

**AOTF-ASHT-AHTF's
Hand in Hand Research Grant
Request for Application (RFA)
2025-2026**

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Note: Full applications will open August 14, 2025.

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

I. BACKGROUND

To address the urgent need for more practice evidence in hand and occupational therapy, the American Occupational Therapy Foundation (AOTF), American Society of Hand Therapists (ASHT) and American Hand Therapy Foundation (AHTF) have joined forces to launch the *Hand in Hand Research Grant*- a proof-of-concept initiative designed to close the gap between research and real-world practice.

This grant seeks to catalyze partnerships among researchers, clinicians, and community stakeholders, fostering collaboration at every stage of the research process. By prioritizing research that is grounded in the lived experiences and practical realities of diverse communities, this initiative aims to ensure that findings are not only evidence-informed but also actionable in everyday practice settings.

In this context, *community* is broadly defined as individuals, groups, and organizations connected by shared characteristics, geography, or social identity- including, but not limited to, race/ethnicity, disability status, gender identity, and sexual orientation (Consortium for Cancer Implementation Science Community Participation Capacity Building Task Group, 2021). Centering the perspectives and priorities of these communities is essential to conducting research that is relevant, equitable, and impactful.

Through this new collaboration, AOTF, ASHT, and AHTF reaffirm their shared commitment to advancing the science of hand and occupational therapy- strengthening the evidence base, empowering clinicians, and ultimately improving patient outcomes through the seamless integration of research into practice.

Objective of the AOTF-ASHT-AHTF's Hand in Hand Research Grant:

The *Hand in Hand Research Grant* aims to spark innovative, early-stage research that is deeply rooted in community engagement. This grant is designed to help lay necessary groundwork for future large-scale studies by supporting foundational work that advances real-world impact in hand and upper extremity therapy.

Competitive proposals will go beyond traditional research approaches to meaningfully engage community partners- integrating their voices, needs, and strengths throughout the research process. Projects may focus on evaluating intervention therapies, analyzing care access and delivery trends, or accelerating the implementation of evidence-based practices. Regardless of focus, all proposals must demonstrate a strong, sustained collaboration between community and researchers.

Priority areas for research include, but are not limited to:

- Health Disparities: Research targeting underserved or marginalized populations to reduce disparities in health outcomes.
- Comparative Effectiveness: Studies comparing different therapeutic approaches to determine the most effective practices.
- Clinical Practice and Outcome Validation: Research demonstrating measurable outcomes in hand rehabilitation, particularly related to tendon injuries, lateral epicondylitis, pain, and complex regional pain syndrome.
- Orthosis Use and Biophysical Agents: Studies focusing on the use and validation of orthosis and biophysical agents in hand rehabilitation.

Funding AOTF-ASHT-AHTF grants: AOTF, ASHT, and AHTF are committed to supporting projects that demonstrate strong, formalized collaborations among occupational therapy researchers, hand and upper extremity rehabilitation experts, and community partners. Priority will be given to proposals that:

- Clearly address needs and priorities identified by the community, not just for the community;
- Emphasize capacity building that empowers community partners to participate fully and equitably in the research process;
- Include a concrete plan for sharing results with the community and/or outlining next steps for scaling or sustaining the work.

In addition, applicants must clearly articulate how their proposed project aligns with the scope of occupational therapy practice or contributes to an emerging area of OT practice. This alignment ensures that the research not only advances knowledge but also strengthens the profession's relevance and reach in addressing real-world challenges.

There is one funding stream:

- \$50,000 for one year

Justification for the requested funds should be clearly included in the 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.

II. AWARDS INFORMATION

- Indirect expenses will be funded up to 10%.
- Total salaries for the PI or Co-PIs will be capped at 20% of the budget requested.
- All applicants **must include a research mentor** who meets the following criteria: Have an established record of **extramural grant funding**, peer-reviewed publications, and experience in research mentoring.
- Project Funds will be released in two installments, the first in July 2026 (assuming the IRB approval/exempt doc is received by AOTF) and the second in January 2027 (assuming the midyear report is received by AOTF).
- The project start date will be July 1, 2026. The funding duration will last one calendar year from the start date. It is the applicant's responsibility to get IRB approval prior to the start date and submit all progress reports on time.

III. APPROACH

- One, 1-year research grant will be awarded through this partnership with total funding of \$50,000 (including the indirects). These funds will provide financial support for the research study, including reimbursement for community partners.
- The goal of this partnership is to provide funding for an early-stage research project that promotes strong community engagement. The ideal project will lay the necessary groundwork for larger studies and can be designed to examine intervention therapies or trends, access to health services or to improve implementation/adoption of evidence into practice but must emphasize collaboration between community partners and researchers/academic institutions to address key areas in hand and upper extremity therapy.
- The proposed research project should align with the missions of AOTF, ASHT, and AHTF, and have the potential to advance evidence-based hand therapy practices.
 - AHTF Mission: The mission of the American Hand Therapy Foundation is to improve patient outcomes by promoting evidence-based practice through funding clinical and scientific research and education.
 - ASHT Mission: The mission of the American Society of Hand Therapists is to advance evidence-based practice and improve patient outcomes through the promotion, support, and dissemination of clinical and scientific research in hand and upper extremity therapy.
 - AOTF Mission: To advance the science of occupational therapy to support people's full participation in meaningful life activities.
- ***All proposals must include one occupational therapist and one community partner. The occupational therapist should be included as no less than a co-investigator and must meet the specified eligibility criteria for the PI.***

IV. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. What are the eligibility criteria for the Principal Investigator (PI)?

- The PI has a terminal research degree (PhD, ScD) or has an OTD, DPT or EdD with advanced research training and/or experience (e.g., **completion** of a post degree research fellowship or multiple first author publications).
- The PI is an Early Career Researcher* and a credentialed occupational therapist or physical therapist** who is a certified hand therapist with a full-time faculty position appointment or an equivalent research position at the time of application.
- 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).

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.*

****This grant may have OT and PT serve as Co-PIs, provided both meet the above-specified criteria.**

All proposals must include at least one occupational therapist who meets PI eligibility criteria, regardless of whether they serve as PI or Co-PI.

B. Other Criteria/Considerations/Restrictions

- The PI has a track record of achievements and career goals related to the proposed project that includes peer-reviewed publications.
- The PI should have a funding history associated with early stage, emerging, or early career investigations that may include small research grants and training-related or mentored career awards. However, the PI cannot currently or in the past have any substantial extramural research awards (e.g. RO1, PCORI, Research Program Project Grant, Veterans Administration Merit Award, Field-Initiated Project).
- The PI or Co-PI does not have two concurrent awards from AOTF, ASHT, or AHTF.
- The Investigators (PI and/or CO-PIs) are not named on more than one application per cycle.
- The PI (or Co-PIs) 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 or Co-PI should not have any conflicts of interest. The PI or Co-PI should not be:
 - An AOTF, ASHT, AHTF or American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) board or staff member
 - Currently involved in the review or sponsorship of an AOTF, ASHT or AHTF grant.

All proposals must include one occupational therapist and one community partner. The occupational therapist should be included as no less than a co-investigator and must meet the specified eligibility criteria for the PI.

V. APPLICATIONS AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. The Steps:

1. The principal investigator (PI) reviews the eligibility criteria and completes the full application.
2. Applications will be reviewed by a Scientific Review Group composed of five members with relevant experience in grant review. The group will include scientific experts from AOTF, ASHT, and AHTF, and may also include community partners who offer unique perspectives. The review group will consist of five members: one nominated by ASHT, one by AHTF, and three by AOTF.
3. Full Application deadline: **November 3, 2025, 11:59 p.m. ET***

B. Key Dates:

Dates	Application Stage
June-August 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RFA, application instructions 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 full applications
August 14, 2025	Online submission site for full application opens
November 3, 2025	Application deadline for grants full application at 11:59 pm EST
Feb 16-20, 2026	Summary statements and award notifications are sent to applicants.

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

VI. CONTENT AND FORM OF APPLICATION SUBMISSION

It is critical that applicants follow the instructions for 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. Full Application

- Applicant/Principal investigator: Personal information and Biosketch
- Information about the applicant organization: Name, mailing address, Administrative Contact
- Information about the community partner and Co-PI: Personal Information, Biosketch, Letter of Engagement
- Research mentor: Biosketch, Letter of Commitment, and research mentoring table and publications
- Description of the proposed research project
- Research Plan
 - Project summary in lay language
 - Specific aims
 - Plan for Future Studies and Funding
- Research Plan Strategy
 - Significance
 - Innovation

- Approach
- Resources Available
- Consortium, Contractual, Consulting Arrangements
- References and Literature Cited
- Letters of Support
- Research team member/Community Engagement Plan: The description should include community/team members' roles and responsibilities with details regarding the contribution of each individual in the 1) development and execution of the proposed study and 2) Dissemination of study results.
- Budget
 - Budget and Budget Justification
- 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)
 - Blank Informed Consent/Assent Forms, Simple Lists of Interview Questions, Surveys, Questionnaires, Data Collection Instruments, and Clinical Protocols
- Optional Data Form
- Signature – Terms and Conditions

VII. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

Grants will be scored utilizing the numeric scoring system based on the NIH grant scoring system. Overall impact scores will be determined by the following five criteria:

- Significance: Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field?
- Investigator(s): Are the PIs, co-PIs, research mentors, collaborators, community partners, and others well suited to the project?
- Innovation: Does the application challenge and seek to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms by utilizing novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions?
- Approach: Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project?
- Environment: Will the scientific environment in which the work will be done (scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangements) contribute to the probability of success?

A. Reviewers will also consider:

- Relevance to Award Objectives: Alignment with the missions of AOTF, ASHT, and AHTF, and the potential to advance evidence-based hand therapy practices.
- Community Impact & Community partner engagement: The strength and sustainability of community partnerships and the potential for research to benefit the community.
- Protections for human subjects

- Potential for subsequent funding lays the necessary groundwork for larger intervention studies and subsequent funding.
- Budget & Budget justification
- Mentor: Expertise & support provided to the PI

B. Knowledge Translation

In response to the AOTF 2023-2025 Strategic Plan, AOTF 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

Consortium for Cancer Implementation Science Community Participation Capacity Building Task Group (2021). *Resources for stakeholder & community engagement. In resources for stakeholder & community engagement in implementation science.* https://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/sites/default/files/2021-08/CCIS_Engagement-Bibliography_080931_508.pdf