restless legs syndrome foundation blog

RLS FOUNDATION RESEARCH GRANT PROGRAM

CALL FOR 2026 RLS RESEARCH GRANT PROPOSALS



Call for RLS Research Grant Proposals

December 3, 2025

The RLS Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that aspires to achieve universal awareness of restless legs syndrome, to support the identification of effective treatments, and to find a cure for the millions of individuals who suffer from RLS.

The RLS Foundation calls for grant proposals of a one year-duration, with funding levels of up to \$50,000 (including 8% for F&A costs), based on the number of funded applications. A renewal or extension of a previously funded proposed project may be considered, but any extension would be subject to the regular competitive approval process for year two.

The number of total awards will depend on the number and quality of the applications submitted. Currently, the Foundation is expecting to support up to two proposals for the 2026 - 2027 grant cycle. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine has agreed to co-sponsor two grant awards for the 2026 round of funding.

Spring 2026 Priorities

For this round of funding, the primary research priorities are:

- Iron homeostasis: e.g. Elucidate the genetic/epigenetic, developmental and biological factors that contribute to RLSrelevant alterations in the central nervous system.
- Comorbidities: e.g. Elucidate the interactions between RLS and comorbid disorders, such as cardiovascular disease and sleep apnea.
- Genetic/epigenetic: e.g. Elucidate the interactions between RLS-relevant genetic/epigenetic factors or the consequence of these genetic/epigenetic factors on RLS-relevant neurobiological factors.
- Other topics: Other research areas related to RLS may also be accepted for funding consideration.

Requirements

■ Eligibility: All institutions within the United States, Canada and other countries where supervision of grant administration is possible are eligible.

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- Human Subject Protection: Approval by the institution's human investigation committee is necessary for all projects that involve human subjects.
- Recombinant DNA Research and Animal Welfare: The RLS Foundation has adopted the regulations pertaining to these
 areas, as established by the US Public Health Service.
- Multiple Awards: Individual investigators may receive a maximum of one RLSF grant award of any kind in a given year.

Application process

- The grant submission is a two-step process requiring both "pre-application" (letter of intent) due no later than January 23, 2026 and, if invited, a full application as indicated further below. Both pre-application and full application will be submitted via a specific link.
- The application title and all information for the Principal Investigator (PI), Business Official(s), Performing Organization, and Contracting Organization must be consistent throughout the entire preapplication and full application submission process.
- If submitting a joint proposal involving multiple PIs (Partnering PI Option): The Initiating PI must complete the preapplication submission process and submit the contact information for the partnering PI.
- Fund disbursement for successful applications will be contingent upon documentation of approved institutional review or animal user protocols, as appropriate.

Preapplication (Letter of Intent) Submission Components

The Letter of Intent (LOI) should consist of a preproposal with:

- Rationale (500-word limit): State the hypothesis and reasoning on which the proposed research project is based.
 Briefly describe how preliminary data, scientific rationale, and referenced literature support the research hypothesis.
 Clearly demonstrate that there is sufficient rationale for the project.
- Focus Area: Identify the research priority(ies) from the Spring 2026 Research Priorities list above that the proposed study seeks to address, if applicable.
- Specific Aims and Study Design (500-word limit): Clearly describe the type of research study being proposed. Concisely state the project's objectives, specific aims and ultimate endpoints. As applicable, briefly describe the proposed recruitment strategies and methods, how they will accomplish the project's aims, as well as the outcome measures that will be used.
- Research Team (250-word limit): Provide a description of the research team that clearly demonstrates the appropriate background and experience to accomplish the proposed work.
- Impact and Relevance to RLS (250-word limit): Describe how the proposed work will impact healthcare and quality-of-life needs for patients and/or family members or beneficiaries living with RLS.

In addition, for the pre-proposal, applicants need to provide a reference list (one-page limit), a list of abbreviations, acronyms, and symbols, and biographical sketches (NIH format) of all key personnel. The pre-application and the supporting documents need to be converted into a single PDF file before uploading.

Formatting Requirements

For both pre- and full submissions, applicants need to abide for all documents by the NIH-based formatting requirements for grant applications:

- Paper size no larger than standard letter paper size (8 ½" x 11").
- At least one-half inch margins (½") top, bottom, left and right for all pages.
- No more than 6 lines per vertical inch.
- Font size at least 11 pt in fonts: Arial, Georgia, Helvetica, or Palatino Linotype.

To be considered, the LOI can be submitted online starting December 3, 2025 and must be submitted by January 23, 2026 (CT). See sample template for LOI here. Applicants will be informed in late February if their proposal is invited for a full application.

Full Application Submission Components:

If invited to submit a full application, the PI will receive the link to the full application and submission components.



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Award Process

Schedule: The RLS Foundation Scientific and Medical Advisory Board (SMAB) and external reviewers strive to review all applications in a timely manner. The goal is to provide the results to the LOI applicants within two months of the respective grant deadline and four months after submission of the full proposals.

Review: The SMAB will evaluate and rank the full proposals based on scientific merit. Overall impact, significance, approach, innovation (conceptual, technical) and individual criteria will be taken into account for funding consideration.

Award: The RLS Foundation Board of Directors will make final award decisions in accordance with available funds, based on the evaluation provided by the SMAB and other prioritization factors as determined by the Board of Directors.

Recipient Requirements:

In order to receive an RLS Foundation research grant, the recipient must:

- 1. Within one month of the grant award, provide a photo of the grantee and a one-page article for publication in NightWalkers (the Foundation's quarterly news magazine), describing in layman's language the importance of the research to the RLS community and the recipient's intention for future research.
- 2. Use the terminology restless legs syndrome in all grant-related publications and correspondence.
- 3. For 1-year awards, agree to submit a progress report after 6 months and 12 months from the starting date of the grant.
- 4. Acknowledge the RLS Foundation's support in any published work or audiovisual productions resulting from research that the Foundation has supported. (Provide PDF copies of any reprints to the Executive Director of the RLS Foundation.)
- 5. Agree, if RLS Foundation funded research is commercialized or generates revenues, to devote a portion of the revenues to repaying the entire amount of the grant received, plus interest at the-prevailing prime rate, to the Foundation. Interest will be calculated semi-annually on the unpaid portion of the amount to be repaid.

Lastly, the intent of the RLS Foundation Research Grant Program is to provide seed monies to support researchers in their research endeavors and help them obtain the data to successfully request large scale funding elsewhere.

Thus, while an application may be also submitted to other organizations or agencies for funding, the applicant may not receive funding from the RLS Foundation, if any of those other projects are awarded or funded prior to the award being granted by the RLS Foundation.

The applicant will notify the RLS Foundation in writing of award funding for the same proposal from another organization and withdraw the application from consideration.

Costs Not Permitted

The following costs are not allowable under the RLS Foundation's grant programs:

- New construction, alterations, or renovations of existing facilities
- Consultant fees, unless specified in the original grant application
- Travel and healthcare costs

RLS Research Grant Program

The RLS Grant Program started in 1997 and has funded over 50 grants totaling over \$2 million. Membership support is the primary funding support of the RLS Foundation Research Grant Program. Help us to continue to fund promising new RLS research and end RLS for future generations.











RESTLESS LEGS SYNDROME FOUNDATION

The Restless Legs Syndrome Foundation is the leading organization for science-based education and patient services for people suffering from restless legs syndrome (RLS). It is also the only organization with a dedicated research grant program to advance promising

September (3) ► August (4) ▶ July (2) ▶ June (1) ► May (2) ► April (4) ► March (2) ► February (1) January (2) **2024 (26) 2023 (22)** ▶ 2022 (24) ▶ 2021 (20) ▶ 2020 (28) **▶** 2019 (27) ▶ 2018 (40)

2017 (48)

▶ 2016 (22)

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