

Request for Applications 2026 GLOBAL TEAM SCIENCE AWARD \$3 million over 3 years

CONTENTS

Background	
Program Description	2
Principles and Objectives	2
Research Emphasis Areas	
Award Structure	
Eligibility	4
Requirements Summary	
Application Process and Instructions	5
Key Dates	5
Review Criteria	9
Award Terms and Conditions	10
Inquiries	12
Appendix I	

BACKGROUND

The Lupus Research Alliance (LRA) is the largest private funder of lupus research worldwide. The organization aims to transform lupus treatment while advancing towards a cure by funding cutting-edge, innovative research.

The central challenge to developing safer and more effective treatments for people with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) stems from the tremendous clinical and mechanistic heterogeneity of SLE. To overcome this challenge, the LRA has established the Global Team Science Award (GTSA), which provides up to US\$3 million over three years to support **interdisciplinary**, **collaborative**, and **highly synergistic** projects that focus on the molecular understanding of human lupus and the heterogeneity of the disease. Successful teams will push the boundaries of innovation and bridge research and clinical efforts in lupus by using **cutting-edge technologies** to address critical questions that could bring about **breakthroughs** in lupus care, research, or drug development.

The LRA invites established investigators worldwide and across scientific disciplines to submit Letters of Intent (LOIs) for 3.5-month planning grants (up to US\$10,000 each) to assemble competitive multi-institutional teams and to develop competitive proposals. The LRA anticipates that up to five LOIs will be invited to submit applications, and one to two full applications will be funded. Only proposals with outstanding scores will be awarded.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The GTSA mechanism is strongly aligned with LRA's strategic priorities to 1) define human lupus heterogeneity by molecular pathology to stratify patients by active disease mechanisms, 2) integrate the research continuum to bring advances to patients, and 3) enable global research/technology collaborations.

Principles and Objectives

Proposed projects must apply cutting-edge technologies to the study of lupus clinical samples or datasets in a way that interconnects technology and human immunology experts with clinical scientists to bring about breakthroughs in the molecular understanding of human lupus and the heterogeneity of the disease through cross-disciplinary synergies.

Proposed projects must adhere to the following five principles and objectives:

- Interdisciplinary research, defined as research across disciplinary boundaries
 that attracts and engages scientific talent from diverse research and clinical fields
 such as systems biology, computational biology and bioinformatics, biomedical
 engineering, immunology, microbiology, molecular biology, biochemistry,
 rheumatology, nephrology, neurology, and infectious diseases.
- Collaboration, where the relevant research goals can only be achieved if all Co-Principal Investigators (Co-Pls) combine their complementary expertise and resources in a novel and fully integrated research program. The LRA strongly encourages that these collaborations be multinational.
- **Synergy**, in which the team's research constitutes an effort much greater than the sum of the individual team members' efforts should they be working alone.
- Cutting-edge technologies, which for the purpose of this RFA denote the
 expectation that patient samples and clinical data will be studied using state-ofthe-art analytic approaches such as, but not restricted to, scRNA-Seq, REAP-Seq,
 CITE-Seq, ATAC-Seq, CyTOF, proteomics, metabolomics, machine learning
 algorithms, or any other cutting-edge approach investigators may wish to use.
 While this RFA requires the application of new technologies, it does not support
 their development.
- Breakthrough research characterized by a high potential for shifting or creating new paradigms. Such research goes beyond existing doctrines, models, and approaches to open new research areas or deliver critical knowledge to transform lupus care and research.

Research Emphasis Areas

Examples of the types of research questions that could be explored include, but are <u>not</u> limited to, the following **in the context of human lupus**:

- Understanding functional consequences of variants, genes, and pathways implicated by human genetic studies
- Characterizing the immunologic, genetic, and molecular factors differentiating responders and non-responders to approved or investigational therapies in lupus
- Correlating clinical subsets of lupus with peripheral biomarkers
- Understanding how the mechanisms of disease differ for different clinical manifestations of lupus
- Defining genetic or molecular factors conferring susceptibility to developing neuropsychiatric lupus, cutaneous lupus, or lupus nephritis
- Utilizing the Lupus Nexus registry/biorepository, Accelerating Medicines Partnership (AMP) SLE samples/data, or other high-quality samples/data sets to examine racial and ethnic differences in key cellular/molecular pathways.

Activities that will **not** be supported as part of this funding mechanism:

- Generation of new clinical cohorts (see appendix for information about available cohorts). The use of existing cohorts is permitted. Preference will be given to groups proposing to use Lupus Nexus samples and/or data (see appendix).
- Development of new technologies
- Conducting clinical trials; however, mechanistic studies related to already funded clinical trials will be considered
- Discovery or validation of novel therapeutic targets as the sole focus of the project
- Development of clinical outcome measures
- Exclusively clinical collaborations studying heterogeneity from a purely clinical perspective

Award Structure

The GTSA requires that all Co-Pls work on a common project from distinct angles. Specifically, the team should address a single overall question or challenge by employing the complementary skills and contributions of the Co-Pls and realizing the synergies within this collaborative environment.

A team must consist of at least three but ideally not more than five Co-Pls, one of whom must serve as the Corresponding Co-Pl. The team must be multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional, with Co-Pls from at least three institutions. There are no restrictions on the number of disciplines represented on the team. Collaborations between human immunology researchers, technology experts, and lupus clinicians are strongly encouraged.

General operational expectations for each funded team include sharing of data among team members in real time and frequent interactions among Co-Pls and their research teams. At a minimum, this should include frequent conference calls and one to two meetings per year, one of which should coincide with the annual evaluation meeting.

Applicants who wish to consult with program staff to discuss the responsiveness of their proposal to this program or to discuss ideas for resources that might benefit this initiative

are invited to do so. Please refer to the contacts provided at the end of the document.

ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must hold an MD, PhD, DVM, or equivalent academic degree with a faculty or equivalent position at a college, university, medical school, or comparable institution. The Corresponding Co-PI must hold a faculty or equivalent position at the rank of associate or full professor at the time of letter of intent submission.

Applications may be submitted by domestic or foreign non-profit organizations, public or private, such as colleges, universities, hospitals, or laboratories. The LRA does not impose geographic restrictions or citizenship requirements. Researchers working outside of the United States are encouraged to apply.

For-profit entities such as pharmaceutical or biotechnology companies may participate as collaborators but are **not** eligible to receive any financial support through the grant award.

Projects with significant overlap with currently active LRA-funded grants will not be considered and may be administratively withdrawn. Applicants are advised to review the LRA research portfolio to determine if overlap exists and may consult with the LRA's scientific staff if necessary.

Previous recipients of a Global Team Science Award seeking to further their research are eligible to submit an application for a **new** project. The new submission should not be considered a continuation of the original GTSA. Rather, the proposed project should either be (1) an entirely new project or (2) a project with new questions built on insights gained from the original GTSA project. The grant will be awarded on a competitive basis.

REQUIREMENTS SUMMARY

- The core team must consist of at least three but ideally not more than five Co-Pls, one of whom must serve as the Corresponding Co-Pl.
- The Corresponding Co-PI must hold a faculty or equivalent position at the rank of associate or full professor.
- The core team must be multi-institutional, with Co-Pls from at least three institutions.
- The core team must be multi-disciplinary.
- The proposed project must fulfill the five principles and objectives listed above.
- The proposed research must be strongly aligned with LRA's strategic priorities as described above.
- Studies using Lupus Nexus samples and data are preferred.
- If animal studies are proposed, they must constitute a focused component linked to the results of human studies and aimed towards further understanding of human lupus.

APPLICATION PROCESS AND INSTRUCTIONS

A two-stage application process, bridged by a planning grant, will be employed. A Letter of Intent (LOI) will be used to judge the significance, innovation, and alignment of the proposed project concept with the GTSA funding mechanism. The specific LOI review criteria are detailed below. Applicants with approved LOIs will be invited to submit an application and will be provided with a 3.5month planning grant of up to US\$10,000 to develop the full proposal.

KEY DATES

RFA Release: June 30, 2025

Letters of Intent Due: September 30, 2025 Letter of Intent Decision: November 2025

Planning Grant Timeline: December 1, 2025 – March 15, 2026

Applications Due*: March 16, 2026
Application Decision: September 2026
Earliest Start Date: December 1, 2026

*By invitation only with an approved LOI

LETTER OF INTENT

LOIs must be submitted via the <u>LRA Grants Management System</u> by 11:59pm US ET on the stated deadline. LOIs will not be accepted via any other means.

All templates and instructions, including the Request for Applications and the Letter of Intent template, can be downloaded from within the LOI form. **Please note that when a template is provided, it must be used.**

The following information is required to submit a complete LOI:

Applicant

- The Institution Information and Contact Information will be preloaded with information from the organization profile and applicant profile, respectively.
- For Role, select "Corresponding Co-PI" from the dropdown menu.
- Indicate whether the applicant is currently funded by the LRA and, if so, provide the project title and grant program.
- For Gender and Race and/or Ethnicity, select all that apply. This information is not required and will not be used in any way during the selection process. The LRA collects this data for administrative purposes only.
- Select from the dropdown menu how the applicant learned about this opportunity.
- Upload, as a PDF, a standard <u>NIH Biosketch</u> for the Corresponding Co-PI. Applicants who are not based in the United States may submit a copy of their curriculum vitae, <u>which must be limited to five pages in length</u>.
- Upload, as a PDF, an <u>Other Support Page</u> for the Corresponding Co-PI. This should detail all other financial support (current as of the date of the submission) available to the applicant for their research endeavors.

Give Other Users Access to Proposal

To provide co-applicants and institutional administrators with access to the LOI form:

- 1. Click the Collaborators icon .
- 2. Enter the required information.
- 3. Clicking on the plus sign button will add additional rows.
- 4. Click the Save button at any time to save your work.
- 5. Click the Invite button. An email with the subject line "Invitation to Collaborate on LRA Grant Proposal" will be sent inviting them to work on the grant proposal. They will be asked to click a link to accept or decline the invitation. Users who accept but are not yet registered in the system will need to do so.

NOTE: A user added as a co-applicant, financial administrator, research/grants administrator or signing official will be able to edit the LOI form but will not be able to submit it. Only the applicant and any users added as institutional administrators will be able to both edit and submit the LOI form. In addition, only one user can edit the LOI form at a time.

Key Personnel

Add all Co-PIs (but not the Corresponding Co-PI) in this section. To add a Co-PI:

- 1. Click the plus sign (+) button.
- 2. Select "Co-PI" from the Role dropdown menu. Enter the requested information. Required fields are denoted with an asterisk.
- 3. Click the Save Draft button.
- 4. Upload a standard NIH Biosketch for the Co-PI. Applicants who are not based in the United States may submit a copy of their curriculum vitae, which must be limited to five pages in length.
- 5. Upload an Other Support Page for the Co-PI. List all pending and current support (institutional, federal, commercial, etc.) for the applicant's research endeavors. Indicate specific aims, funding amounts, percent effort, funding period, and whether there is scientific overlap with the proposed research. If overlap exists, a statement regarding intended dispositions of funds in the event dual granting is required.
- 6. Upload a Letter of Collaboration from the Co-PI confirming their willingness to be an active participant in the proposed project.
- 7. Click the Submit button, then the Yes button, to submit the record.

Project Information

- Enter the title of the proposed project.
- Indicate whether the LOI is a resubmission and, if so, provide the title of the prior application.
- Keywords: Select all that apply.

Attachments

Cover Page: Provide the name, institution, position, and role on the team for each Co-PI

on the cover page template provided on the LRA Grants Management System. Upload as a PDF.

Letter of Intent: Upload as a PDF. The Letter of Intent template provided on the LRA Grants Management System must be used. Margins must not be less than .5 inches on each side and 12-point Times New Roman or the equivalent should be used for the text. The LOI, excluding the resubmission statement (if applicable) and references, should not exceed four pages. Figures, tables, and legends are included in the page limit. The information listed below must be included in the indicated order. Section word limits are offered as suggestions only.

- i. **Resubmission Statement (if applicable):** Revised applications are required to include a resubmission statement, not to exceed a half page (300 words). The statement should highlight changes from the original submission and explain how the modifications address the concerns of the original review panel.
 - A resubmission is an application that was not funded in one of the previous two application cycles.
 - An applicant who is unsuccessful may revise their original application only once.
 - If substantial changes are made to the original application, the application should not be submitted as a resubmission.
- ii. **Brief Background**: Provide a succinct contextual framework for the proposed project. (100 words)
- iii. **Objective:** State the overall research question and aim of the proposed project. (75 words)
- iv. **Innovation:** What novel questions, approaches, or areas does the team plan to explore? (250 words)
- v. **Research Plan:** Outline the research approaches anticipated to be pursued by each core team member in addressing the team's overall question. (500 words for all Co-Pls)
- vi. **Team Attributes:** How will team members work together, that is, what is the general collaboration plan? How will the team's activities be integrated? What synergies does the team plan to realize? Explain how the research efforts described in the research plan will be interlaced to create a truly integrated endeavor that is much greater than the sum of its parts. (300 words)
- vii. **Significance:** Briefly state the anticipated impact of the outcomes of the proposed project on improving lupus treatments and clinical care. (75 words)

- viii. **Impact Statement:** Provide a succinct statement about the potential of the proposed research to improve the standard of care or quality of life of people with lupus.
- ix. **Resource Assessment:** Provide an overview of the team's ability to carry out this project and outline the resources and expertise each team member will contribute. (200 words)
- x. **Planning Grant:** The purpose of the planning grant is to facilitate the interactions between prospective team members necessary for the preparation of a highly coordinated and synergistic proposal. Describe the key activities to be undertaken during the three-month planning grant stage should the LOI be approved. Describe how the planning grant funds will be used to generate the application and provide a corresponding itemized budget for the planning grant. (500 words)

Planning Grant Budget: Applicants invited to apply will receive a planning grant of up to US\$10,000 for the period between December 1, 2025, and March 15, 2026. The level of support will depend partially on the geographic distribution of the proposed team members and must be well-justified within the LOI. Indirect costs on the planning grant are not allowed. Should not exceed one page. Upload as a PDF.

Electronic Signatures

When the applicant is ready to submit the LOI:

- 1. Click on the checkbox next to, "By signing, the Corresponding Co-PI certifies that the information contained in the LOI is true, complete, and accurate to the best of their knowledge."
- 2. Enter the Corresponding Co-PIs name in the LOI Signature Box.
- 3. Click on the LOI Signature Date box and click the Now button. This will automatically insert the current date and time.
- 4. Click the Submit button to submit the LOI, then the Yes button to confirm.

LOI Restrictions

Only one LOI will be accepted per Corresponding Co-PI in a grant cycle. The Corresponding Co-PI may not participate on any other GTSA. However, other Co-PIs may do so if the projects they are involved with are non-overlapping and a compelling justification for multiple participation has been provided.

APPLICATION

Applications may be submitted only by applicants whose LOIs have been approved to advance to the next stage of the review process.

Planning Grant

Approval of the LOI will trigger the release of a 3.5-month planning grant from the LRA to be used for the sole purpose of developing a well-coordinated and synergistic GTSA application. The purpose of the planning grant is to facilitate the interactions between prospective team members necessary for the preparation of a competitive proposal. The

planning grant will provide up to US\$10,000, which must be used between December 1, 2025, and March 15, 2026. During this period, the team must develop a detailed plan of the proposed research activities for the three-year grant term. The level of support must be well justified in the LOI. Indirect costs on the planning grant are **not** allowed.

Detailed instructions for completing the application will be provided after LOI approval. In brief, the following sections will be included in the research plan: 1) Goals of the project; 2) Interdisciplinary aspects; 3) Relevance and significance; 4) State of the art of the field relevant to the project; 5) Research approach; 6) Description of the collaborative and synergistic aspects of the Team; 7) Project implementation and coordination; 8) Risk management; 9) Milestones and corresponding timeline.

Applications must be submitted via the LRA Grants Management System by 11:59pm US ET on the stated deadline. Detailed instructions for the application form will be available in the LRA Grants Management System. The application form will only be accessible to applicants with approved LOIs.

REVIEW CRITERIA

The scientific review committee will consider each of the following criteria in assigning the application's overall score, weighting them as appropriate for each application.

LOI Review

- Alignment of the concept proposal with the objectives and scope of the GTSA and the LRA's strategic research priorities
- Potential of the proposed collaborative team: Do the Co-Pls have a demonstrated track record of innovation and of shifting scientific paradigms and breaking open new areas of research? Do the Co-Pls have a history of creating and maintaining meaningful scientific collaborations with investigators in other disciplines or within the same discipline? Please note that prior collaborations among the proposed team members are not required. Do the core team members complement each other's expertise? Does the proposed team create a unique research environment that can serve as a catalyst for scientific breakthroughs in lupus? Does the team have compelling preliminary collaboration and integration plans? Please note that the planning grant will enable the full development of these components.
- Novelty of the proposed research: Does the project employ novel concepts, approaches, or methods? Are the aims original and innovative? Does the project challenge existing paradigms or develop new methodologies?
- Potential impact of the overall effort on lupus treatments or care
- Environment: Does the proposed project take advantage of unique features of the scientific environments at each site? Is there evidence of institutional support?

Application Review

- Assessment of the proposed research approach
- Evaluation of the interdisciplinary character of the team in relation to the proposed project and the added value of the collaboration
- Assessment of the proposal's innovation

- Potential for research breakthroughs in lupus that could benefit people living with the disease
- Assessment of the implementation and coordination aspects of the proposal
- Alignment with LRA's strategic priorities
- Review of Data Sharing Plan

Review Process

All eligible grant applications will be peer-reviewed by a panel of external reviewers, the results from which will be considered by the LRA Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) in the context of the LRA grant portfolio and LRA's strategic research priorities. The SAB will make funding recommendations to the LRA Board of Directors, which will, in turn, consider all previous recommendations and provide a lay perspective including patients' concerns and expectations, as well as deliberations on the business aspects of funding the recommended grants. The LRA Board of Directors will make all final funding decisions.

AWARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Global Team Science Award

The GTSA will be supported for up to US\$1,000,000 per year for up to three years. Indirect costs must not exceed 10% of the total budget (excluding equipment) and must be included within the US\$1,000,000 annual budget cap. The Co-PIs, including the Corresponding Co-PI, must devote a minimum of 5% effort on this award. Equipment purchase is discouraged unless indispensable for the conduct of the project. If equipment is to be purchased, there must be a justification included within the grant application, and the equipment purchase can only be approved if it will occur during the first year of the award. The LRA will provide all award funds to the Corresponding Co-PI's institution, which will be responsible for distributing the monies to the other Co-PIs' institutions according to the LRA-approved budget.

The LRA is committed to the publication and dissemination of all information and materials developed using the organization's resources. All recipients of LRA awards must agree to this principle and must take steps to facilitate availability of data and materials as similarly required by NIH. A data sharing plan describing how data generated from the project will be managed and shared must be part of the application submission. The LRA is implementing a new data strategy for research, which expands and emphasizes our commitment to the sharing of data and research resources generated with LRA funds. As such, awardees are expected to account for data sharing activities in project budgets, including but not limited to data storage and sharing costs, data analysis and processing costs (including software and online platforms), as well as dedicated expert personnel. Should a project be selected to submit a full application, detailed budget instructions will be provided. LRA funding must be acknowledged in all publications and presentations of the supported research.

Forming partnerships with the grant recipients is one of the cornerstones of the LRA's funding philosophy. Towards this end, awardees are required to attend the LRA annual scientific conference, Forum for Discovery, as well as the Alliance of Global Team Science

Awardees Meeting that usually takes place the day before Forum for Discovery and share the concepts and progress of their research. Travel funds, provided by the grant award, should be used to attend these meetings.

Start-up Period

The start of the three-year project will follow a two-month start-up period. During the start-up period, the team is required to complete all administrative and research preparatory tasks required to fully initiate the research activities of the team. These should include, but are not limited to, the execution of subcontracts, acquisition of institutional resources at all primary institutions, finalization of common protocols, establishment of a common data sharing platform, finalization of operating processes for the team, etc. The successful completion of these preparatory activities, as determined during the project launch meeting (see below), will trigger standard award payments. Funds for the start-up phase must be budgeted within the overall \$3 million grant budget. Grant activation is based on the timely submission and approval of all activation materials. The Corresponding Co-PI should contact the LRA if there are any delays with the acquisition of all required documents within the allotted deadlines.

Project Launch and Annual Evaluation Meetings

The start-up phase will culminate in a virtual project launch meeting between the LRA staff and the GTSA Co-Pls to ensure that the team is well poised to begin their research effort. Virtual annual evaluation meetings—conducted at the end of year one and year two of the grant—will include a specially empaneled evaluation committee consisting of three external experts who will assess the Team's progress and advise the LRA as well as the Co-Pls. Progress reports are required at the end of each year and will be reviewed by LRA staff and external scientific advisors prior to the annual evaluation. Continued funding beyond the first year of the grant is based on demonstrating research progress and on meeting the pre-established project aims.

LUPUS NEXUS

We strongly encourage applicants to incorporate **Lupus Nexus (LNx)** data and biosamples into their research projects when applying for this grant.

The Lupus Nexus (LNx) is a unique lupus registry, biorepository, and data exchange platform designed to facilitate and accelerate human lupus research. Central to LNx is the Lupus Landmark Study (LLS), an ongoing observational, longitudinal study (conducted through the LRA funded and managed Lupus Clinical Investigator's Network) that will recruit 3,500 individuals with lupus over the next five years into one of four cohorts: 1) new onset (within 12 months of diagnosis); 2) extra-renal flaring SLE; 3) active Lupus Nephritis; and 4) prevalent. As of the release of this RFA about 450 individuals have been recruited into the study, and it is anticipated that by the time of GTSA award activation (January 2027) there will be about 1,000 participants. The LLS collects medical information (Electronic Health Records and familial autoimmune history), clinician-reported outcomes (SLEDAI-2K, SLEDAI-Flare, SLICC/ACR Damage Index, NPSLE, etc.), patient-reported outcomes (SLAQ, PROMIS, LupusQoL, etc.), alongside an extensive range of longitudinal biosamples (e.g., plasma, serum, PBMC, gDNA, RNA,

urine, saliva, and stool). The Lupus Nexus' <u>Data Repository</u>, <u>Exchange</u>, and <u>Analytics platforM</u> (DREAM) houses all the data and serves as a centralized data hub for researchers worldwide. For more information about LNx, visit <u>LupusNexus.org</u>. The "For Researchers" link at the bottom of the homepage enables users to submit inquiries and to apply for access to LNx biosamples and data.

Applicants planning to propose the use of LNx biosamples and/or data in their GTSA projects should complete the following Jira form no later than <u>September 30, 2025</u>, to enable verification of the availability of the requested resources should the grant be funded.

https://lupusnexus.request.lupusresearch.org/servicedesk/customer/portals
Jira form to be completed: "DREAM Access Application"
Please select: "Pending Grant Award", "Lupus Research Alliance", and "Global Team Science Award (GTSA)".

INQUIRIES

Scientific:

Mara Lennard Richard, PhD Scientific Program Officer Lupus Research Alliance mrichard@lupusresearch.org 646-884-6086

Administrative:

Diomaris Gonzalez
Director, Grant Programs
Lupus Research Alliance
dgonzalez@lupusresearch.org
646-884-6056

LRA Grants Management System:

For assistance with the electronic grant application process, please contact Erin McLaughlin, Manager, Grant Programs, at emcLaughlin@lupusresearch.org.

APPENDIX I

Examples of sources of data and samples for lupus research

Lupus Nexus (LNx)

- As of the release of this RFA, LNx includes data and samples from 450 individuals with lupus
- By the time of grant activation (January 2027), it is expected that LNx will have data and samples from about 1,000 participants

Childhood Arthritis and Rheumatology Research Alliance (CARRA) Registry

<u>ClinicalStudyDataRequest.com</u> (CSDR)

GSK Study Register

Lupus Family Registry and Repository (LFRR)

Pfizer Data Access Requests

Vivli – Center for Global Clinical Research Data

Yale University Open Data (YODA) Project

Accelerating Medicines Partnership (AMP) RA/SLE data is available through the ARK Portal

Multiple lupus data sets can be accessed through <u>dbGAP</u>, the database of Genotypes and Phenotypes, including:

- Accelerating Medicines Partnership (AMP) RA/SLE
- The International Consortium on the Genetics of Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLEGEN)
- OMRF SLEGEN GWAS Data from European-American Women with Lupus
- Whole Genome Association Study of Systemic Lupus Erythematosus
- CLRR-Cincinnati Lupus Registry and Repository