



**AOTF Intervention Research Grant
Request for Application (RFA)
2025-2026**

Table of Contents

I. BACKGROUND 2

II. AWARDS INFORMATION 2

III. APPROACHES 2

IV. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION 4

V. APPLICATIONS AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION 5

VI. CONTENT AND FORM OF APPLICATION SUBMISSION 6

VII. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION 7

Note: Letter of Intent will open August 14, 2025.

Contact AOTF (research@aotf.org) if you have any questions.

I. BACKGROUND

The AOTF Intervention Research Grant (IRG) targets principal investigators who do not currently have substantial extramural research awards as an independent principal investigator (e.g., NIH, R01, PCORI, Research Program Project Grant, Veterans Administration Merit Award, and Field-Initiated Project). Typically, the principal investigator (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 must also have a commitment from an experienced research mentor who has an established record of substantial extramural grant funding, peer-reviewed publications, and supervision/mentoring of research students and/or fellows.

What are the objectives of the AOTF's Intervention Research Grant?

- Lay the necessary groundwork for larger studies to evaluate the effectiveness of occupational therapy interventions on occupation, participation, and health.
- Align with future funding priorities and intended sources of funding.
- Develop interventions that are client-centered, occupation-based, theory-driven, and manualized.
- Lead to efficacy (research under tightly controlled conditions) or effectiveness (research under real-world conditions) trials.
- Cultivate interdisciplinary research teams and partner with communities.
- Include underserved and diverse populations in research.
- Mentor new investigators and researchers

II. AWARDS INFORMATION

- One-year non-renewable proposals for up to \$100K (including indirect costs) will be considered.
- Indirect expenses will be funded up to 10%.
- Up to 20% of grant funds may be used towards mentor compensation.
- Funds will be released in 2026 on a payment schedule identified by AOTF. The grant cycle will begin on July 1, 2026, pending receipt of IRB approval by AOTF.

III. APPROACHES: PILOT/FEASIBILITY/PLANNING GRANT DESCRIPTIONS

Approaches that lay the necessary groundwork for larger intervention studies include:

- Pilot studies
“A Pilot Study is a version of the main study that is run in a miniature study to test whether the components of the main study can all work together. It is focused on the processes of the main study, for example to ensure recruitment, randomization, treatment, and follow-up assessments all run smoothly. It will therefore resemble the main study in many respects. In some cases, this will be the first phase of the substantive study and data from the pilot phase may contribute to the final analysis; this can be referred to as an internal pilot. Alternatively at the end of the pilot study the data may be analyzed and set aside, a so-called external pilot.” (Arain, Campbell, Cooper, & Lancaster, 2010, p. 5).

Pilot studies are characterized by:

- o “rigorous methodological components like sample size estimation, randomization and control group selection” (Arain et al., 2010, p. 5)
- o an explicit purpose (e.g., “to test a new procedure in preparation for a clinical trial”) and “the criteria which lead to further studies being abandoned” (Arain et al., 2010, p. 6)
- o reporting of results are “interpreted with caution” (Arain et al., 2010, p. 6)
- o or as “inconclusive, with the intention of conducting a further, larger study” (Arain et al., 2010, p. 5)
- o results that “provide information to enable a sample size calculation in a subsequent main study” (Arain et al., 2010, p. 6)

- Feasibility studies

“Feasibility Studies are pieces of research done before a main study. They are used to estimate important parameters that are needed to design the main study.

For instance:

- o standard deviation of the outcome measure, which is needed in some cases to estimate sample size, willingness of participants to be randomized,
- o willingness of clinicians to recruit participants,
- o number of eligible patients,
- o characteristics of the proposed outcome measure and in some cases feasibility studies might involve designing a suitable outcome measure,
- o follow-up rates, response rates to questionnaires, adherence/compliance rates, ICCs in cluster trials, etc.

Feasibility studies for randomized controlled trials may not themselves be randomized. Crucially, feasibility studies do not evaluate the outcome of interest; that is left to the main study. If a feasibility study is a small randomized controlled trial, it need not have a primary outcome and the usual sort of power calculation is not normally undertaken. Instead, the sample size should be adequate to estimate the critical parameters (e.g., recruitment rate) to the necessary degree of precision” (Arain et al., 2010, p. 5)

In general, feasibility studies are “conducted with more flexible methodology compared to those labeled 'pilot'. For example, the term 'feasibility' has been used for large scale studies such as a screening program applied at a population level to determine the initial feasibility of the program” (Arain et al., 2010, p. 5)

- Intervention research planning grants

An intervention research planning grant allows a new community (typically multi-disciplinary) of experienced investigators to form and share knowledge and ideas around a shared problem prior to attempting to undertake collaborative intervention research. The planning grant period allows the PI to determine who is committed to working together in a true collaborative spirit. The “product” of the planning grant should be a detailed plan for going forward with clearly identified goals for intervention research, a work agenda with defined roles for participants, and a plan for obtaining the needed resources to allow the program to go forward.

What are the key elements for success in a planning grant?

- o A driver – the one person who has the passion and vision and takes a leadership role
 - A team committed to working together with a deep appreciation for why traditional approaches will not solve the problem.
- o Duration – long enough for true planning and collaboration – but short enough to drive a product.
- o A structure that allows for both a focused working group and casting a wide net.
 - An opportunity to involve individuals across the career span – but especially junior people who will then internalize a new model for successful research.
- o A problem that cannot be solved without a novel approach calling on combined expertise
 - A commitment to developing a “common currency” or a shared language – this means developing a respect for other “kinds” of knowledge and for recognizing why a particular dogmatic approach will not succeed. This takes time and some discomfort.
- o An atmosphere of trust – individuals must be comfortable pushing one another.
- o A project that has both practical outcomes while contributing to further the development of theory.

A planning grant should include goals to:

- o Yield a program of intervention research with real growth potential
- o Yield operational success – so a component of the application should include a plan for how the program of intervention research identified during the planning process would be supported by identifying pertinent RFAs.
- o Demonstrate why occupational therapy is central to the intervention research program and its likelihood of success.
- o Provide a true training component to strengthen capacity for intervention research.

IV. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

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

General Personnel Criteria:

- The PI has a terminal research degree (PhD, ScD) or has an OTD or EdD with advanced research training (e.g., **completion** of a post degree research fellowship).
- The PI is a credentialed occupational therapist with a full-time faculty position appointment or an equivalent research position at the time of application OR a non-OT investigator with a primary academic appointment in an occupational therapy department.
- 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 U.S. admitted for permanent residence OR applied for permanent residence. (For non-citizens/visa holders, the applicant organization must have policies in place to determine whether residence status or visa status will allow completion of the research.)

Research and Proposed Project Related Requirements:

- 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.
 - **An early career researcher is a Principal Investigator (PI) in the early stages of their independent research career, typically within 10 years of completing their terminal research degree (e.g., PhD, DSc) or equivalent training (such as post degree research fellowship for non-research degrees e.g. OTD/EdD). A longer time frame may be appropriate for individuals who have spent significant time in non-research roles following their degree. These roles may include clinical practice, teaching-only academic positions, industry work (e.g., regulatory affairs or clinical operations), public health or policy practice, administrative or leadership positions, military or government service, entrepreneurial activities, or caregiving responsibilities. Eligible PIs are generally at the Lecturer, Instructor, Assistant Professor, or early Associate Professor level (or equivalent). Their funding history may include small research grants, mentored career development awards, or training-related mechanisms aligned with early stage or emerging investigators.*
- 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:
 - An AOTF board or staff member
 - An AOTF Scientific Advisory Council member
 - A board or staff member of an IRG sponsor

V. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. The Steps:

1. The principal investigator reviews the eligibility criteria and completes the Letter of Intent (LOI) application.
2. The submitted LOI is reviewed by AOTF (Scientific Review Group Chair included). If the LOI satisfies the following screening considerations, the LOI is accepted by AOTF and PI is invited to complete the Full Application.
 - PI and Co-I eligibility criteria and merits
 - Mentor merits and alignment with project
 - LOI aligns with the grant opportunity
 - LOI provides sufficient detail and clarity.
3. Principal investigators granted permission to submit a full application will be emailed the week of October 6, 2025.

Full Application deadline: **November 21, 2025 11:59 p.m. ET**

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

B. Key Dates

Dates	Application Stage
August 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RFA and Award Guidelines are posted on AOTF website. Review the research priorities, objectives, approaches, and

	<p>eligibility criteria found in the Request for Application (RFA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review award guidelines • Develop the initial framework for a Letter of Intent and applications
August 14, 2025	Online submission site for Letter of Intent opens
September 19, 2025	Letter of Intent deadline 11:59 p.m. ET
October 6-10, 2025	Invitations to submit a Full Application are extended to principal investigators who meet eligibility criteria and whose LOI is accepted by AOTF. Invitees can begin full application.
November 21, 2025	Application deadline for grants full application at 11:59 pm ET
March 2026	Summary statements and award notifications are sent to applicants

VI. CONTENT AND FORM OF APPLICATION SUBMISSION

It is critical that applicants follow the instructions for LOI and full application. Conformance to the requirements in the application instructions is required. Applications out of compliance with these instructions may be delayed or not accepted for review.

A. Letter of Intent (LOI)

- Applicant/Principal investigator: Personal information and Biosketch
- Information about the applicant organization: Name, mailing address, Administrative Contact
- Research mentor: Biosketch, Letter of Commitment, and Research mentoring table and publications
- Community partners and/or Co-Investigators (as needed by the project): Biosketch/CV and other documents
- Description of the proposed research project

B. Full Application

- Principal Investigator and Project Information
- Sponsoring Institution Information
- Research Plan
- Cover Letter (optional)
- Project Summary in Lay Language
- Specific Aims
- Plans for Future Studies and Funding
- Research Plan Strategy Plan
 - Significance

- Innovation
- Approach
- Stakeholder Involvement
- Resources Available
- Consortium/Contractual/Consulting Arrangements
- References and Literature Cited
- Letters of Support
- Budget and budget justification
- Biographical Sketches of Co-Investigators and Other Key Personnel
- Assurance Form
- Protection Form
 - Protection of Human Subjects Plan
 - Inclusion of Women, Minorities, Children
 - Vertebrate Animal Protections
 - Practice Settings
- Appendices
 - Human Subjects Research Training Certificates
 - Consortium, Contractual, Consultant Letters
 - IRB approval letter/IACUC approval (required but may be submitted at a later date. Grant will not begin until AOTF receives IRB)
 - Surveys, Questionnaires, Data Collection Instruments, Clinical Protocols
- Signature – Terms and Conditions

VII. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

A. Review Criteria

- Overall impact score
 - Significance
 - Innovation
 - Approach
 - Environment
 - Investigator(s)
 - Protections for human subjects
- Potential for subsequent funding lays the necessary groundwork for larger intervention studies and subsequent funding
- Budget
- Mentor: Expertise & support provided to the PI

B. Knowledge Translation

In response to the AOTF 2023-2025 Strategic Plan, the Foundation is particularly interested in proposals that address the scope of research i.e., wide or targeted, and outline strategies for future dissemination of findings.

C. Inclusion of Women and Minorities

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

- Arain, M., Campbell, M. J., Cooper, C. L., & Lancaster, G. A. (2010). What is a pilot or feasibility study? A review of current practice and editorial policy. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 10, 67.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-10-67><https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-10-67>
- James S. McDonnell Foundation, personal communication <http://www.jsmf.org/about/s/preface-gauthier.pdf>