I. Background:

Occupational therapy researchers are steadily developing strong evidence to support occupational therapy practice. Many occupational therapists find it challenging to move and sustain effective research-based health care services into their practice settings due to influences at the individual, institutional/organizational, social, and political levels. We need to support research that is focused on helping occupational therapists take evidence-informed practice from theory to reality in their practice setting.

Implementation Research is “the scientific study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of clinical research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice, and hence to improve the quality (effectiveness, reliability, safety, appropriateness, equity, efficiency) of health care.” Implementation research develops and evaluates the processes used to implement, sustain, and or scale-up evidence-based practice into routine care with an end goal to improve the quality and effectiveness of care. Implementation research looks at multiple aspects of the implementation process, including:

- Developing methods to use existing site-specific data (such as EMR’s) to guide implementation of evidence-based interventions.
- Systematically comparing delivery of current OT practice to evidence-based guidelines to identify gaps between best practice and actual practice.
- Identifying barriers and facilitators to the implementation of best evidence into OT practice.
- Testing methods to breach barriers to implementation.
- Identifying high performing systems and quantifying strategies used to achieve this performance with the intention of translating excellence to other practice settings.
- Determining methods to adapt an evidence-based intervention to suit the needs of a setting and how those changes might affect key outcomes.
- Devising methods to develop interdisciplinary collaborations necessary for implementation to occur.
- Determining how to scale up smaller pilot research studies into larger health system(s).
• Testing the effectiveness of early stage implementation practices.
• Defining and supporting methods for quality improvement—such as developing methods to encourage occupational therapists to become more effective in assimilating and putting into practice new knowledge.
• Determining how to more efficiently deliver evidence-based practice in the OT practice setting (i.e., how to sustain and expand changes in provider behavior to enhance consistent delivery of best practices).
• Develop methods to measure successful implementation.

Implementation research does not focus on the development of new programs/clinical interventions or evaluate their overall safety and clinical efficacy. Instead, this line of inquiry focuses on how to employ existing evidence-based interventions and strategies, identify methods used to adapt them to a specific site, and examine rates and quality of the delivery of evidence-based practice. Outcomes in implementation research primarily focus on markers of how well an intervention is working, such as acceptability, adoption, appropriateness, relative advantage, feasibility, fidelity, implementation cost, coverage, and sustainability. These outcome frequently target the provider or health system.

Implementation research must be grounded in the needs of the clinician and priorities of the patient (and their caregivers) within the clinical context. It requires interdisciplinary collaborations to ensure that contextual factors are appropriately and adequately addressed.

**Objective of the Implementation Research Pilot Studies:** This research program is designed to develop or study methods to implement evidence-based services into OT practice as well as provide pilot data for subsequent larger implementation research projects.

**Funding Implementation Research grants.**

Projects submitted for funding should include one or more stages of implementation of an evidence-based program into a specific clinical practice and/or method to assist practitioners, patients, caregivers, health systems, and additional members of trans-disciplinary teams to develop and implement best evidence into their practice.

These activities can be aimed at a specific clinical situation in a single practice setting with the purpose of improving practice at that site. This funding application strongly encourages this type of application. The application can also assess activities to improve methods to develop and implement programs into practice on a more global level. Whatever type of proposal, preference will be given to projects grounded in implementation research theory and which clearly show how the results can be applied beyond a single setting to the larger arena of occupational therapy practice.

Eligible applicants are not required to be occupational therapists. However, as the goal of this grant is to improve care in the domain of occupational therapy, the research application must have an occupational therapist(s) as key personnel and he/she must be an integral part of the design and execution of the project. Further, the PI must explain how the proposed project is aligned with OT scope of practice or emerging practice area. Co-PI applications are accepted as long as an OT is one of Co-PIs.

**Implementation research must be grounded in the needs of clinicians, patients, caregivers and/or health systems. These stakeholders must be an integral part of the development and execution of the proposed project. To this end, all projects must include stakeholder**

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1 The Knowledge to Action Framework is a potential implementation model. However, any implementation model can be used as a basis for the grant.
partners who are explicitly and clearly integrated into the planning and implementation of the project. Preference will be given to projects that have at least one stakeholder as a Co-Investigator.

There are two funding streams:

- Smaller projects: $50,000 for one year
- Larger projects: $100,000 for two years

Justification for either stream should be clearly included in the Timeline/Work Plan and Budget Justification.

Proposals to complete preliminary assessments of evidence, such as scoping reviews and meta-analyses will not be considered, unless they are only a small part of a more substantial project.

Application Components:

II. ABOUT THE AVAILABLE AWARDS FOR THIS IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH INITIATIVE

- One year non-renewable proposals for up to $50K OR two year non-renewable proposals for up to $100K (including indirect costs) will be considered.
- Indirect expenses will be funded up to the level of 10%.
- Funds will be released in 2021 on a payment schedule identified by AOTF. The grant cycle will begin on July 1 pending IRB receipt by AOTF.

III. ABOUT THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR INVESTIGATORS

A. What are the eligibility criteria for the principal investigator (PI)?

General Personal Criteria

- The PI has a terminal research degree or has an OTD with advanced research training (such as completion of a research fellowship).
- The PI is employed by a U.S. domestic, public or private, non-profit organization/institution that is eligible to receive Foundation research grants and will provide assurance of its accountability and support for the project.
- The PI is a U.S. citizen or non-citizen national of the United States OR admitted for permanent residence OR applied for permanent residence. (For non-citizens, the applicant organization must have policies in place to determine whether residence status or visa status will allow completion of the research.)
- The PI is a credentialed occupational therapist with a full-time faculty position appointment or an equivalent research position OR a non-OT investigator with a primary academic appointment in an occupational therapy department. (Please note: Post-Doctorate Fellowship Researchers are not eligible to apply).

Research and Proposed Project Criteria
• The PI has a track record of achievements and career goals related to the proposed project that includes peer-reviewed publications.
• The PI does not currently have any substantial extramural research awards (e.g. RO1, PCORI, Research Program Project Grant, Veterans Administration Merit Award, Field-Initiated Project). Typically, the PI will have a funding history associated with early stage, emerging, or early midcareer investigators that may include small research grants and training-related or mentored career awards.
• The PI has a commitment from an experienced research mentor who has an established record of substantial extramural grant funding, peer-reviewed publications and supervision and research mentoring experience.
• The PI does not have any conflicts of interest. The PI is not:
  o An AOTF or AOTA board or staff member
  o An AOTF Scientific Advisory Council member
  o A board or staff member of an IR sponsor

IV. ABOUT THE PROCESS AND TIMELINE FOR 2020-2021 APPLICATIONS

A. What is the process for submitting an application for 2020-2021 Implementation Research funding?

Applying for the grant involves several steps:

• The principal investigator reviews the eligibility criteria and completes the online Grant Eligibility Form. The online site for the AOTF Implementation Research Grant opens **August 31, 2020**. If the principal investigator meets all eligibility criteria on the online Grant Eligibility Form, immediate access will be given to the Letter of Intent (LOI). The LOI must be submitted **September 30, 2020 11:59 p.m. PST**. The LOI is reviewed by AOTF. If the PI meets all eligibility criteria and the LOI is accepted by AOTF, applicants will be provided with a link to the application. Principal investigators who are granted permission to submit an application will be notified by **October 15, 2020**.
• Application deadline: **December 15, 2020 11:59 a.m. PST**.

Applicants are responsible for all deadlines. Deadline extensions will NOT be granted.

B. What is the timeline for the 2020-2021 Implementation Research Grant project?

**May**

- May 1st -- RFA and award guidelines are posted on AOTF website. Review the research priorities, objectives, approaches, and eligibility criteria found in the RFA.
- Review award guidelines.
- Develop the initial framework for a Letter of Intent and applications

**August**

- August 31st -- Online submission site for Letter of Intent opens.
September
- September 30th -- Letter of Intent deadline 11:59 p.m. PST.

October
- October 15th -- Invitations to submit an Application are extended to principal investigators who meet eligibility criteria and whose LOI is accepted by AOTF. Invitees can begin application.

December
- December 15th -- Application deadline 11:59 p.m. PST.

March 2021
- Summary statements and award notifications are sent to applicants

V. ABOUT THE COMPONENTS OF THE 2020-2021 LETTER OF INTENT AND APPLICATION

A. What are the components of the Letter of Intent (LOI)?
- Principal investigator: personal information and biosketch
- Information about the applicant organization
- Research mentor: personal information, letter of commitment, biosketch, and mentor training table
- Description of the proposed research project

B. What are the components of the Application?
- Principal investigator and project information.
- Sponsoring institution information.
- Research Plan.
- Project summary in lay language.
- Budget and budget justification.
- Specific aims.
- Research plan strategy:
  - Significance.
  - Innovation.
  - Approach.
    - Alignment to Implementation Research.
    - Integration of Stakeholders
- Letters of support.
- Stakeholder Letter.
- Literature cited.
- Protection of human subjects plan.
- Inclusion of women, minorities, and children.
- Consortium/contractual/consulting arrangements.
- IRB approval letter/IACUC approval (required but may be submitted at a later date. Grant will not begin until AOTF receives IRB).
- Human subjects research training certification for key personnel.
- Appendices.
- Available resources.
VI. ABOUT THE KEY REVIEW CRITERIA FOR 2020-2021 APPLICATIONS

A. What are the key review criteria for the 2020-2021 applications?

- Overall impact score
- Significance
- Innovation
- Approach:
  - Alignment to Implementation Research.
- Environment
- Integration of Stakeholders
- Investigator(s)
- Protections for human subjects
- Potential for subsequent funding -- lays the necessary groundwork for larger studies and subsequent funding.
- Budget

All AOTF-funded studies must address plans for the inclusion of women and minorities within the application or proposal. Applications and proposals should describe the composition of the proposed study population in terms of sex/gender and racial/ethnic groups, and provide a rationale for selection of such subjects. Any exclusions based on sex/gender or race/ethnicity must include a rationale and justification based on a scientific or ethical basis. Investigators should also plan for appropriate outreach programs and activities to recruit and retain the proposed study population consistent with the purposes of the research project.

References


