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2024 Early-Stage Investigator Research Grants Program

Letter of Intent (LOI) Instructions

Required components of the LOI

For all applicants:

1. Principal Investigator's (PI) contact information
 - a. ORCID (optional)
2. PI's race and ethnicity (optional)
3. A **Technical Abstract** describing the proposed work and its potential impact, not to exceed 2500 characters, including spaces
4. **Keywords** selected from a list online during the application process
5. A **Research Plan Overview** of **no more than two pages**, including the rationale, the concept of how the research will be carried out, and potential impact of the proposed work. **References may be listed on a third page.**
6. An [NIH-style](#) biosketch of the PI
7. A one-page summary of current **Additional Laboratory Funding** not included on the applicant's or their Sponsor's biosketch, such as departmental or institutional support (e.g., lab startup package). If all funding is described on the applicant's or Sponsor's biosketch, this file is not required.
8. A letter of support from the applicant's department head attesting to the availability of resources (e.g., lab space, other funds, equipment) needed to complete the work.

For **Postdoctoral Fellowship** applicants only, please provide in addition to the above:

1. Letters of reference from **three** individuals (one of these three must be the Sponsor) willing to support the applicant's candidacy for fellowship
2. A copy of their Sponsor's NIH-style biosketch and contact information
3. Sponsor's race and ethnicity (optional)

Hope no matter how complex

Three thick, curved, overlapping lines in shades of blue, orange, and purple sweep across the bottom right corner of the page.

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 in the **Research Plan Overview** 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 [Proposal Central](#) no later than **11:59 pm Eastern Time (US and Canada) on Monday, May 13, 2024.**

Questions?

For questions about using the Proposal Central system, please utilize the online help or contact customer service. Links for [Help](#) and [Customer Service](#) are available in the top right corner of every Proposal Central page. The system is designed and hosted by Altum, so TSC Alliance personnel are unfamiliar with technical aspects of the system.

For questions about content of the application, please contact Sam Metzger at the TSC Alliance. Altum customer service representatives are unable to answer questions about the information we request or require. Email smetzger@tsalliance.org or call (301) 562-9890.

Creating an Account on Proposal Central

If you already have a Proposal Central account, skip to the "Brief Overview of Using Proposal Central" section on the next page.

To create an account:

- Go to the website at <https://ProposalCentral.altum.com/login.asp>.
- Click on the button labeled "CREATE ONE NOW!" below the Application Login boxes.
- Enter a "Username" - This is a unique name that you make up to identify yourself.
- Next enter your "First Name", "Last Name" and "Email Address" - This is the primary email address for the account. This e-mail address will be used for all correspondence and notifications from Proposal Central and the participating grant-makers. This e-mail address can be used in place of the username to login.
- Enter your "New Password" that has between 6 and 12 characters. It must have at least one number in it. NOTE: The password is case sensitive.
- Enter the same password again to "Confirm Password."
- Select a "Challenge Question" - This is a security question for Customer Service can use if you forget your password.
- Enter the "Answer" to the challenge question.
- Tick the boxes for "Terms of Service" and "Acceptable Use Policy."
- Click on "Save."

The system will send you a confirmation email.

To add your primary institution:

- Return to <https://ProposalCentral.altum.com/login.asp> and login as a registered user.

- The next screen should say “You do not have any primary institution. Primary Institution is required, please click [here](#) to add one.”
- Click on the “here” link to search for your institution and click the “Display Results” button. **Use a very simple search** using only a key portion of the institution’s name to ensure that you find the correct entry. For example, a search for “Vanderbilt University” will not find “Vanderbilt Children’s Hospital,” but “Vanderbilt” will.
- Select the correct institution. If your institution does not appear, you can create a new one or contact Customer Service if you think your institution should exist in Proposal Central. Select one with a status of “Confirmed” if at all possible.
- You can then enter your professional contact information and professional profile or click on the “Create New Proposal” link to begin your application submission process. You can enter required contact information during the application process.

Brief Overview of Using Proposal Central

To begin a new Postdoctoral Fellowship or Research Grant application, log in at <https://ProposalCentral.altum.com/>, then:

- Choose the gray “Grant Opportunities” tab and scroll down to the TSC Alliance opportunities or select “TSC Alliance” from the blue button labeled “Filter by Grant Maker”
- Click on the “Apply Now” link at the right-hand side of the appropriate program
 - To apply for a **Postdoctoral Fellowship** or **Research Grant**, choose the TSC Alliance Research Grant Program

To resume a saved LOI, log in at <https://ProposalCentral.altum.com/> and click “Edit” on the row corresponding to your LOI in progress. If your in-progress applications are not visible, click the “Proposals” tab and ensure the “Proposal Status” drop-down is set to All or In Progress.

On the **Title Page**:

- Enter the title of your proposed project
- Choose whether you are applying for a Postdoctoral Fellowship or a Research Grant
- Click Save and then click Next>>

On the **Download Templates & Instructions** page, the document you are reading now is the LOI Instructions document that can be downloaded. You may also download the Program Guidelines (Request for Proposals) and a template for an NIH-style biosketch if needed.

The page entitled **Enable Other Users to Access this Proposal** is optional. This is available if you need a collaborator or sponsor to be able to view or edit the proposal online.

On the **Applicant/PI** page, please ensure that the information from your professional profile, if you have created one, has populated the fields correctly. If not, please click the button labeled “Edit Professional Profile,” enter the required information, and click the

button labeled “Return to LOI/Proposal” to continue. For the purposes of the online application process, only one PI is allowed. However, the proposal may include equal co-PIs if needed for the purposes of directing the project. **For Postdoctoral Fellowship applications**, the PI is the postdoctoral fellow who is the applicant for the award, not the lab head; enter the name of the **Sponsor** (or lab head) in the Sponsor field at the bottom of this page. Click Next>>.

The TSC Alliance **strongly encourages** you to link your profile to your ORCID iD. This allows you and funders such as TSC Alliance to easily link and track publications to funding sources, helping funders demonstrate impact and raise more money to fund more research.

On the **PI Data Sheet** page, please enter the requested demographic information to help TSC Alliance understand the diversity of populations from which we receive LOIs. Data collected on this page will not be shared with reviewers. The information is pulled from the applicant’s Professional Profile on Proposal Central. To change any information, please click the button labeled “Edit Professional Profile” and click Next>> three times to get to the page containing demographic information. Edit your information as desired, click Save, and scroll to the top of the page and click on the orange “Return to LOI/Proposal” button.

On the **Institution & Contacts** page, please ensure that the information from *your* primary institution has populated the fields correctly. If not, please click the button labeled “Change Institution” and select the correct institution. Click Next>>. Do not enter institutions for co-PIs or collaborators.

The **Letters of Reference** page is required ONLY for postdoctoral fellowship applications, but may be used to collect letters of support for research grant applicants if desired. Applicants for research grants may click Next>> to skip this page. *This page can and should be completed well in advance of the due date. It is not necessary for all portions of the LOI application to be completed before requesting Letters of Reference.* Postdoctoral fellowship applicants should use this page to request letters from three references whom they have contacted in advance and who are willing to upload a letter in support of the applicant’s candidacy for a fellowship. One of the letters should be from the postdoc’s Sponsor. Enter the first reference’s email address, and then enter it again in the second box for confirmation. Click the “+” button. A pop-up window will appear. If the reference is in the Proposal Central system, their first and last names will automatically populate. Otherwise, please enter the reference’s first and last names. Click “Send Email” followed by “Close Window.” Repeat for the second and third references. Each reference will immediately receive an email with a request for a letter of reference for you from the TSC Alliance that includes a link they will use to upload a letter of reference. The email includes your name and your project’s title, but nothing else from your application. You may re-visit this page as often as necessary to check whether references have responded, to re-send emails, or to delete a reference and replace it with another. Click Next>>.

On the **Abstract** page, please enter a technical abstract for peer reviewers. You may type directly into the text box or cut-and-paste from another document. Use plain text only. Formatting, superscripts, Greek symbols, etc., are not compatible. Text will be truncated after 2500 characters, including spaces. Since this summary may become public information, do not include any proprietary or confidential information. The abstract should give your peers an overall understanding of the rationale and impact of your proposed research. More detail is available by clicking the “?” button accompanying each text box. If your text exceeds the length limits you will see an error message after clicking Save or Next>> that states, your “entry...was longer than permitted and has been truncated.”

Also on the **Abstract** page, select one or more keywords that are relevant to your proposal by selecting keywords from the list and clicking the “+” or “Add” button. You may select more than one keyword at a time by holding down the Ctrl key in Windows or the Command key in macOS while clicking keywords. These will be used to help identify potential peer reviewers; more-specific keywords are better than general ones. Click Next>>

Uploading Materials in PDF Format

On the **Attachments** page, the Program Guidelines and a blank biosketch template can be downloaded if needed from the bottom section of the screen.

There is no template for the 2-page **Research Plan Overview**. This document should include the specific aims of the project, the rationale for the approach, the significance of the research, a description of how the project is innovative, and references (if needed). Any tables and figures must fit within the two-page limit, while references may be included on **one** additional (the third) page. If you anticipate requesting significantly less than the maximum funding amount (\$150,000 total costs) or duration (two years), please state the amount and duration of funding you expect to request within the text of your Research Plan Overview. Otherwise, reviewers will assume the funding requested will be approximately \$150,000 divided equally over two years. The Research Plan Overview must:

- be in PDF format and not exceed two letter- or A4-size pages (except for the reference page, which may be on one additional third page),
- have no smaller than a 0.5-inch margin on all sides, and
- use a readable [font meeting NIH requirements](#), specifically 11 points or larger using Georgia, Palatino, Arial, or Helvetica font.

Upload files by clicking the “Attach Files” button. On the next screen, select the Attachment Type you are uploading, describe the attachment briefly (e.g., PI biosketch, Sponsor biosketch, etc.), and click on “click here to browse” text to locate the file on your computer or drag and drop the file into the upload box. Then click the “Upload And Continue” if you have additional attachments to upload, or click the “Upload And Return” button to complete the upload and return to editing the LOI. If you clicked “Upload And Continue” but are finished uploading, click the “Back” button at the bottom of the screen. Before clicking Next>> on the Attachments page, ensure all required attachments appear in the current list of uploaded attachments.

- PI Biosketch (and Co-PI Biosketch only if the project requires a co-PI)
- Research Plan Overview
- Summary of funding not captured by the PI Biosketch, if any

And, if a **POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP** proposal:

- Sponsor Biosketch—same “attachment type” as the PI Biosketch

Completing the Process

On the **Reviewer Recommendations** page, you may optionally add names and email addresses for experts whom you recommend we include as reviewers for your proposal or researchers whom you wish us to exclude due to potential conflicts of interest. Click Next>>

Use the **Validate** page to ensure that all required information has been included, and then click the “Submit” button on the **Submit** page to complete the Letter of Intent process. Prior to submission, applications can be saved and resumed at any point.

For grant-related inquiries, please contact:

Sam Metzger, Science Project Manager
smetzger@tscalliance.org

Steven L. Roberds, PhD, Chief Scientific Officer
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