

2020 TS Alliance Early Stage Investigator Research Grants Program Guidelines

The TS Alliance endeavors to stimulate, support and coordinate research that will lead to a cure for tuberous sclerosis complex (TSC) while improving the lives of those affected. In 2020 we anticipate awarding one or two postdoctoral fellowships and one or two research grants, depending on merit, requested budgets, and funds available.

A description of research funded by previous awards is currently available on the [TS Alliance website](#). Researchers funded by the TS Alliance have a strong history of obtaining additional funding: between 1984 and 2019, principal investigators who received a total of \$21.2 million from the TS Alliance subsequently garnered an additional \$15.6 million from the Department of Defense's Tuberous Sclerosis Complex Research Program and \$326 million from the NIH.

Funding Mechanisms Available in 2020

Please note important change to eligibility criteria in 2020: Only researchers meeting NIH criteria for Early Stage Investigators are eligible for TS Alliance grants this year. See the "Eligibility" section below for details. Established investigators are encouraged to have a postdoctoral researcher from their lab apply.

Postdoctoral Fellowships

- Duration: up to two years (can be shorter if appropriate for the project and trainee)
- Budget limits (can be less if appropriate for the project):
 - Maximum total costs of \$75,000 per year (\$150,000 total) inclusive of both direct and indirect costs
 - No more than 10 percent of the total costs (\$7,500 per year or \$15,000 total) may be applied to indirect costs
 - Postdoctoral fellowship awards may include up to \$1500 for travel expenses to support the applicant's professional development
- Postdoctoral fellowship awards may support any type of basic or translational research relevant to TSC that provides an outstanding opportunity for the trainee's professional growth.
- Postdoctoral fellowship awards are intended to provide funding for an individual who has recently earned a PhD or MD degree and is working with a Sponsor to do research relevant to TSC. The Sponsor must be tenure-track faculty or an equivalent level at a research institution or company. The award is intended to fund the applicant's salary and some of the laboratory supplies or tools necessary to conduct the proposed research. The award is not intended to fund technical support for the project or to purchase equipment in the Sponsor's laboratory. The trainee applicant is considered to be the "Principal Investigator" for the purpose of postdoctoral fellowship awards.

Research Grants

- Duration: up to two years (can be shorter if appropriate for the project)
- Budget limits (can be less if appropriate for the project):
 - Maximum total costs of \$75,000 per year (\$150,000 total) inclusive of both direct and indirect costs
 - No more than 10 percent of the total costs (\$7,500 per year or \$15,000 total) may be applied to indirect costs
 - Up to \$1,500 may be included for travel expenses to attend a relevant scientific meeting
- Research plans should address one of the following four high-priority areas:
 - Understanding phenotypic heterogeneity in TSC, i.e., research on genetic, biologic, or environmental factors that might explain why TSC is so different from person to person
 - Gaining a deeper knowledge of TSC signaling pathways and the cellular consequences of TSC deficiency
 - Improving TSC disease models, whether cell-based, tissue-based, or animal models
 - Developing clinical biomarkers or patient-reported outcome measures for TSC, particularly those that assess disease burden or stratify an individual's risk of progression or developing specific manifestations of TSC
- Research grant awards are intended to provide funding for an independent researcher, whether tenure-track faculty, non-tenure-track faculty or staff, or an equivalent level at a research institution or company. The award may support laboratory supplies, personnel costs, services, or equipment necessary to conduct the proposed research. The TS Alliance fully supports collaborative projects between co-investigators, but only one investigator may be considered the "Principal Investigator" for the purpose of applying through the online submission system.

Key Dates

- Online submission for letters of intent: opens Friday, February 7, 2020
- Letters of intent due: Monday, April 6, 2020 at 11:59 p.m. US EDT
- Full proposal invitations sent by TS Alliance in June
- Full proposals due (by invitation only): Monday, August 17, 2020 at 11:59 p.m. US EDT
- Earliest project start date: December 1, 2020

Eligibility

This opportunity is open to all investigators at established academic or research institutions or at pharmaceutical or biotech companies worldwide. Researchers residing in the United States do not need to be U.S. citizens to apply for funding.

Applicants for both the postdoctoral fellowship awards and the research grants must fit the NIH definition of an [Early Stage Investigator](#). An ESI is a Principal Investigator (PI) who has completed his or her terminal research degree or end of post-graduate clinical training, whichever date is later, within the past 10 years and who has not previously competed successfully as a Program Director (PD) or PI for a substantial NIH independent research award. A list of NIH grants that a PD/PI can hold and still be considered an ESI can be found at: <https://grants.nih.gov/policy/early-investigators/list-smaller-grants.htm>

Process

- Applications will only be accepted through the [online submission system](#).
- Applicants submit a brief Letter of Intent describing their specific aims and the relevance of their proposed work to TSC, describing the rationale and any preliminary data supporting the approach.
- Postdoctoral Fellowship applicants ensure three letters of reference are submitted on their behalf through the online submission system.
- Letters of Intent will be evaluated by reviewers identified by the TS Alliance, including experts selected from the International Scientific Advisory Board or *ad hoc* reviewers who will evaluate the Letters of Intent for scientific rationale, innovation, and potential impact. Additionally, Postdoctoral Fellowship Letters of Intent will be evaluated on the candidate's productivity and qualifications for successfully carrying out the research based on their biosketch and letters of recommendation.
- The TS Alliance will invite a relatively small number of applicants to submit more detailed Full Proposals.

This process is intended to reduce workload on applicants and reviewers by triaging applications based on a brief Letter of Intent. Those invited to submit Full Proposals will have a much higher probability of funding and will be invited to engage in a dialog with the TS Alliance Chief Scientific Officer during the preparation of the Full Proposals to optimize alignment of the scientific proposal with the goals and areas of emphasis of the TS Alliance.

Required Components of the Letter of Intent

For all applicants:

1. Principal investigator's contact information
2. A technical abstract describing the proposed work and its potential impact, not to exceed 2500 characters, including spaces
3. Keywords selected from a list online during the application process
4. A research plan overview of no more than two pages, including the rationale, the concept of how the research will be carried out, potential impact of the proposed work, and any references
5. An [NIH-style biosketch of the principal investigator](#)

For Postdoctoral Fellowship applicants only:

6. Sponsor's NIH-style biosketch and contact information
7. Letters of Reference from three individuals willing to support the applicant's candidacy for a fellowship

If you are applying for significantly less than 24 months of funding or if your budget is significantly less than \$150,000 total, please also include an estimated annual budget (not itemized) with an explanation of why this time and/or funding amount is appropriate for the proposed project.

The components above must be submitted through proposalCENTRAL no later than April 6, 2020 at 11:59 p.m. US EDT.

For Grant-Related Inquiries, Contact:

Zoë Fuchs
Science Project Coordinator
Phone: (301) 562-9890
Email: zfuchs@tsalliance.org