



Research Award Guidelines

The Massage Therapy Foundation (MTF) is committed to advancing the art, science, and practice of massage therapy through high-quality research. Our funding priorities focus on projects that demonstrate a clear and direct connection to massage therapy practice and have the potential to strengthen its evidence base, sustainability, and integration within health care. While massage techniques may be used by various health professionals, MTF grants are intended to support research that reflects and informs the practices of trained and credentialed massage therapists.

Important Dates

- **Research Award pre-proposal (LOI) submission deadline: February 28, 2026 at 11:59pm CST.**
- **LOI Decision Notification: No later than May 1 at 11:59pm CST.**
- **Invited full application deadline: August 3 at 11:59pm CST.**
- **Notification: by mid-October**
- **Earliest Start: Jan 1**

OBJECTIVES

Awards are granted to support high quality, independent research which contributes significantly and directly to the knowledge and evidence base of massage therapy and/or its application. Basic, applied, and translational research studies which investigate massage therapy as a wellness, medical, or health/mental health treatment and/or prevention intervention are supported.

FUNDING

Awarded funds must be used for research expenses such as salary support (commensurate with current stipends or salaries), participant costs, equipment and supplies, and dissemination expenses. Unspent funds must be returned to the Massage Therapy Foundation at the end of the grant period.

Research Award: Larger research grants supporting up to \$300,000 for up to 3 years. Pre-proposals (LOI) are required and up to 5 research teams will be invited to submit a full proposal for further consideration. Required elements review criteria for pre-proposals and full proposals are detailed below.

ELIGIBILITY

Research Grants are awarded to a single Sponsoring Organization, not to individuals. Applicants must be currently associated with or have secured the cooperation of a university, independent research organization, health center, or other institution (the “Sponsoring Organization”). A Sponsoring Organization must have sufficient facilities as well as human and informational and Institutional Review Board (IRB) resources available to support the proposed research project and to perform the proposed work and expected outcomes (see Expected Outcomes).

Research Grants will not be awarded to Sponsoring Organizations which employ or otherwise have an ownership or contractual relationship with officers or trustees of the Massage Therapy Foundation, members of the Research Proposal Review Committee (“Review Committee”) or any spouses, domestic partners, children, descendant, spouses of descendants or any other individual related to any officers or trustees of the Massage Therapy Foundation or to members of the Review Committee.

Principle Investigator (Applicant) Requirements:

- Applicants must demonstrate experience in the relevant field of research.
- The applicant must have access to the necessary resources (including the proposed patient population), facilities, and other resources. Letters of institutional support are required.
- Applicants outside the US are eligible to apply; however, payment of award funds must be accepted by the institution in US dollars.
- Applicants who are the Principal Investigator on a currently-funded MTF study are **not** eligible to apply.
- **Applicants must be currently associated with or have secured the cooperation of a university, independent research organization, health center, or other institution (the “Sponsoring Organization”).**
- Newer investigators with little or without prior research experience must document support from an experienced investigator willing to act as collaborator and mentor. Collaborators should be actively involved in the development and execution of the proposed research project and should be identified as such in the staffing plan.

LOI & PROPOSAL EXPECTATIONS

All LOIs and full proposals must clearly articulate how the proposed research will advance massage therapy practice, contribute to research capacity building with the massage therapy field, align with the [MTF Research Agenda](#) (which closely parallels NCCIH priorities), and include meaningful involvement of massage therapists in the research process. Massage therapists are not required to serve as Principal Investigators; however, they are expected to contribute substantively to intervention design, protocol development, and delivery of massage therapy interventions when applicable. Massage-related research proposals from other health disciplines are eligible for consideration; however, to be

competitive, the LOI must provide a strong rationale explaining how the proposed research applies to massage therapy and the extent to which it will advance the massage therapy evidence base and practice.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) & MACHINE LEARNING USE

MTF supports responsible and ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools. AI's use without appropriate attribution is prohibited. Any permitted AI use—such as for brainstorming, summarizing, or creating figures—must be fully disclosed in the application, including the tool used, purpose, and extent of assistance. Failure to disclose AI use may result in disqualification. ***AI content must never replace the applicant's own intellectual contributions and submissions that are primarily AI generated will not be reviewed.*** Limited editorial assistance from AI (e.g., grammar checks) does not require disclosure. [See MTF's full AI policy for applicants.](#)

HUMAN SUBJECT / ANIMAL PROTECTION

If using human or animal subjects, the applicant will be responsible for obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Institutional Animal Care and use Committee (IACUC) approval. The IRB or IACUC letter of approval for the specified project must be on file with the MTF office before funds can be disbursed. IRB approval is not required at time of LOI or full proposal submission however, confirmation of IRB access is required at time of application.

International recipients may not be familiar with or have requirements comparable to the United States IRB process, in which case MTF would require applicants to follow and document the [Declaration of Helsinki](#).

PAYMENT SCHEDULE

The Foundation shall pay the Funds to the Sponsoring Organization for the Project and the benefit of the Principal Investigator as expenses are incurred and only after receipt by the Foundation on a quarterly basis (every February 28/29, May 31, August 31, and November 30) of (a) financial reports detailing the expenditures of funds in relation to the approved budget; (b) documentation of the completion of any measurable milestones, outcomes, and/or conditions set forth in the application/proposal; and (c) detailed interim progress reports and final report demonstrating satisfactory progress of the Project to date. Payment shall be made within thirty (30) days of the Foundation's receipt of such detailed financial and interim progress reports from the Principal Investigator and Sponsoring Organization in a form reasonably satisfactory to the Foundation.

PROPOSAL REVIEW CRITERIA AND PROCESS

The MTF Grant Review Committee will evaluate and score all eligible LOIs and full proposals. Factors that will be taken into consideration include the applicant's experience, availability of resources necessary to complete the study, feasibility and scientific merit of the research plan, environment, appropriateness of the proposed research to the mechanism and mission of the Massage Therapy Foundation, and the anticipated relationship between the funds provided and expected outcomes.

Only materials submitted within the application will be used in the evaluation of applications. The

Research Proposal Review Committee will submit invitation recommendations (based on the Committee's LOI assessment and scores) to the MTF Board of Trustees who will then extend the invitations for full proposals. Following review of full proposals, the Research Proposal Review Committee will submit funding recommendations to the American Massage Therapy Foundation (AMTA) Board of Directors who will make the final funding decisions. This final step in process may take an additional 90-120 days but applicants will be notified if their proposal is being advanced to AMTA review.

Reviewers will evaluate LOIs and full proposals across four key domains:

- **Significance:** Importance of the research question, originality, potential impact, and relevance to massage therapy.
- **Scientific & Technical Merit:** Soundness of design, methods, and analysis; acknowledgment of limitations.
- **Capability:** Qualifications of the research team, inclusion of massage therapists, institutional support, demonstrated productivity and research impact, and potential to develop new MT researchers.
- **Budget:** Appropriateness, justification, and fair allocation of resources, including compensation for massage therapists and statistical support.

GRANT ACCEPTANCE TERMS

The research grant funds must be used consistent with the budget, location, personnel, and the purpose(s) as described in the applicant's MTF Research Grant application. Any significant variance (more than 10% of total award) in the use of the grant funds or key personnel change will require the approval of the MTF Research Director and the President. The applicant will notify MTF of any circumstances which may preclude the applicant from completing the research project consistent with the methodology set forth in the Grant Application, or by the anticipated completion date. Any significant change without prior approval can result in immediate termination of all funding.

Applicants must submit documentation showing that all reasonable measures will be taken to assure the safety and health of the participant(s) in the research endeavor according to guidelines set by the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

Principal Investigators and Sponsoring Organizations are required to adhere to the principles set forth in all applicable privacy laws and regulations, including but not limited to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). Personal information obtained from participants in the research endeavor shall be used only for the purpose for which it was collected and can be disseminated only with prior consent of the individuals to whom it relates. The approval of the Massage Therapy Foundation on ethical and health acceptability of the proposal will be based on compliance with these principles.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Reporting:

Outcomes evaluation is an essential component of this award. All proposals must identify the goals and appropriate outcomes measures of the research. The outcomes should align with the goals and objectives and statistical analysis plan stated in the applicant's proposal for this award. The reporting schedule should be submitted as follows:

- Register the project at clinicaltrials.gov within sixty (60) days after the Agreement is fully executed and file periodic progress reports thereafter
- Submit to MTF within sixty (60) days of the agreement execution, a one (1) minute video describing the project
- Submit quarterly progress reports
- At the interim reporting date immediately following the conclusion of the Research Period (completion of the Project), submit to the Foundation: a final report describing the rationale, procedures, and findings of the Project ("Final Report"); a complete, accurate, and up-to-date final financial report of all expenditures (in coordination with Sponsoring Organization); and a 300-word blog describing the Project results for publication on the Foundation's website.

Dissemination Expectations:

All MTF grant awardees are to disseminate funded work and effort through conference presentation *and* no less than one peer-reviewed publication. Conference and publication dissemination is expected within whichever discipline and venue makes the most sense and impact for the research team and work. Multiple dissemination products are encouraged, especially for multi-year research awards. Awardees are encouraged to publish their work in an open access format or venue when possible and include such budget allocation in their proposals. Awardees are asked to consider submission of at least one manuscript to the *International Journal of Massage Therapy and Bodywork (IJTMB)*.

- Conferences
 - All submitted conference abstracts are to be reported to MTF and updated upon acceptance or decline notification.
 - All posters from funded projects presented at scientific/discipline conferences are invited to have an encore showing at the immediately following annual AMTA convention and/or IMTRC. If a study representative is unable to bring the poster, shipping costs will be covered by MTF.
 - Similar to the above, all oral/paper conference presentations are invited to convert presented information into a poster for the immediately following annual AMTA convention poster session.
- Publications
 - All submitted manuscripts for peer-review are to be reported to MTF upon submission via cover sheet that includes journal details and updated upon acceptance or decline notification.
 - Awardees are encouraged to consider planning and submitting a protocol manuscript, a main results manuscript, and (if applicable) a secondary analysis manuscript and/or clinician perspectives (massage therapist as research personnel) manuscript.

Promotional/Project Amplification:

The MTF wants to promote and amplify funded work and has many venues to do so. Promotional and amplification efforts are not intended to, nor will they supersede peer reviewed dissemination through publication or conference presentation.

- From the start and intermittent as appropriate/applicable:
 - By the project's first quarterly report, a 1-2 minute video describing the project is to be submitted to MTF for MTF and AMTA websites, promotions, and otherwise.
 - Participate personally or through another study collaborator in video podcast interviews about the project (Research Perch and similar) conducted by the MTF and/or AMTA.
 - Present at the International Massage Therapy Research Conference (IMTRC) and/or AMTA National Convention* to disseminate project experiences and findings back to the therapeutic massage field.
- At project conclusion, study personnel will provide or contribute to:
 - a 300-word blog describing the Project results for publication on the Foundation's website.
 - An ~1200 word article for the AMTA trade periodical, *Massage Therapy Journal*, outlining in lay language the project, results, impact, and next steps of the funded work.

*Presentations at IMTRC or AMTA National Convention will not to be the primary results dissemination venue for the project. In addition, costs related to invited presentations at IMTRC or AMTA National

Convention venues should not be included in the awarded budget as reasonable travel and accommodation will be covered by MTF and/or AMTA.

REQUIRED APPLICATION CONTENT

Detailed instructions for each LOI and proposal component can be found [here](#). In short, all uploaded application documents (listed below) are to follow NIH guidelines and formatting: single-spaced word document using 11- or 12-point Times New Roman or Arial font and 0.5" margins. Tables and figures should be embedded as appropriate and are included in applicable page limits. **Appendixes** are only allowed for blank data collection forms, investigator brochure, or informed consent documents.

Each proposal application component is listed below in its application order. Most application components are the same for the LOI and full submission with page limitations for the LOI submission.

Proposal/Application Components:

- Applicant and Sponsoring Contact and Information (in portal)
- Application files
 - Abstract (1-page, 400-word limit)
 - Specific Aims (1-page limit)
 - Research Plan (3-page limit for the LOI; 12-page limit for Full Proposal)
 - References (no page limit)
 - Facilities and Resources (2-page limit + 1-page letter of support for LOI; 4-page limit + letters of support for Full Proposal)
 - Budget summary
 - Budget justification (2-page limit for LOI; 4-page limit for Full Proposal)
- Key Personnel: Biosketches or Resumes (as applicable) for Researchers, Collaborators and Interventionalists (3-page limit each for LOI; 5-page limit each for Full Proposal)
- Conflicts of Commitment and/or Interest (in portal)
- IRB confirmation (in portal)
- Dissemination Plan (in portal)