described, please contact LRA research staff to discuss the responsiveness of your application to the program.

ELIGIBILITY

Individuals with a doctoral degree (MD, PhD, DO, or equivalent), holding a faculty, or equivalent, position and leading an independent research team at an academic, nonprofit, or government research institution are eligible to apply. US federal government research

laboratories are not eligible for this award. There are no citizenship requirements for investigators applying to this program.

Applicants who have previously received LRA funding must also be current and in good standing with all required reports and previously agreed to Terms and Conditions of the LRA-funded project(s) at the time of application submission.

The same research project may not be submitted for consideration to multiple LRA grant mechanisms in the same year. Such submissions will be triaged without review.

Projects with significant overlap with currently active LRA-funded grants will not be considered and may be administratively withdrawn. Applicants are advised to review the LRA research portfolio to determine if overlap exists and may consult with the LRA's scientific staff if necessary.

APPLICATION PROCESS AND INSTRUCTIONS

A two-stage application process will be employed. A Letter of Intent (LOI) will be used to judge the innovation of the approach, significance, and alignment of the proposed project with the LGA-IRT funding mechanism. The feasibility of gaining timely access to samples and/or data will also be taken in account. Applicants whose LOIs successfully pass this first review stage will be invited to submit an application. Applicants are encouraged to consult with LRA scientific staff to discuss the responsiveness of their proposal to this program.

KEY DATES

RFA Release:	August 4, 2025
Letters of Intent Due:	September 29, 2025
Letter of Intent Decision:	November 24, 2025
Full Applications Due*:	January 15, 2026
Full Application Decision:	March 2026
Expected Start Date:	May 2026

*By invitation only with an approved LOI.

LETTER OF INTENT

LOIs must be submitted via the LRA Grants Management System **by 11:59pm US ET on the stated deadline**. LOIs will not be accepted via any other means.

All templates and instructions, including the Request for Applications and the Letter of Intent template, can be downloaded from within the LOI form. **Please note that when a template is provided, it must be used.**

The following information is required to submit a complete LOI:

Applicant

- The Institution Information and Contact Information will be preloaded with information from the organization profile and applicant profile, respectively.
- For Role, select “Applicant/PI” from the dropdown menu.
- Indicate whether the applicant is currently funded by the LRA and, if so, provide the project title and grant program.
- For Gender and Race and/or Ethnicity, select all that apply. This information is not required and will not be used in any way during the selection process.
- Select from the dropdown menu how the applicant learned about this opportunity.
- Upload, as a PDF, a standard NIH Biosketch for the applicant. Applicants who are not based in the United States may submit a copy of their curriculum vitae, which must be limited to five pages in length.
- Upload, as a PDF, an Other Support Page for the applicant. This should detail all other financial support (current as of the date of the submission) available to the applicant for their research endeavors.

Give Other Users Access to Proposal

To provide institutional administrators and research/grants administrators with access to the LOI form:

1. Click the Collaborators icon  .
2. Enter the required information.
3. Clicking on the plus sign button will add additional rows.
4. Click the Save button at any time to save your work.
5. Click the Invite button. An email with the subject line “Invitation to Collaborate on LRA Grant Proposal” will be sent inviting them to work on the grant proposal. They will be asked to click a link to accept or decline the invitation. Users who accept but are not yet registered in the system will need to do so.

NOTE: A user added as research/grants administrator will be able to edit the LOI form but will not be able to submit it. Only the applicant and any users added as institutional administrators will be able to both edit and submit the LOI form. In addition, only one user can edit the LOI form at a time.

Project Information

- Enter the title of the proposed project.
- Indicate whether the proposed project is in the pilot or mechanistic research area.
- Indicate whether the proposed project involves the use of human samples and/or data.
- Keywords: Select all that apply.

Attachments

Upload the **Letter of Intent** as a PDF. The Letter of Intent template provided on the LRA Grants Management System must be used. Margins must not be less than .5 inches on each side and 12-point Times New Roman or the equivalent should be used for the text. The LOI, responsive to the specific instructions below, **should not exceed two pages**, including any figures, tables, and legends. References are not included in the page limit. The information listed below must be included in the indicated order.

i. **Type of Project Proposal** (Pilot or Mechanistic)

ii. **Brief Background:** Provide a succinct contextual framework for the proposed project. If applying a technology, method or process from a disease or research area other than lupus, describe the rationale of applying it in lupus treatment research.

- If using samples or data from a completed or ongoing clinical trial, describe the trial, its status, timing, and any pertinent information that has bearing on the proposed project.

iii. **Objective and Specific Aims:** State the overall objective and outline the specific aims.

iv. **Impact Statement**: Provide a succinct statement about the potential of the proposed research to improve the standard of care or quality of life of people with lupus.

v. **Project Plan:** Describe the innovation, significance, and approach for the proposed project.

vi. **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 and how the applicant will leverage the expertise of their lupus collaborators to maximize the lupus impact of the project.

- If applicable, include information on type and accessibility of clinical samples and/or clinical data.
- If applicable, include information on any for-profit collaborator and the nature of the collaboration.
- If applicable, indicate any known issues, including financial, legal and/or regulatory, that may affect the commencement or execution of the project.

vii. **References:** List all citations.

Upload, as a single PDF, standard **NIH Biosketches for all key personnel** working on the project. A curriculum vitae may be submitted for key personnel not based in the United States.

Electronic Signatures

When the applicant is ready to submit the LOI:

1. Click on the checkbox next to, “By signing, the applicant certifies that the information contained in the LOI is true, complete, and accurate to the best of their knowledge.”
2. Enter the applicant’s name in the LOI Signature Box.
3. Click on the LOI Signature Date box and click the Now button. This will automatically insert the current date and time.
4. Click the Submit button to submit the LOI, then the Yes button to confirm.

LOI Restrictions
Only one LOI will be accepted per applicant in a grant cycle.

APPLICATION

Applications may be submitted only by applicants whose LOIs have been approved to advance to the next stage of the review process. Applications must be submitted via the LRA Grants Management System **by 11:59pm US ET on the stated deadline**. Detailed instructions for the application form will be available in the LRA Grants Management System. The application form will only be accessible to applicants with approved LOIs.

REVIEW CRITERIA

The most important review criteria are project innovation, significance, and approach. The feasibility of gaining timely access to samples and/or data will also be taken into account. Other criteria will also be considered, including patient impact. Applications that are not aligned with the outlined objectives of this funding mechanism, as well as the goals and the mission of the LRA, will not be peer-reviewed.

Review Process
All eligible grant applications will be peer-reviewed by a panel of external reviewers, the results from which will be considered by the Joint Steering Committee described below and 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 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
For applicants invited to submit full applications, a summary statement containing the reviewers’ critiques will be provided within three months of the funding decision notification date. The LRA does not provide scores or application rankings to applicants.

AWARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The LGA-IRT provides **up to US$150,000 per year over one or two years**. Once an execution payment is made, the distribution of periodic scheduled payments will be contingent upon timely and satisfactory completion of progress reports and execution of project milestones, as determined by the Joint Steering Committee described below.

Indirect costs must not exceed 10% of the total budget and must be included within the $150,000 annual budget cap.

Joint Steering Committee

A Joint Steering Committee (JSC) will be empaneled consisting of three external scientific experts appointed by the LRA and three Genentech scientists. Grant recipients must attend periodic, quarterly (for 1-year projects) or semi-annually (for 2-year projects), virtual JSC meetings to provide progress updates. For two-year projects, continued funding for the second year will be determined by the JSC based on satisfactory progress towards the predetermined milestones.

Grant recipients must attend and/or present each year at the Forum for Discovery, LRA's annual scientific conference. Travel funds (up to $2,000 per year) provided by the grant must be used to pay for travel expenses related to attending Forum for Discovery meetings.

Intellectual Property and Data Sharing Considerations

Genentech will not hold intellectual property rights on any of the grant awards, as long as they are solely invented by the Institution. Following the completion of each project, Genentech may choose to exercise its first option to negotiate with the grantee's institution for licenses under any arising intellectual property and will have the "right to first refusal".

The LRA is committed to the publication and dissemination of data/information and materials developed using the organization's resources. LRA staff will work with the awardees of this funding mechanism to enable this key LRA principle while ensuring intellectual property and commercialization potential. Genentech will have the right to review research data generated by this mechanism and/or use research data for its internal research and development purposes while ensuring that this doesn't interfere with or prevent the ability of the investigator to publish the findings.

Recipients will have the right to publish the results. A copy or draft should be presented to the LRA and Genentech at the time of manuscript submission. Upon request and in good faith, the recipient shall remove any confidential information or "patentable arising IP" and allow reasonable time for patent application before pursuing publication.

INQUIRIES

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LRA Grants Management System:
For assistance with the electronic grant application process, please contact Erin McLaughlin, Manager, Grant Programs, at emclaughlin@lupusresearch.org.