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# 2024 Program Guidelines

## Early-Stage Investigator Research Grants and Postdoctoral Fellowships

The TSC Alliance is dedicated to creating a future where everyone affected by tuberous sclerosis complex (TSC) can live their fullest lives. We invest in early-career researchers to drive innovative TSC research and to foster a diverse group of researchers dedicated to our shared mission. In 2024, we anticipate awarding three or four awards to postdoctoral fellows and early-stage investigators depending on merit, requested budgets, and funds available. A description of research funded previously is available on the TSC Alliance [grants webpage](#).

### ❖ Additional Funding Opportunity

Thanks to generous support from the Wong Family Foundation, the TSC Alliance is proud to offer a funding opportunity as part of our regular research grant and postdoctoral fellowship cycle for 2024. This special two-year award will be designated to the most meritorious application focusing on epilepsy research. All epilepsy-focused Postdoctoral Fellowship and Research Grant candidates will automatically be considered for the [Wong Family Foundation Research Award](#), so no additional information is required during the application process.

### Key Dates

The TSC Alliance's program follows a two-step process. **A Letter of Intent (LOI) is required** and must be submitted by the due date below. LOIs will be peer-reviewed, and a subset of applicants submitting LOIs will be invited to submit full applications.

Step in process	Due Date
LOI due	Tuesday, May 28
Full proposal invitations distributed	Friday, July 12
Full proposal due (by invitation only)	Monday, August 26
Project start date	December 1, 2024

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## Award Budget and Project Period

### All Applicants

- The maximum project period is two years. The project period may be shorter if appropriate for the project.
- The maximum total costs are \$75,000 per year and \$150,000 total, inclusive of both direct and indirect costs.
- Indirect costs may not exceed 10% of the total cost (\$7,500 per year or \$15,000 total).
- Up to \$2,000 total may be allotted toward travel expenses to support the applicant's professional development.

### Postdoctoral Fellowship Applicants

- 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 fund the applicant's salary and some of the laboratory supplies or tools necessary to conduct the proposed research.
- Postdoctoral fellowship awards are not intended to fund technical support for the project or to purchase equipment in the Sponsor's laboratory.

### Research Grant Applicants

- Research grant awards may support laboratory supplies, personnel costs, services, or equipment necessary to conduct the proposed research.

## Eligibility

### All Applicants

- All applicants must have a doctoral-level degree, e.g., MD or PhD or equivalent.
- All applicants must meet the [NIH definition of an early-stage investigator](#) (ESI) as of the LOI due date. 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>
- All applicants must be investigators at established academic or research institutions or at pharmaceutical or biotechnology companies worldwide. Researchers residing in the United States who are not US citizens are eligible to apply.

### Postdoctoral Fellowship Applicants

- Postdoctoral fellowship applicants must be working with and mentored by 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 trainee applicant is considered the "Principal Investigator" for the purpose of postdoctoral fellowship awards.
- Postdoctoral fellowship applicants must have been a member of the Sponsor's laboratory for at least 12 months as of the LOI due date.

- Previous recipients of a TSC Alliance Postdoctoral Fellowship are not eligible to receive a second TSC Alliance Postdoctoral Fellowship award, but they may be eligible to receive a Research Grant as an independent, early-stage investigator.
- Previous recipients of a TSC Alliance Biosample Seed Grant are eligible to receive a Postdoctoral Fellowship if they meet other eligibility criteria.

## Research Grant Applicants

- Research grant Principal Investigator applicants must be an independent researcher, whether tenure-track faculty, non-tenure track faculty/staff, or an equivalent level at a research institution or company.
- The TSC 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.
- Previous recipients of a TSC Research Grant award are not eligible to receive a second Research Grant award.
- Previous recipients of a TSC Alliance Postdoctoral Fellowship or Biosample Seed Grant are eligible to receive a Research Grant if they meet other eligibility criteria.

## Areas of Emphasis

### All Applicants

- Building a strong, diverse, and inclusive pipeline of TSC researchers.
  - The TSC Alliance will work diligently to diversify applications by actively seeking and increasing applications from institutions and researchers underrepresented in TSC research (for example, see [Notice of NIH's Interest in Diversity](#), although not all underrepresented populations listed by NIH may be underrepresented in TSC research).
  - To measure our progress, applicants will be asked to voluntarily provide information on race, ethnicity, and gender via the Professional Profile in ProposalCentral. This information will be used internally by TSC Alliance and will not be shared with peer reviewers.
- Epilepsy for the Wong Family Foundation Research Award
  - Areas of emphasis for a project designated as the Wong Family Foundation Research Award may include (but are not limited to):
    - Basic research in mechanisms relating to intractability, e.g., multi-drug resistant epilepsy
    - Model development (especially for infantile spasms or intractable epilepsy)
    - New technologies related to epilepsy (imaging, electrophysiology, etc.)
- Projects utilizing and/or building upon shared resources, including [TSC Preclinical Consortium](#), [Natural History Database](#), [Biosample Repository](#), or other TSC datasets.
- Addressing recommendations from the [2015 strategic planning conference for TSC research](#).

### Postdoctoral Fellowship Applicants



- At the full proposal stage, emphasis will be placed on mentorship and anticipated impact of receiving a Postdoctoral Fellowship on the applicant's career plans.

## Research Grant Applicants

- Understanding the phenotypic heterogeneity in TSC, i.e., research on genetic/biologic/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/development of specific manifestations of TSC.

## Letter of Intent Process and Content

### All Applicants

- Applications will only be accepted through the online submission system, Proposal Central. The portal will open no later than March 15.
- Applicants must submit all required components:
  - Principal Investigator's (PI) contact information
    - ORCID (optional)
  - PI's race and ethnicity (optional)
  - A **Technical Abstract** describing the proposed work and its potential impact, not to exceed 2500 characters, including spaces
  - **Keywords** selected from a list online during the application process
  - 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. Cited **references may be listed on a third page**.
    -  Preliminary data supporting the rationale and/or feasibility are strongly encouraged.
    - If the project period is significantly less than 24 months or if the budget is expected to be 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.
  - An [NIH-style](#) biosketch of the PI
  - 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.
  -  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.

### Postdoctoral Fellowship Applicants

Postdoctoral fellowship applicants must submit all required components listed under "All Applicants" above and must also submit:

- Letters of reference from **three** individuals (one of these three must be the Sponsor) willing to support the applicant's candidacy for fellowship.

- Letters of reference should be requested through Proposal Central on the online application.
- Sponsor's NIH-style biosketch and contact information
- Sponsor's race and ethnicity (optional)

## Letter of Intent Review Criteria

### All Applicants

- LOIs will be evaluated by reviewers identified by the TSC Alliance, including experts selected from the International Scientific Advisory Board or ad hoc reviewers who will evaluate the LOIs for
  - Relevance to TSC Alliance's mission
  - Innovation
  - Scientific merit
  - Potential impact.

### Postdoctoral Fellowship Applicants

- Postdoctoral fellowship LOIs will also be evaluated based upon impact and productivity of the applicant's prior research, and qualifications for successfully carrying out the research based upon their biosketch and letters of recommendation.

## Additional Information

**TSC Alliance Grant Policies are available at [tscalliance.org/researchers/grants-funding/](https://tscalliance.org/researchers/grants-funding/)**

- Intellectual Property Policy
- Human and Animal Use Policy
- Policy on the Use of Human Fetal Tissue and/or Human Embryonic Stem Cells in Research
- Open Science Policy

### For grant-related inquiries, please contact:

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