

Smith Family Awards Program for Excellence in Biomedical Research

A program of the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation

Initial Proposal Guidelines

2024 Grant Cycle

Initial Proposal Deadline:

Tuesday, June 20, 2023

12:00 Noon, U.S. ET

Award Period: April 1, 2024 – March 31, 2027

Up to five \$400,000 three-year awards will be made to support promising junior faculty with the potential to transform their fields through their research.

Eligibility

- Based at a nonprofit academic, medical, or research institution in Massachusetts or at Brown or Yale University.
- Full-time tenure-track (or equivalent) research faculty; received or will receive first independent research faculty appointment (normally tenure-track Assistant Professor) on or between October 1, 2020 through April 1, 2024.
- Have less than \$350,000 in combined federal and non-federal funding in direct costs per year, excluding the institutional start-up package and other intramural support.

Applicant eligibility must be verified by the relevant department Chair and the institution's Office of Sponsored Research, or the initial proposal will not be considered. There is no limit on the number of applicants from a given institution. The Scientific Review Committee will select a subset of initial applicants to invite to submit full proposals.

Health Resources in Action promotes diversity of gender, ethnicity, and perspectives, among many other forms, across its grant programs. Applications from women and people from groups underrepresented in biomedical research are particularly encouraged.

Program Overview and Mission

The Smith Family Foundation is committed to effecting permanent positive change in the lives of the residents of Greater Boston, particularly individuals and families in economically disadvantaged communities. In the area of health, the Foundation supports the advancement of biomedical research and the expansion of access to high-quality health care at safety net institutions serving low-income individuals and communities of Greater Boston.

The Smith Family Awards Program for Excellence in Biomedical Research was created in 1991 to launch the careers of newly independent biomedical researchers with the ultimate goal of achieving medical breakthroughs. Since 1992, the Program has funded 192 outstanding scientists and has provided \$42.1 million in research support.

The Smith Family Awards Program for Excellence in Biomedical Research is managed by Health Resources in Action (HRIA). HRIA is a national non-profit with a mission to help people live healthier lives and create healthy communities through prevention, health promotion, policy, and research.

Research Focus

The three-year Award supports newly independent faculty engaged in **basic or translational biomedical research**. Investigators in the physical sciences (physics, chemistry, and engineering) whose projects focus on biomedical science are also encouraged to apply. While basic research projects involving human subjects, data, and samples are eligible, clinical trials research is beyond the scope of this program.

We invite proposals from starting faculty members who study a wide range of problems in diverse biological systems. For example, we have supported research as diverse as regulated translation in synapse formation, bacterial regulators of immunity, kinetochore function in centromere cohesion, neural codes for perception, and DNA damage pathways in tumors. We recognize that very basic biology discovered in systems ranging from bacteria to plants to human tumors can impact fields as distant as neural pathfinding and immune function. We welcome proposals that range from fundamental biology to translational research. Our review committees have traditionally been composed of researchers from diverse disciplines including bacterial and eukaryotic geneticists, immunologists, neurobiologists, developmental biologists, cancer biologists, and transcriptional regulation experts, who can assess a wide range of biological proposals.

In recognition of the importance of research collaboration within the scientific community, collaboration is an additional, but not required, positive ancillary factor. These projects may involve researchers within and/or outside the applicant's institution.

Eligibility Requirements

United States citizenship is not required.

Institution

- Researchers must have their primary appointment at a nonprofit academic, medical, or research institution in Massachusetts, or at Brown University or Yale University.
- Research projects must be conducted within the entity that is submitting the application. Award funds will go to that entity. For example, if an applicant submits from Harvard Medical School, the research project must be conducted at Harvard Medical School and not at an affiliate location (such as Massachusetts General Hospital or Boston Children's Hospital).

Career stage

- Applications will be accepted from full-time faculty who have received or will receive their **first independent research faculty appointment on or between October 1, 2020 through April 1, 2024**. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the eligibility period for the 2022, 2023, and 2024 grant cycles was extended by one year. This means that researchers who were promoted to their first tenure-track Assistant Professor appointment no more than 3.5 years prior to the award start date of April 1, 2023 are eligible to apply for this award in the current grant cycle. As in years prior to 2022, it is likely that in future cycles the eligibility window will be 2.5 years of independence prior to the award start.
- We understand that there is a continuum of independence at many institutions beginning with emerging independence at the Instructor level. However, to level the playing field and ensure that all applicants have only one window of eligibility, **we consider the tenure-track Assistant Professor appointment to be the first independent faculty appointment**.
- If an Applicant has been on medical or family leave, or if research was interrupted for other reasons, this period of absence does not count towards eligibility. Please address any gaps in work history in the Personal Statement on the Biosketch. The Department or Division Chair must also confirm the leave of absence as well as applicant eligibility in the “Applicant Independence/Institutional Commitment Form.”
- All applicants must have completed their postdoctoral training by the funding start date of April 1, 2024.
- The Applicant’s level of independence is critical. The “Applicant Independence/Institutional Commitment Form” must be completed by the Department or Division Chair and must describe space, start-up package, percentage of clinical vs research time, and institutional commitment. This form will be used by the Scientific Review Committee in evaluating independence.

Current, Pending and Post Award Funding

Concurrent Federal and Non-Federal Support

- Applicants are ineligible if, at the time of application, they have combined federal and non-federal funding totaling \$350,000 or more in direct costs in either of the first two years (4/1/24 - 3/31/25 or 4/1/25 - 3/31/26) of the three-year Smith Award. This figure refers to external funding only and not an Applicant’s start-up package, other intramural support, or the Smith Award.
- Applicants are also ineligible if they were previously or are currently a Principal Investigator or Multiple PI (NIH), Co-PI (NSF), or equivalent on an R01, P01, Pioneer Award, New Innovator Award or similar large awards from other federal agencies or national foundations.

Pending Federal and Non-Federal Support

- Applicants who have pending R01s or other large applications to the NIH and other agencies are encouraged to submit proposals to the Smith Family Foundation. However, neither the applicant nor the institution may accept funding with budgetary overlap with the proposed aims of a funded Smith project. To avoid conflicts if your proposal receives a funding recommendation, **we strongly suggest that you do not propose the same aims and budget in different grant applications**. Please note that if a Smith Excellence award is made, neither the Institution nor the

awardee may accept funding that results in an overlap of funding for the Smith Excellence project. **If the work proposed in the Smith Excellence proposal is funded by another source before the Smith awards are announced, the applicant must notify HRiA at SmithExcellence@hria.org and withdraw the application immediately.**

- If an applicant is **notified on or prior to 12/1/2023** that they have been successful in securing federal or non-federal grant support which, when combined with other support, totals \$350,000 or more in direct costs in either of the first two years of the Smith Award, the application to the Smith Excellence Program will be ineligible for review. Notification of funding **after** 12/1/23 will not impact eligibility for a Smith Family Award. **It is the responsibility of all applicants to contact SmithExcellence@hria.org as soon as notification of any new funding is received.**

Award Selection Criteria

The Scientific Review Committee uses the following criteria to evaluate applications.

Impact

- The proposed basic or translational biomedical research addresses an important problem and has high potential to lead a fundamental advance in basic biology or a substantial advance in translational biology. In the longer term, the work has potential to generate a medical breakthrough.

Applicant

- The applicant is fully capable of carrying out the proposed research and has clear ability to develop a sound research plan.
- The institution has demonstrated an appropriate level of commitment to her/him.
- Collaboration is an additional, but not required, positive ancillary factor.

Research project

- Research question and hypothesis are clearly stated and are based on sound precedents and a clear rationale.
- Study design is appropriate to answer the question(s) and technically feasible.
- The proposal makes sense in the context of the pertinent literature and the work of other investigators in the field of study.

Application Process

The Smith Family Award for Excellence in Biomedical Research is a two-stage proposal process. Applicants submit an Initial Proposal by the designated deadline. Invited applicants will be asked to submit Full Proposals due in early October. Funding begins on or about April 1, 2024. The online application system will notify applicants once the application is received and will be used to communicate with applicants about the status of their applications.

PLEASE NOTE: If the Applicant is unable to accept the Award, the Award will not be transferred to another investigator involved in the research project.

Proposal Writing Tips

Applicants are strongly encouraged to prioritize good grantsmanship in writing their initial applications, to maximize their chances of being invited to submit a full application. The Review Committee is composed of a diverse group of researchers who can assess a wide range of biomedical research proposals, such as bacterial and eukaryotic geneticists, immunologists, neurobiologists, developmental biologists, cancer biologists, and experts in transcriptional regulation. Characteristics of a well-written proposal include the following:

- Main points are communicated clearly and concisely. The big picture of what will be done, why it is important, and how it will advance the field is clear.
- The language is understandable to a general scientific audience. When jargon must be used, it is clearly explained, and complex technical points are put in context.
- Specific aims and concise/essential background, experiments, and analysis plan are connected with clear logic, and key choices are justified. Sufficient detail about the approach is provided that the reviewers can clearly understand the proposed experiments.
- Written responses answer the questions, and the use of references is appropriate. The writing is clear and does not overly rely on references to cheat the word count.
- For applicants in crowded fields, the proposal makes clear how the study will bring a fresh perspective. Innovation and novelty in the field *should not be overstated*. Reviewers typically check this.
- Goals and metrics of success are well-defined.
- While the work must be feasible, top-scoring proposals typically have at least one ambitious aim. The preliminary proposal format is intended to give you the freedom to be creative. Reviewers do not look favorably on applications that look and feel like a shrunken, repurposed R01.
- The impact of the work and how it will lead to a fundamental advance in basic biology or a substantial advance in translational biology should be clear.
- Any appearance of scientific or budgetary overlap with other current or pending support is clearly described. Because Smith awardees are not allowed to accept funding that overlaps with the aims of the Smith project, we suggest applicants avoid proposing the same aims and budget in different grant applications.
- Information about preprints and major papers in press is shared in the Biosketch.

Applicants are encouraged to seek grant writing advice within their institutions and externally, and to ensure that the initial proposal is clear and comprehensible to a scientist from a related field as well as to a specialist. It may be helpful to read examples of successful proposals, such as those found in the grant-writing tip sheets for NIH research grants. Institutions and colleagues may also be willing to provide examples of well-written and successful grant applications. Applicants are strongly encouraged to invite a mentor, preferably a tenured faculty member with experience on review committees or NIH study sections, to do a close read and provide feedback on the completed application.

Acknowledgement of Support

The Award Recipient and Institution are encouraged to announce receipt of this Award entitled: the **Smith Family Award for Excellence in Biomedical Research**, and credit financial support to the **Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation, Newton, MA.**

Publications

Publications or presentations resulting from research supported by this Award must also acknowledge support from the **Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation, Newton, MA.**

Terms of the Award

Please download “Terms of the Award” from <https://hria.org/tmf/Smith> for information regarding use of the Award funds, indirect costs, payment schedule, reporting schedule, and other Awardee and Institutional requirements.

A listing of prior **Award Recipients** and their research summaries as well as **Frequently Asked Questions** may also be found at this site.

Application Instructions

APPLICATION DEADLINE

Tuesday, June 20, 2023 (12:00 PM, U.S. Eastern Time)

Before beginning the online submission, **download and save the “Excellence Application Form” which can be found at <https://hria.org/tmf/Smith>.**

Use one of the following links to begin or continue the application process:

Start a New Application: https://www.grantrequest.com/SID_738?SA=SNA&FID=35241

Continue a Saved Application: https://www.GrantRequest.com/SID_738?SA=AM

The following sections must be completed for the online submission:

1. **Institution’s Tax ID Number**
2. **Eligibility Quiz**
3. **Applicant Data:** Institution where proposed research will be conducted, Applicant’s contact information and educational background
4. **Key Personnel:** Collaborator information (if applicable)
5. **Research Project Information:** Project title, key words, non-technical overview, and experimental system(s), key tools, and techniques to be used.
6. **Institutional Contact Information:** Department/Division Chair and Authorized Institutional Representative
7. **Attachment (Document Upload):** The Application must be converted into ONE PDF file, in the order noted, for upload. This document must be named LastName, FirstName.pdf (for example, Doe, Jane.pdf). Make sure all pages are numbered sequentially starting with the Cover Sheet as Page #1.

Document Upload

Application:

- **Application Cover Page:** Complete the Application Cover Page (type all information). The Cover Page is the first page of the Document Upload.
- **Table of Contents:** Follow the Table of Contents and number ALL pages consecutively. The Table of Contents is page 2 of the Document Upload.
- **Key Personnel:** Collaborator information is page 3 of the Document Upload. This should match the information entered in the Key Personnel online submission field.
- **Initial Research Proposal:** Complete this form according to the instructions.
- **Applicant Biosketch:** Use the new, updated March 2021 form for your NIH Biographical Sketch (<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm>). Please include

information about all current, pending, and completed funding support on the Addendum to Biosketch form.

- **Addendum to Biosketch:** Complete this form according to the instructions. Applicants must disclose ALL current (active) and pending (not closed) grants regardless of overlap with this proposal, and **clearly indicate any potential research or budgetary overlap with the Smith Excellence proposal**. In cases of any potential overlap or duplication, a detailed explanation of project aims must be appended to address any apparent overlap or lack thereof.
- **Applicant Independence/Institutional Commitment Form:** The Department or Division Chair must complete this form and sign at the bottom.

Please note: Supplemental materials are not permitted and will be removed (e.g., letters of collaboration or recommendation).