



Rheumatology Research Foundation

Advancing Treatment | Finding Cures

Investigator Award (IA)

The mission of the Rheumatology Research Foundation is to advance research and training to improve the health of people with rheumatic diseases.

This award is intended to support **early-stage investigators with a faculty appointment** during the period that they are developing a project that will be competitive for NIH and/or equivalent funding. It is not intended to be a second postdoctoral fellowship. The purpose is to provide support for basic science, translational, and clinical investigators engaged in research relevant to the rheumatic diseases for the period between the completion of post-doctorate fellowship training and establishment as an independent investigator.

Award Amount: Up to \$125,000 per year (maximum \$375,000)

Award Duration: 3 Years

The following are recommended benchmarks to demonstrate in an Investigator Award application:

- A developed project with preliminary data or analyses that provide foundational support for the feasibility, scientific premise, and/or analysis that they have generated.
- A track record of academic productivity in the form of publications.
- An outline in their application regarding how successful completion of their project will lead to an NIH K grant (or equivalent) and/or independence over the term of the award.
- Solidified support from the Institution and a secure Faculty Position.

If you have any questions about your eligibility or submitting your application, please contact Award & Grants staff at 404-365-1373 or Foundation@rheumatology.org.

We require a non-binding [letter of intent](#) to be submitted no later than July 1, 2024.

The Letter of Intent and Application must be submitted by 5:00 pm ET on the deadline day through ProposalCentral at: <https://proposalcentral.com/>.

Applications Open
April 1, 2024
Letter of Intent Deadline
July 1, 2024
Application Deadline
August 1, 2024
Notification
December 6, 2024
Award Term Begins
July 1, 2025

Guidelines

All award recipients must abide by Foundation [Awards and Grants Policies](#) at all times.

Eligibility

- Applicant must meet all eligibility requirements as outlined in the Awards and Grants Policies.
- Applicant must be an [ACR](#) or [ARP](#) member at the time of submission and for the duration of the award.

ACR members must meet the following criteria:	ARP members must meet the following criteria:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have earned a DO or MD degree and who have completed a Rheumatology fellowship. • Individuals more than 8 years from the beginning of fellowship (or 9 years for pediatric rheumatologists) at the time of award start date may not apply. • MDs and DOs who are not licensed to perform clinical care may not apply. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have earned a PhD*, DSc, or equivalent doctoral degree. • Must be within 6 years of terminal degree at the time of award start date.

- *The Foundation does NOT currently support non-MD/DO scientists working on basic science projects.
- Applicant must have a faculty appointment (e.g. instructor, assistant professor) at the time of the application, and a firm institutional commitment to support the applicant’s academic career for the duration of the award.
- Applicant must be able to commit a minimum of 75 percent full-time professional effort to research, academic career development, and other research related activities. Candidates may not spend more than 25 percent in clinical and/or teaching activities. It is expected that about 50 percent full-time professional effort will be spent on the Foundation Funded project.
- Former or current recipients of research grants at the K level or higher and past awardees of this or equivalent Foundation grants are NOT eligible to apply.
- Individuals at the NIH, FDA and CDC are NOT eligible to apply.
- Applicant may not apply for the **Scientist Development Award** in the same funding cycle.
- Individuals may not apply for more than one Investigator Award per funding cycle.
- Applicant is not eligible to receive funding from the Foundation’s Career Development Bridge Funding Awards during the Investigator Award term.
- Investigators interested in using data from the ACR’s RISE registry as part of their proposed research project need to get their data use request approved before applying for funding. Please visit [RISE for Research](#) for more information on RISE data. RISE data requests should be submitted at least 2 months prior to the Foundation’s application deadline.

The Foundation is sensitive that life and professional challenges may arise. Applicants or awardees may contact the Foundation to request reasonable accommodations to eligibility criteria, award terms, award policies, application deadlines, extensions, etc. when needed. All requests are subject to review and approval by the Scientific Advisory Council.

Foundation Strategic Plan

The Foundation seeks to support the best basic, translational, clinical and epidemiologic research in rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases. Applications directly addressing the current [Strategic Plan](#) are particularly encouraged.

Review Criteria

Applications are rated on the following criteria:

- Relevance of the proposal to the Foundation's mission to improve the health of people with rheumatic disease.
- The proposed research project's scientific merit, innovation and rigor.
- The applicant's submission of a well-developed analytical plan that includes power/sample size considerations (where appropriate).
- The appropriateness of the proposed project as a mechanism for developing the applicant into an independent rheumatology investigator.
- The environment in which training will be conducted, specifically the mentor, the unit, the available facilities, and the potential for inter- and extra-departmental interactions (if applicable).
- The applicant's background, training, prior productivity, and potential to develop into a productive research scientist.
- The institutional commitment to protect applicant's time for research and continued education.

Award Terms and Funding

The institution must agree to protect at least 75 percent of the applicant's full-time professional effort for research, academic career development, and other research-related activities. No more than 25 percent of full-time professional effort will be spent on clinical and/or teaching activities. Award funds may be used for purposes of the Investigator Award project only. Funds may not be used to compensate clinical or teaching efforts. It is expected that about 50 percent of full-time professional effort will be spent on the Foundation funded project.

Awardees cannot have received funding by any of the award mechanisms outlined in the eligibility section when funding for this award begins. The Awardee assumes an obligation to expend award funds for the purposes set forth in the original grant application and to affirm that there is no duplicate funding for these purposes. The Awardee must promptly notify the Foundation of the receipt of any additional award(s) which may potentially have scientific or budgetary overlap with their Foundation award. Overlap will be assessed by the Scientific Advisory Council. If concurrent funding is deemed allowable by the Council, the awardee may be required to re-budget their Foundation award.

Awards are funded for up to three years; however, funding in Years 2 and 3 is contingent upon evidence of a reviewed application, status on a pending submitted application or a detailed resubmission plan toward independent (e.g., NIH, VA) research funding. This information must be included in the Annual Progress Report.

Funds will be used to support up to \$75,000 annual salary, including fringe. Salary support of the PI must reflect the requirements listed above and match the provided distribution of time template. In addition, an amount of up to \$50,000 per year will be provided for supplies and other justified research costs— including salary support for technicians, coordinators, and statisticians, or advanced tuition. Total costs per year may not exceed \$125,000, including 8 percent indirect costs. Award payments will be distributed in two equal installments in July and January of each award year.

Annual Investigators Meeting: The Foundation sponsors an annual Investigators Meeting where all current investigators share progress updates on their funded projects. **Attendance is required for this event, and travel costs should be included as a line item in the grant budget.** Failure to attend the meeting may result in grant cancellation.

ORCID provides a persistent digital identifier (an ORCID ID) that you own and control, and that distinguishes you from every other researcher. **Applicant is required to connect their ORCID Identification Number with ProposalCentral at the time of application.** If the applicant does not have an ORCID Identification Number, one should be created and connected to the application prior to submission. If selected for funding, applicant will be required to “Trust” the Rheumatology Research Foundation as an organization to optimize tracking of project metrics. For instructions on how to link ORCID ID with your application in ProposalCentral, visit [this link](#) and scroll to page 35.

Letter of Intent

In order to help recruit the most appropriate peer reviewers and assist with study section assignments, applicant is required to submit a brief non-binding letter of intent to the Foundation by **July 1, 2024**.

The letter of intent is an online form and includes the following:

- Project Title
- Name and information of Applicant and Institution
- Listing of Mentor(s) and Institution(s)
- Disease Area
- Goals of project (limit 500 characters including spaces)
- Indication of Human Studies or Animal Studies
- Study Section Selection (Basic Science or Clinical): Please select the preferred study section that this application should be reviewed in. A list of Foundation peer reviewers by study section can be found at [this link](#). Please note: The Foundation reserves the right to move the application from the preferred study section, if it would provide a more accurate and fair review.
- Primary Research Method/Area (Ex: Epidemiology, Genetics/Gene Expression, Health Services/Outcomes, etc. Full list available at Letter of Intent Link)
- Research Classification (Ex: Basic Discovery Research/Biology, Early Detection/Diagnosis/Prognosis, Etiology/Mechanisms of Disease, etc. Full list available at the Letter of Intent Link)

- Primary Biomedical/Health Research Category (Ex: Blood, Cancer, Cardiovascular, Congenital Disorders, etc. Full List available at the Letter of Intent Link)

LOI should be submitted online [at this link](#).

Application Instructions

Before starting the online application, you will be required to create a Professional Profile in ProposalCentral, if you have not already. To do so, visit [this link](#) to begin creating your account.

All files must be saved as a PDF. Documents that do not have a required template should be formatted with ½ inch margins, 11-point Arial Font, and single-spacing (does not apply to figures and tables). All applications and documents must be written in English and avoid use of jargon. If terms are not universally known, spell out the term the first time it is used and note the appropriate abbreviation in parentheses. The acronym may be used thereafter.

Note: The Foundation does not require an official signature from an authorized institutional research office at the time of application. However, many institutions require an application to be reviewed prior to submission. Please check with your research office for your institution's requirements.

Applicant/Principal Investigator

You will be asked to confirm your eligibility and provide contact information in this section. In addition to the applicant information requested above, you will be asked to upload the following document:

Applicant Biosketch in NIH Format

Limit to 5 pages; should include any pending support and follow NIH guidelines. Download NIH format Biographical Sketch template by clicking [here](#).

Abstract/Project Information

The information in this section is general information about the grant submission.

If the application is funded, the following information will be entered into the Foundation database and will become public. Do not include proprietary, confidential information or trade secrets in the description section.

- Project Title (limit 200 characters including spaces)**
Make your title specific and detailed. It should clearly state the topic of your proposal.
- Abstract (limit 2,000 characters including spaces)**
Succinctly describe the hypothesis to be tested, the specific aims and global objectives of the project and the hypothesized expected results.
- Relevance to Foundation's Mission (limit 1,000 characters including spaces)**
Briefly describe how your proposed project is relevant to the Foundation's mission to improve the health of people with rheumatic disease.
- Patient Impact (limit 1,500 characters including spaces):** Briefly describe in what ways your Foundation funded award will ultimately impact patients.

E. Keywords

Choose three keywords that accurately describe the project. If the application focuses on a specific disease, please include it as a keyword.

F. The following questions will be used to assign your application to the appropriate study section. Please select one or more of the options in the online application.

- Primary Research Material
- Study Section
- Primary Research Method/Area
- Research Classification
- Primary Biomedical/Health Research Category

Mentors

You will be asked to identify your mentors and provide contact information in this section.

Applicant may have more than one mentor; however, at least one must be a rheumatologist or rheumatology professional and a fellow member of the ACR or ARP. Applicant should include a biosketch and support letter from each mentor (detailed requirements for mentors' letters of support are included below).

This requirement does not exclude having a primary research mentor outside a rheumatology division, but does require that the trainee's academic career development has input from rheumatology faculty (e.g., rheumatologist as a co-mentor). Mentors must have sufficient independent research support to cover the costs of the proposed research project in excess of the allowable costs of the IA. The use of co-mentors to achieve the program's goals is strongly encouraged.

Mentor(s) Biosketch in NIH Format

Limit to 5 pages per biosketch; should include any pending support and follow NIH guidelines. Download NIH format Biographical Sketch template by clicking [here](#).

Mentor(s) Letter of Support

A **signed letter of support** is required from each mentor involved in the project. Limit to 2 pages for primary mentor and 1 page for each additional mentor.

The mentors must provide letters of support detailing the following (as applicable):

- A. **Mentor Experience:** Details of their own previous experience as mentors.
- B. **Environment:** Features of their training program and the institutional environment that will be relevant to the application.
- C. **Financial Resources:** Financial and other resources available to support the applicant specific to their project. Mentors must have sufficient independent research support to cover the costs of the proposed research project in excess of the allowable costs of the IA.
- D. **Mentoring Plan:** Description of the frequency and how they will provide mentoring to the applicant.

- E. **Confirmation of Participation:** Agreement to participate in the project and confirmation regarding availability of time to commit to the project (if specific methodological support, reagents, patients, or other resources are critical to the project, they should also be addressed in the statement).
- F. **Applicant's Qualifications:** Description of applicant's qualifications and track record of productivity, and likelihood to become a future successful investigator.
- G. **Review of Application:** *Explicitly state* that the mentor reviewed the full application prior to submission.

IA Advisory Committee

The IA Advisory Committee form, which will be submitted with each annual progress report, is included below for reference. The Awardee should ensure that the IA Advisory Committee is confirmed according to the composition requirements on Page 13 prior to application submission. If awarded, the applicant will be required to provide the names and institutions of the advisory committee along with award acceptance.

This component of the award is designed to aid the awardee by providing critical constructive review coupled with friendly advice and counsel, giving access to established researchers and other untapped resources. The IA advisory committee will help the awardee stay on track regarding project benchmarks and proposed research training plan and assist in reviewing annual progress reports prior to submission.

Budget & Justification

Applicant should outline an itemized budget not to exceed \$125,000. Funds may be used for supplies, awardee salary and the salaries of technical personnel, but may not be used to acquire administrative or clerical support. Up to \$50,000 per year may be requested for the following types of expenses: (a) research supplies, equipment, core/facility costs, and technical personnel; (b) tuition and fees and books related to didactic courses or career development; (c) travel to research meetings or training; and (d) statistical services including personnel and computer time. Attendance at the Annual Investigators Meeting is required, and travel costs should be included as a line item. Indirect costs are permitted at a rate of 8%. Research funds may not be used for salary support for the awardee or mentors.

Current & Pending Support

Applicant should list all current and pending research support, including but not limited to grants and contracts. Indicate any current startup funds. For each entry specify the overlap between the other awards, applications, and/or sources listed in this application.

Organization Assurances

The applicant assures that the proposal is in compliance with institutional guidelines as provided by the sponsoring institution's clinical and research review boards. All research proposals including human subjects, laboratory animals and recombinant DNA techniques must show documented compliance with institutional guidelines. Copies of approval notices by the institutions IRB, IACUC and/or biosafety committees must be provided as appropriate once awarded.

Required Documents

Research Proposal

Sections A – E are limited to 12 pages including figures and tables. This does not include references, which do not have a page limit.

The applicant is solely responsible for writing the proposal. This section should be presented in such a way that it is clear that the applicant understands the project. **Prior to application submission, the applicant should meet with their mentor(s) to review the research plan. Meeting with the advisory committee (see page 12) prior to submitting the application is encouraged.**

The following questions should be addressed: What do you intend to do? Why is the work important? What has already been done? How are you going to do the work? What will potentially be learned? Describe in detail:

- A. **Specific aims (typically one page):** State the overall research hypothesis, objectives, and specific aims for the proposed project.
- B. **Background & Significance (typically three and a half pages):** Briefly summarize the background to the proposal. Include only key references to prior work that constitutes the foundation of the proposal and preliminary background work. Preliminary data produced by the applicant is essential. Include a statement on the relevance of the proposed project to the prevention, control, or cure of rheumatic diseases and/or better patient outcomes. Describe how the successful completion of the proposed project will add to a better understanding of rheumatic diseases. State the importance of the research described in this application by relating the specific aims to the broad, long-term objectives.
- C. **Innovation (typically half of a page):** Include a statement explaining how the application challenges and seeks to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms. Describe any novel concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions to be developed or used, and any advantage over existing methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.
- D. **Approach:** Summarize the essential features of the experimental design and methodology and interpretation of results. Include a specific plan for data and statistical analysis and a clearly defined power analysis where appropriate. Describe potential pitfalls and alternative approaches where relevant. Preliminary data may also be included in this section.
- E. **Future Direction:** Include a statement summarizing the potential impact and outcomes that this project may have on your career and the field of rheumatology. Please outline how successful completion of the aims outlined in this award will position you for future independent funding.
- F. **Selected References (no page limit)**

Benchmarks for Success

Download, complete, and submit the Benchmarks for Success Template. See example of the template below.

These benchmarks should be applied to all relevant aspects of the proposal and must be measurable. Suggested examples include: timetable for research proposal, submission of abstract(s) and/or publication(s). **Timeline for other grant submission is a required benchmark.**

Distribution of time

Download, complete, and submit the Distribution of Time Template. See example of the template below.

Indicate the percentage of time to be spent in any academic activity for each year of the award. List all clinical, research, teaching or administrative activities. Clinical work related to the proposed research is considered part of the research activity, but routine clinical duties are not. Clinical work related to the project must be clearly justified.

The institution must agree to protect at least 75 percent of the applicant's full-time professional effort for research, academic career development, and other research-related activities. No more than 25 percent full-time professional effort will be spent on clinical and/or teaching activities. It is expected that about 50 percent full-time professional effort will be spent on the Foundation Funded project. Salary support of the PI must reflect the requirements listed above and match the provided distribution of time template.

Research Training Plan

Limit to 2 pages. **This item should be completed by the applicant and approved by the primary mentor.** The research training plan must provide a strategy that details activities that will be used to aid the applicant's development into an independent investigator. The role of the mentor(s) should be clearly outlined. Describe any coursework or other plans for obtaining specific research methodology training.

Letter of Institutional Support

The purpose of this award is not to make an investigator "suitable" for employment, but to provide support for those individuals to whom the institution has made a firm commitment as an academic rheumatologist.

The division chief, department chair, or equivalent institutional official must provide written assurance of the following:

- Institution must agree to protect at least 75 percent of the applicant's professional effort for research for the duration of the grant.
- Institution must agree that no more than 25 percent full-time professional effort will be spent on clinical and/or teaching activities.
- Award funds may only be used for purposes of the Investigator Award project. Funds may not be used to compensate clinical or teaching efforts.

Additional Uploads

Limit to 20 pages. Additional documents which support the grant application may be uploaded.

Benchmarks for Success

The benchmarks (expected status of the project at various points in time) included in your original application will be used to evaluate progress. The milestones should reflect the specific aims of the proposal and be presented within the context of measurable outcomes. **Timeline for grant submission (e.g., NIH, VA) is a required benchmark.**

BENCHMARKS <i>(Should be listed chronologically)</i>	Metrics for Success <i>(Projected end points)</i>	Expected Completion Dates

Distribution of Time/Effort

Give the percentage of time to be spent on academic activities during the award period. List all research, clinical, teaching and/or administrative activities. Clinical work related to the proposed research may be considered part of the research activity, but typically this type of clinical activity would not generate revenue.

The institution must agree to protect at least 75 percent of the applicant's full-time professional effort for research, academic career development, and other research-related activities. No more than 25 percent full-time professional effort will be spent on clinical and/or teaching activities. It is expected that about 50 percent full-time professional effort will be spent on the Foundation Funded project.

ACTIVITY	DURING AWARD (%)	DESCRIPTION
Research Total (min 75%)		
- Foundation Funded Project		
- Other Research Activities		
Clinical Duties		
Teaching		
Administration		
Other (Explain Below)*		
TOTAL (Must Equal 100%)	100%	
*Other Explanation:		

Definitions:

- Foundation Project* Time applicant will spend on activities related to the proposed project
- Other Research* Time applicant will spend on other research projects
- Clinical* Clinical activities including clinical teaching activities, such as ward rounds and clinics
- Teaching* Teaching activities in a non-clinical setting
- Administrative* Administrative duties

Advisory Committee Requirements

Purpose

The advisory committee is designed to aid the awardee through critical constructive review coupled with friendly advice and counsel. The advisory committee Chair should be an individual in addition to the Mentor(s) to whom the awardee can turn for advice on larger issues such as overall research direction and career development. The advisory committee should meet bi-annually throughout the period of the award.

Composition of Committee

The advisory committee should be a multidisciplinary committee composed of **3 to 4** total members of the university faculty who will function as advisors to the awardee. The committee must contain at least one member NOT affiliated with the awardee's division and at least two members who are not the awardee's mentor(s). The advisory committee should be constructed by the awardee and their primary mentor. The committee will be chaired by a member of the committee who is NOT the awardee's primary mentor and not the division or department head.

Meetings

The committee should convene for approximately one hour EVERY 6 MONTHS during the funded project period. At each meeting, the awardee will be expected to give a **formal 15-20 minute presentation** of their work accomplished to date and plans for the future. This will be followed by 15-20 minutes of questions and comments by the committee. This will then be followed by a ~10-minute period during which the awardee is absent and the committee can discuss any concerns with the awardee's progress to date, then a ~10-minute period during which the primary mentor is absent so that the committee can assess the advisee's relationship with the mentor. The committee will spend the final 10 minutes of the meeting presenting its evaluation and offering advice for successfully working towards the awardee's stated career goals and successful completion of the award. The awardee is encouraged to contact the committee as a whole or individually via e-mail, telephone or individual meetings throughout the award period with concerns or questions. Documentation/meeting minutes must be included with each annual progress report.

Annual Progress Reports

Annual progress reports will be due each Spring. It is expected that the awardee and mentor(s) will prepare these reports. The advisory committee will review the reports prior to submission to the Foundation. The advisory committee will be required to provide sign-off on all reports, indicating they have carefully reviewed the reports and provided feedback to the awardee. Please also include the mentorship evaluation form with your yearly reports.

Goals

The result of this mentoring process should be a project that received great support and achieved the outlined benchmarks for success. The Foundation should then receive two (three if a third year is granted) detailed and informative progress reports. The research years should have been devoted to accomplishing the original aims, goals and benchmarks stipulated in the original application (if not changed by the advisory committee). Below are some examples of products that may result from this process:

- Peer-reviewed publication (s) in which the awardee played a substantial role
- Presentations at scientific meetings based on the project
- A thesis or dissertation written in connection with the pursuit of an advanced degree
- Grant applications to other institutes, agencies, etc., that have been accepted or favorably reviewed

Advisory Committee Meeting Record

Use the form below to confirm the committee has **progress meetings EVERY 6 MONTHS**. Documentation/minutes from this meeting must be included with the annual progress report and should be merged to this signature page and uploaded as one PDF file.

Date of Advisory Committee meeting

Date: _____

Advisory Committee Signatures

Advisee/Principal Investigator:

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Advisory Committee Chair (cannot be primary mentor or division/department head):

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Primary Mentor:

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Additional Advisory Committee Member (from outside division):

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Additional Advisory Committee Member (Optional):

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Annually

- At this meeting, the committee reviewed the Annual Progress Report prior to its submission to the Foundation.

****It is required that at least two members above are NOT the advisee's primary mentor(s)***