

STRIDE Mentored Research Scholarship (SMRS): FAQs

1. What is STRIDE?

STRIDE stands for Standing for Research Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity. It is the American Occupational Therapy Foundation's (AOTF) standing committee to develop, direct, and evaluate AOTF initiatives to promote diversity & belonging, combat racism, heal trauma, achieve equity, and social justice. STRIDE aims to identify and address any barriers in our community to full inclusion and learn more from our stakeholders about experiences that could inform us about how to do better and promote the kinds of reflections and insights that fuel change. While some of these actions build on existing initiatives within AOTF, others represent new steps that the Foundation will be enacting in direct response to recent events.

2. Can MOT students and/or practicing COTAs apply and get accepted into the SMRS program?

No, active MOT students are not eligible to apply as it's required to have graduated and completed all program requirements. COTAs are also not eligible at this time.

3. If I've already been accepted into a PhD program, or if I am in a doctoral program, can I apply to the SMRS program?

No, you are not eligible to apply to STRIDE if you are currently in those programs. Instead, you may look into your eligibility for AOTF's Postdoctoral Fellowship and Doctoral Scholarship programs, opening in January 2027.

4. Are OT clinicians with years of practice experience still eligible if they are new to research?

Yes, assuming you meet all other eligibility criteria. There is no maximum number of clinical practice years that would disqualify someone from applying to the STRIDE Mentored Research Scholarship (SMRS).

5. I am an Occupational therapist working PRN/Per-Diem. Am I eligible to apply for the STRIDE OT Research Fund?

Yes, you are eligible to apply for the STRIDE Mentored Research Scholarship (SMRS) if you are a part-time AND/OR full-time clinician.

6. Application instructions state that faculty members may not apply. If I am not full-time faculty and have an adjunct faculty role, may I still apply?

If you are a part-time clinician with your adjunct faculty position teaching a clinical course, you may apply. The goal of STRIDE is to connect awardees with research experiences and resources that they may not have access to otherwise. To confirm eligibility, please reach out to us at research@aotf.org and share the number of hours you teach and work in your faculty position. For the best response, please also include relevant details such as your position description, what it entails, and whether you are currently performing any research.

7. Can I apply if I am not from an under-represented background, with disabilities, and/or from under-resourced backgrounds?

No. The eligibility criteria for this award requires the applicant to be from an under-represented background, with disabilities, and/or from under-resourced backgrounds. Please refer to the following NSF & HRSA links regarding information on underrepresented groups: [Minorities & Underrepresented Minority](#).

8. I am an internationally trained OT with a bachelor's degree. Assuming I meet all other criteria, am I eligible to apply?

Yes, you are eligible to apply for the STRIDE Mentored Research Scholarship (SMRS) if you are an internationally trained OT with a bachelor's degree and meet other eligibility criteria.

9. Do I have to make a Proposal Central user account to apply?

Yes. Please look for the instructions in '[AOTF ProposalCentral Instructions - How to Create a User Account](#)'.

10. I know a researcher who works in the area I am interested in. Can I request them as my mentor?

Yes. Applicants may suggest a mentor, who meets the eligibility criteria, during the SMRS application process and upload/enter all required mentor information. This information will be reviewed during the application review process.

Awardees, who do not suggest a mentor, will be paired with mentors selected by the AOTF's STRIDE committee based on the information applicant provides in their SMRS application.

11. When requesting a specific mentor, the application instructions state a “track record” for publications is required. Can you clarify the mentor’s desired experience?

While we do not assign a particular number of required publications, mentors should have sufficient research experience and publications to support a mentee in their chosen area of interest (e.g., neurology or pediatrics), as determined by the STRIDE awards subcommittee.

12. What if my mentor is located in a different state?

There are no restrictions based on where mentors/mentees are geographically located.

13. What will be my mentor’s role?

The mentor will guide the selected student /clinician through a research experience over an intensive research experience period. During this period, the mentor will provide instruction, direction, challenge and support to the mentee through weekly individual meetings, weekly lab meetings and/or training to carry out proposed research experience. The Mentor will monitor the mentee’s research activities and provide feedback, offer informal guidance and direction regarding future prospects for research engagement for the applicant, networking possibilities, and regional & national conference opportunities. Additionally, the Mentor will guide the applicant to prepare and present their final poster at the AOTA INSPIRE conference to showcase their work.

14. Are there opportunities for mentorship in rehabilitation science, including neuro imaging?

While the STRIDE committee makes their best efforts to match awardees with mentors with aligned interests, we cannot guarantee matches based on specific specialty areas. We evaluate the applicant’s interests and research goals alongside the mentor’s experience to determine if the match would help facilitate these skills. For example, a mentor may not have neuro imaging expertise, but if their expertise in literature review aligns with the mentee’s primary research skill goals, they may be matched. The pool of available potential mentors grows every year.

15. Who will review the STRIDE Mentored Research Scholarship applications?

Researchers from the AOTF’s STRIDE committee and/or occupational therapy research community will review all applications.

16. Am I required to work with my mentor in-person?

No. The 2026-2027 SMRS research experience may be virtual with the option of supplementing it with visits to the mentor's lab.

17. If awarded, when will I receive the funds associated with the award?

The funds will be released to you after AOTF receives your individualized development plan, assuming we have received all other required documents from you.

18. If I receive the award, when will my research experience begin?

The award period begins on September 1, 2026. Please refer to the 'Award timeline' on the [SMRS webpage](#) for details.

19. How are the STRIDE Research Fund applications reviewed?

Every application is reviewed by experienced researchers from the AOTF's STRIDE committee and/or occupational therapy research community. Reviewers use a scoring rubric to assess the following criteria:

- Clarity of goals: How clearly the applicant describes the research experience they are seeking, why they are pursuing it, and how it aligns with their future work in occupational therapy research.
- Relevant experience of coursework: Examples of prior research related experiences and/or relevant coursework
- Academic benefit: How the proposed research experience and scholarship will support applicant's academic development.
- Personal benefit; How this research experience and scholarship will contribute to the applicant's personal growth.
- Professional benefit: How this research experience and scholarship will enhance the applicant's professional goals in occupational therapy.

- Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion: A clear description of applicant's lived/personal experience reflecting the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion as an occupational therapist and/or an occupational therapy student
- Quality of recommendation: The strength and relevance of the applicant's recommendation letter.

20. Are there any research topics that are of particular interest to the STRIDE committee that we should focus on? Does our research topic have to involve under-represented populations?

There are no topic areas that are preferred for submission over others. While the intended recipients for the SMRS are those from under-represented backgrounds, the research project population does not also need to involve participants from this group. The priority of this mentored experience is to develop your own individual research skills, regardless of topic.

21. Does the SMRS program allow me to continue ongoing research, or am I required to initiate a brand-new study?

You are not required to initiate a new study, nor continue an existing one as the purpose is not to complete a research study. The purpose is to develop your individual research skills (e.g., literature reviews) in whatever method best suits the situation and resources of you and your mentor. For example, previous awardees have continued doctoral capstone projects with active IRBs, while others have been brought onto existing research projects through their mentor's research labs.

22. Where can I find examples of potential research skills I can hope to gain from this SMRS experience?

Page 4 of the application instructions list several research skills that may be listed as potential focus areas on your research essay, including: Appraisal of research literature, designing study methods or protocols, data collection, processing, and analysis, etc.

23. If awarded, why do I have to submit receipts of all non-stipend expenditures?

AOTF needs the receipts for audit purposes.

24. Is it mandatory to attend the AOTA Inspire conference?

Yes, it is mandatory. AOTF will allow you to budget award funds for conference-related expenses per the award guidelines.

25. What is the purpose of the poster presentation at AOTA Inspire? Can my presentation involve other co-presenters?

The mandatory poster presentation at the AOTA Inspire conference is intended to be an individual presentation that highlights the progress, modifications, and outcomes of your chosen research skill goals and overall experience with the SMRS. This poster is not intended for you to present on a completed research project that you may be looking to present with someone else. You may include future dissemination plans as part of your poster, as it reflects your long and short-term research goals.

26. Should I submit a final poster if I am not attending the conference in person?

Yes, you are required to prepare and submit your final poster to AOTF even if you are not attending the conference.