

2021 TS Alliance Early-Stage Investigator Research Grant & Postdoctoral Fellowship 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 2021 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 previously is available on the TS Alliance [grants webpage](#).

Areas of Emphasis

- Building a strong, diverse, and inclusive pipeline of TSC researchers, and
- Addressing [recommendations from the 2015 strategic planning conference for TSC research](#)

Important Changes from Previous Cycles

- Limitations on eligibility
 - Applicants for either a Postdoctoral Fellowship or a Research Grant must fit the NIH definition of an [Early-Stage Investigator](#) (this change was implemented in 2020).
 - Postdoctoral Fellowship applicants must have been a member of the Sponsor's laboratory for at least 12 months as of the Letter of Intent due date.
 - Previous recipients of a TS Alliance Postdoctoral Fellowship are not eligible to receive a second TS Alliance Postdoctoral Fellowship but may be eligible to receive a Research Grant as an independent, early-stage investigator.
- Emphasis on mentoring and anticipated impact of receiving a Postdoctoral Fellowship on the applicant's career plans
- Efforts to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion of traditionally underrepresented groups 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)
 - The TS Alliance will work diligently to diversify applications by actively seeking and increasing applications from institutions and researchers 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 TS Alliance and will not be shared with peer reviewers.

Key Dates

<i>Online submission for letters of intent (LOI) opens</i>	March 19
<i>LOIs due</i>	May 17
<i>Full proposal invitations distributed</i>	June 25
<i>Full proposals due (by invitation only)</i>	August 23
<i>Earliest project start date</i>	December 1, 2021

Two Funding Mechanisms are Available in 2021

Postdoctoral Fellowship Awards

Duration: up to **two years**

- May be shorter if appropriate for the project and trainee

Budget Details:

- **Maximum** total costs of \$75,000 per year (**\$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)
- **Professional development:** up to \$1,500 may be allotted toward travel expenses to support the applicant's professional development

Postdoctoral awards may support any type of **basic or translational** research relevant to TSC that provides an outstanding opportunity for the trainee's professional growth. These awards are intended to provide funding for an individual with an MD or PhD degree who is 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 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 the **Principal Investigator** for the purpose of postdoctoral fellowship awards.

Research Grant Awards

Duration: up to **two years**

- May be shorter if appropriate for the project

Budget Details:

- **Maximum** total costs of \$75,000 per year (**\$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)
- **Professional development:** up to \$1,500 may be allotted toward travel expenses to attend a relevant scientific meeting

Research plans should address one of the following high-priority areas:

1. 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
2. Gaining a deeper knowledge of TSC signaling pathways and the cellular consequences of TSC deficiency
3. Improving TSC disease models, whether cell-based, tissue-based, or animal models
4. 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

Research grant awards are intended to provide funding for an independent researcher, whether tenure-track faculty, non-tenure track faculty/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.

Additional Information for Both Funding Mechanisms

Eligibility

TS Alliance research grants and postdoctoral fellowship awards program is open to investigators at established academic/research institutions or at pharmaceutical/biotechnology companies worldwide. Researchers residing in the United States do not need to be US 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>

Applicants for postdoctoral fellowships must have been in their current lab for **at least twelve months**. Applicants who have already been awarded a postdoctoral fellowship from the TS Alliance may not apply for another postdoctoral fellowship.

Process

- Applications will only be accepted through the online submission system (ProposalCentral). See Key Dates section to determine when portal will open.
- All applicants must submit required components of a Letter of Intent (LOI) as listed in the following section.
- **Postdoctoral Fellowship** applicants must ensure three letters of reference are submitted on their behalf through the online submission system. A letter written by the applicant's Sponsor may be one of the three letters submitted.
- LOIs 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 LOIs for scientific rationale, innovation, and potential impact.
 - Additionally, **Postdoctoral Fellowship** LOIs will be evaluated on the candidate's mentoring plan, career impact statement, past productivity, and qualifications for successfully carrying out the research based on the 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 LOI. Those invited to submit a Full Proposal will have a much higher probability of funding and are invited to engage in a dialog with TS Alliance scientific staff during preparation of the Full Proposal 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 (ORCID requested but not required).
2. The Principal Investigator'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 Principal Investigator.
7. A one-page summary of current laboratory funding not included on the applicant's or Sponsor's biosketch, such as departmental or institutional support, e.g., lab startup package.

Additional required components only for **Postdoctoral Fellowship** applicants:

1. Sponsor's NIH-style biosketch and contact information.
2. The Sponsor's race and ethnicity (optional).
3. Letters of reference from three individuals (one of these three may be the Sponsor) willing to support the applicant's candidacy for a fellowship.
4. A one-page Career Impact statement of the potential impact of a TS Alliance Postdoctoral Fellowship on the applicant's career plan:
 - a. Describe the new or enhanced research skills and knowledge you will acquire as a result of the proposed award;
 - b. Describe any structural activities that are part of the developmental plan, such as coursework or workshops that will help you learn new techniques or develop needed professional skills;
 - c. Describe your short-term and long-term career development goals and how this fellowship would help you achieve them.
5. A one-page Mentoring Plan describing:
 - a. Applicant's research responsibilities
 - b. Scientific and technical skills development
 - c. Applicant's participation in writing reviews, articles, and grant applications
 - d. Professional development resources
 - e. Guidance and training for publication and presentation opportunities

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) of why this time and/or funding amount is appropriate for the proposed project.

For Grant-Related Inquiries, Contact:

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