Request for Applications
2026 Translational Bridge Award
Up to $450,000 over 2 years

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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.

At present, therapy for lupus is mostly empiric and involves largely non-specific anti-inflammatory and immunosuppressive agents. While these treatments are frequently beneficial, many patients do not respond adequately or suffer significant side effects. Importantly, even patients with low disease activity accrue organ damage over time. Thus, new conceptual and therapeutic approaches are urgently needed. However, many scientific discoveries that have the potential for clinical translation and commercialization are stunted due to lack of specific funding and guidance to proceed to the next step. The LRA established the Translational Bridge Award (TBA) to provide a dedicated funding mechanism to bridge the gap between post-discovery and pre-commercial development and to accelerate the pace at which promising foundational research discoveries are translated into clinical evaluation and transitioned to a viable product that impacts patients directly.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The TBA provides up to $450,000 for up to two years for milestone-driven projects with strong, relatively near-term (2-3 years) clinical potential or with an immediate opportunity for clinical evaluation. All projects should advance the discovery of potential commercial entities or clinical products with a **clear and direct relevance to people with lupus** and offer the potential to improve diagnosis or standard of care for the disease or usher in a

cure. These can include a range of technologies, therapies, interventions, and diagnostics/prognostics tools and biomarkers. Proposals should be centered around a well-defined bridge plan of translating the discovery and advancing to the next clinical development stage. This bridge plan should consider the scientific, clinical, legal, regulatory, business and/or commercialization objectives outlined below.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH FOCUS

Proposals should be comprised of a milestone-driven project that aims to advance discoveries that have relatively near-term clinical potential, with clear objectives that are well-defined on the clinical development path.

The project should be on the translational spectrum, spanning **early translation** of a validated target or pathway (e.g. compound screening, screening assay development), **development of a novel therapy or diagnostic/prognostic tool or biomarker** (e.g. chemical fine-tuning of hit compounds, sensitivity/specificity testing), **pre-clinical analysis of a new or repurposed therapeutic** (e.g. pharmacological evaluations, efficacy testing in animal models), **validation studies of a diagnostic/prognostic tool or biomarker** (e.g., analytical assay validation, retrospective studies) and **early-stage clinical studies** (e.g. safety studies, clinical proof-of-principle). Clinical trials will only be funded with a strong rationale and/or demonstration of appropriateness for this funding mechanism. Foundational, target/pathway validation or discovery research projects will not be considered.

The proposal should also include a description of the legal, regulatory, business and/or commercialization objective(s) of the project, such as, but not limited to, generating data that would support creating or strengthening an intellectual property position, crafting a robust regulatory or data validation package, launching a start-up company, forging commercial interest or partnerships, and/or securing additional rounds of financial backing.

Proposals can be comprised of multiple objectives and research focuses. Other objectives not mentioned here may be appropriate, and we recommend you contact LRA scientific staff to consult on this topic. Please see the application instructions for further details and examples.

ELIGIBILITY

All individuals that meet the eligibility criteria below may apply; however, to accelerate the translational advancement of LRA's research portfolio, significant preference will be given to applicants that have previously received LRA funding or were affiliated with a previously funded LRA award on a relevant project.

Applicants must have a doctoral degree (MD, PhD, DO, or equivalent), holding a faculty, or equivalent, position and leading an independent research team at an academic, nonprofit, or government research institution. US federal government research laboratories are not eligible for this award. There are no citizenship requirements for investigators applying to this program.

Previously or currently LRA funded applicants must also be up to date with all progress and financial reports and other Terms and Conditions of the original LRA award(s) at the time of application.

The same research project may not be submitted for consideration to multiple LRA grant mechanisms in the same year. Such submissions will be triaged without review.

APPLICATION PROCESS

A single-stage application process will be employed. Project proposals in the form of a "Bridge Plan" will be evaluated for approach, translational potential, clinical relevance, and alignment with the TBA funding mechanism objectives. Applicants are encouraged to consult with LRA scientific staff to discuss the responsiveness of their proposal to this program. Please see application instructions for more details.

KEY DATES

RFA Release:	November 3, 2025
Applications Due:	February 19, 2026
Application Decision:	July 2026
Expected Start Date:	September 2026

Applications must be submitted via the LRA Grants Management System **by 11:59pm US ET on the stated deadline**. Applications will not be accepted via any other means. Detailed application instructions are available within the LRA Grants Management System.

REVIEW

The proposal review will be based on the strength of the initial status of the proposed entity or product, its clinical potential, and the comprehensiveness of its bridge plan, including objectives, experimental design, and appropriate decision points [go/no-go]. Applications that are not aligned with the goals and the mission of the LRA will not be peer-reviewed.

Review Process

All eligible grant applications will be peer-reviewed by a unique panel of external reviewers, including drug developers, venture capitalists, and clinical/translational scientists, 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.

Review Feedback

A summary statement containing the reviewers' critiques will be provided. The LRA does not provide scores or application rankings to applicants.

AWARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The TBA provides up to US$450,000 over two years. LRA may decide to only partially fund the proposal. Partial funds will be distributed upon execution of the award, and subsequent payments are dependent on the budgeted amount for each milestone and their timely and satisfactory completion, as determined by the Program Officer monitoring the progress with input from external experts where necessary. Indirect costs must not exceed 10% of the total budget and must be included within the $450,000 annual budget cap.

Grant recipients must attend and present at Forum for Discovery, the LRA annual scientific conference, each year. Travel funds (up to $2,000 per year) provided by the grant must be used to pay for travel expenses related to attending Forum for Discovery meetings.

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. As such, data sharing activities should be accounted for 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. LRA funding must be acknowledged in all publications and presentations of the supported research. LRA staff will work with the awardees of this funding mechanism to enable this key LRA principle while ensuring commercialization potential.

INQUIRIES

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LRA Grants Management System:
For assistance with the electronic grant application process, please contact Erin McLaughlin, Manager, Grant Programs, at emclaughlin@lupusresearch.org.