

# The Edward N. & Della L. Thome Memorial Foundation Awards Program in Alzheimer's Disease Drug Discovery Research

## Invited Full Proposal Guidelines

Grant Cycle 2024

Invited Full Proposal Deadline:  
**Tuesday, November 28, 2023**  
12:00 Noon, U.S. ET

The Thome Foundation Awards Program in Alzheimer's Disease Drug Discovery Research is a two-step proposal process. After the Initial Proposal phase, selected applicants are invited to submit a Full Proposal.

The Full Proposal requires an online submission. The Full Proposal consists of an Online Application, Application Face Sheet (with signatures), Research Project Summary and Performance Sites, Non-Technical Summary and Overview, DEI Statement, ten-page Research Proposal, Projected Milestones and Research Plan Table, Budget and Justification Forms, Applicant Biosketch, Co-Investigator Biosketch(es) (if applicable), Department or Division Head Letter, and Letter(s) of Collaboration (if applicable).

### **NOTIFICATION TO APPLICANTS**

Applicants will be notified of the final funding decisions in February 2024.

### **AWARD PERIOD**

March 1, 2024 – February 28, 2026

### **AWARD AMOUNT**

Up to five \$500,000 two-year grants (\$250,000 per year) will be made to independent investigators working in academic, medical or research institutions within the United States. Awards do not cover indirect costs.

### **PROGRAM BACKGROUND**

The Edward N. & Della L. Thome Memorial Foundation was created in 2002 to advance the health of older adults through the support of direct service projects and medical research on diseases and disorders affecting older adults. In keeping with the Foundation's mission, the goal of the Awards Program is to support innovative drug discovery research that will lead to improved therapies for individuals suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

In 2022, the Thome Memorial Foundation, Bank of America, N.A. granted Health Resources in Action (HRiA) funding to oversee the continuation of its programs in Age-Related Macular Degeneration and Alzheimer's Disease Research. HRiA works with a Scientific Review Committee to select the proposals that best align with the mission of the Foundation and the goals of the program. HRiA is a non-profit organization in Boston that advances public health and medical research.

### **RESEARCH FOCUS**

The goal of the 2024 Awards Program in Alzheimer's Disease Drug Discovery Research is to support innovative drug discovery research that will lead to improved therapies for individuals suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Successful research proposals should fall along the preclinical research spectrum such that they can be "carried out using cell or animal models of disease; samples of human or animal tissues; or computer-assisted simulations of drug, device or diagnostic interactions within living systems".<sup>1</sup> These projects are intended to move basic science insights towards solutions, techniques, and tools that can be transferred to clinical practice in the near term. Funding areas include, but are not limited to:

<sup>1</sup> Preclinical Research Definition: <https://ncats.nih.gov/translation/spectrum>

- Validation and testing of target compounds and therapeutic agents (e.g., DNA or RNA oligonucleotides, and virally driven therapies)
- Strategies that target pathogenic mechanisms (inflammatory response, synaptic toxicity, and oligodendrocyte or endosomal/lysosomal dysfunction).

Basic research, research that is not directly linked to a clinically relevant biomarker or clinical endpoint, or research studies that align with the NIH definition of a clinical trial<sup>2</sup> are currently outside the scope of this Program.

### **ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

All applicants must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Receive an invitation to submit a Full Proposal.
- The administrative lead applicant must hold a faculty appointment at a non-profit academic, medical, or research institution in the United States.
- PIs must be independent investigators with demonstrated institutional support and specialized space and facilities needed to conduct the proposed research.
- Applicants and key personnel may not have funding for a similar project.
- Individuals who are current Thome Foundation Awards Program in Age-Related Macular Degeneration or Alzheimer’s Disease Research awardees at the time of Initial Proposal deadline are not eligible to apply for the 2024 grant cycle.
- Each PI may only submit one application.
- Institutional nomination is NOT required.
- United States citizenship is not required; visa documentation is not required.

Eligibility is not limited to those investigators currently working in Alzheimer’s Disease research. In addition, investigators from other fields are encouraged to apply with drug discovery and development research proposals directly relevant to Alzheimer’s Disease.

### **Key Personnel, Definitions**

- Principal Investigator (PI): One principal investigator (Applicant) must be identified as the lead or administrative PI of the award, who will be responsible for all grant reporting and fiscal management. The lead or administrative PI will be the main contact for budget and reporting management.
- Co-Investigator/Collaborators: Co-Investigators/Collaborators may share Award funding.

### **Concurrent, Pending and Post-Award Funding**

Please note that if a Thome Memorial Foundation award is made, neither the Institution nor the awardee may accept funding that results in an overlap of funding for the Thome Memorial Foundation project. If the work proposed in the Thome Memorial Foundation proposal is funded by another source before the Thome awards are announced, the applicant must notify HRiA at [ThomeAwards@hria.org](mailto:ThomeAwards@hria.org) and withdraw the application immediately.

The sponsoring institution must accept responsibility for the scientific, administrative, and financial management of the overall project including any subcontracts involved in the project.

### **Diverse and Inclusive Research**

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<sup>2</sup> NIH’s Definition of a Clinical Trial: <https://grants.nih.gov/policy/clinical-trials/definition.htm>

To promote and enable diversity in biomedical research, the Thome Memorial Foundation is committed to awarding researchers of all backgrounds, including racial/ethnic groups that are underrepresented in science. The National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health have established that individuals from the following groups are underrepresented in science: Blacks or African Americans, Hispanics or Latinos, American Indians or Alaskan Natives, Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders. Applicants that identify as a member of these groups are encouraged to apply. In addition, applicants are encouraged to speak to their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion within the application. Please see the University of California, Irvine site for helpful guidance: <https://ap.uci.edu/faculty/guidance/ieactivities/>.

Consistent with current NIH policies<sup>3</sup>, funded clinical research must include women and minority groups as well as a rationale that speaks to composition of the study population. Any exclusions within the study population need to be described and scientifically justified.

## REVIEW CRITERIA

The Scientific Review Committee uses the following criteria to evaluate full proposals:

### Significance, Innovation, and Impact

- The proposed research seeks to improve therapies and therapeutic strategies for individuals with AD.
- The proposed research seeks to move insights from basic sciences towards clinical practice.
- The proposed research is creative and addresses a critical scientific or therapeutic barrier/roadblock that will open a new avenue for AD therapies.

### Research Project

- The proposed work is based on sound precedents and a clear rationale.
- The objectives are technically feasible.
- The research methodology is realistic and sufficiently powered.
- The proposed work suggests next steps upon the finding of positive, negative, or null results
- The timeline is comprehensive, activities described are related to the project completion and enhance the effectiveness of the scope of work. Institutional approvals are indicated where appropriate and will be received prior to the funding start date.
- The timeline indicates clear roles for key personnel.
- The budget is realistic and appropriate.

### Applicant & Co-Investigators/Collaborators

- The Applicant's background and experience is well-suited for completion of the proposed work.
- The roles of co-investigators and collaborators are well-defined and aligned with the background and skills necessary for successful completion of the project.
- The Applicant shows a strong commitment to fostering a positive research culture, including activities that support a diverse, equitable, and inclusive research environment.

## Proposal Writing Tips

Applicants are strongly encouraged to prioritize good grantsmanship in writing their applications to maximize their chances of being invited to submit a full application. *The writing of the proposal will not be directly assessed*; however, it is recognized that clarity of the writing enhances the ability of the reviewers to reflect upon how the proposal aligns with the review criteria.

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<sup>3</sup> NIH Grants and Funding: Inclusion of Women and Minorities as Participants in Research Involving Human Subjects. <https://grants.nih.gov/policy/inclusion/women-and-minorities.htm>

The Review Committee is composed of a multi-disciplinary group of professionals such as biotech executives and academic researchers, with expertise in AD and pharmaceutical development, and have the ability to assess a wide range of proposal topics.

Characteristics of a well-written proposal are reflective of the following practices:

- Funding via non-governmental agencies should be tailored. Make sure the proposal is reflective of the program goals and review criteria.
- Tell the story and sell the proposed work; make sure the background outlines why the proposed questions are important to answer, and the proposed approach is promising.
- The language should be understandable to a general scientific audience. When jargon must be used, it is clearly explained, and complex technical points are put in context.
- Any other personnel included in the project should be clearly justified.
- Don't fall victim to proposing to complete too much work. Reflect on the timeline of the work to ensure it can be feasibly completed.
- Provide enough time to obtain feedback and allow for proofreading prior to submission.

Applicants are encouraged to seek feedback on their proposals within their institutions and externally. Examples of successful proposals can be 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.

**Suggested resources:**

Secrets to Writing a Winning Grant: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03914-5>

NIH grant writing tips:

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/ep/Tutorial.html>

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/funding/grant-writing-and-application-process/grant-writing-tips.shtml>

<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/format-and-write/write-your-application.htm#Important%20Writing%20Tips>

**APPLICATION PROCESS AND NOTIFICATION SCHEDULE**

The Alzheimer's Disease Drug Discovery Research Program is a two-stage proposal process. Only invited applicants may submit Full Proposals. Funding begins March 1.

**TERMS OF THE AWARD**

Please review the Terms of the Award (available for download: [hria.org/tmf/ThomeAD](http://hria.org/tmf/ThomeAD)) for information regarding use of the grant funds, indirect costs, reporting schedules and other Grantee and Institutional requirements.

Frequently Asked Questions are available for download: [hria.org/tmf/ThomeAD](http://hria.org/tmf/ThomeAD)

## **Instructions for Full Proposal**

The application process requires completion of an Online Application and upload of a PDF and an Excel document.

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### **SECTION I: Online Application**

***NOTE: Invited applicants to the Full Proposal received an email with a link to access the online application.***

Please **review and update** the following in the online form: [https://www.GrantRequest.com/SID\\_738?SA=AM](https://www.GrantRequest.com/SID_738?SA=AM)

- Applicant Data: Institution, contact, and educational background information
- Research Project: Project Title, Keywords, Project Summary, Non-technical Summary

### **SECTION II: Attachment Instructions for PDF**

Download templates for items A, C, and D at [hria.org/tmf/ThomeAD](http://hria.org/tmf/ThomeAD). All Items below must be combined into ONE PDF (in order of the lettering below) for upload to the Online Application. Please number all pages prior to upload. Item D should also be uploaded to the Online Application as an Excel file.

**A. Thome AD Application Forms 2024 (Use provided PDF template – Application Face Sheet, Table of Contents, Research Project Summary and Performance Sites, Non-Technical Summary and Overview, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement).** Download the Application Forms here: [hria.org/tmf/ThomeAD](http://hria.org/tmf/ThomeAD).

- **Face Sheet:** The Face Sheet must be completed and signed by the Applicant and the Authorized Institutional Representative administratively responsible for the oversight of the project. Once all signatures have been obtained, the Face Sheet should be used as page 1 of the PDF.
- **Table of Contents:** Follow the Table of Contents template and number all pages sequentially.
- **Research Project Summary and Performance Sites:** Copy the Project Summary from the Online Form into the Project Summary template. The 300-word summary should state the project's broad, long-term objectives and specific aims.
- **Non-Technical Summary and Overview:** Copy the Non-Technical Summary and Overview from the Online Form. The Non-Technical Summary should be no more than 200-words and include a lay-language description of the proposed research that can be understood by the general public. The Non-Technical Overview questions should be answered in one sentence each, and in terms understandable to a non-specialist.
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement:** Copy the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement from the Online Form. It should be no more than 250-words and should state your commitment to improving diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**B. Research Proposal (maximum of ten pages, excluding references cited):**

Outline succinctly how the proposed research project may lead to significant improvements in current therapeutic strategies or create new approaches to treating Alzheimer's disease. In addition, be sure to describe how the proposal fits into the drug development pipeline.

Proposal Format:

- Arial 11 font and size must be used in the text of the research proposal section.
- Any figures, graphs, tables or pictures must be included within the 10 pages. For these visuals, the minimum is an 8 point-font size.
- Use single spacing within paragraphs, double spacing between paragraphs, and at least ½ inch margins on all four sides.

- Appendices are not permitted, however References Cited should be added to the Proposal (not included in the 10-page count)

Within the page limit, include these sections:

- 1) Background and significance;
- 2) Specific aims;
- 3) Preliminary data (if available);
- 4) Research design, experimental methods and analytical plan;
- 5) Research limitations and contingencies;
- 6) References Cited (*excluded from page count*)

**C. Project Milestones and Research Plan Table** (Use provided Word template - maximum 1 page): Create a summary table, based on the specific aims of the project which describes the proposed milestones and benchmarks. The successful completion of these activities will form the basis of measuring achievement of the project goals. Please include specific data, methods, and benchmarks that will demonstrate achievement of the milestone. Quantitative benchmarks must include statistical methods including sample size justification. Note: 1) All personnel and collaborations should be related to the achievement of the milestones; 2) Please include a milestone that describes plans for dissemination of results. *If your Project Milestones and Research Plan Table has not changed since the initial proposal, you may submit the same form.*

**D. Budget and Other Support Form:** Complete this form for the two years of the project. Total support from the Thome Foundation is \$500,000 (\$250,000 each year for the two-year award). Please note that overhead (indirect costs) will not be covered by the award. The Budget Template must be (1) included in the PDF for committee review and (2) uploaded separately as an Excel document to be used in expenditure tracking if the grant is funded. Please ensure that the numbers you have entered are identical in both formats or we will not be able to process the application. Template is downloadable here: [www.tmfgrants.org/ThomeAD](http://www.tmfgrants.org/ThomeAD).

Please include all current, pending, and completed support regardless of relationship to the current Thome AD request in the “Other Support” tab. The Edward N. & Della L. Thome Memorial Foundation does not support overlapping aims. Should overlap exist, the pre-existing funded aims should be provided along with a detailed explanation of how this overlap will be resolved. If no overlap exists, please state as such.

**E. Biosketch of PI/Applicant (use the current NIH biosketch, max 5 pages):** If applicable, please also include Co-Investigator Biographical Sketch(es) in the upload. It is not necessary to include a Collaborator’s biosketch unless they are key personnel.

**F. Department or Division Chair’s Letter:** This letter (forwarded to the Applicant for upload) must address the applicant’s qualifications to conduct the proposed research independently as well as note the space and equipment available for the completion of the project. If the applicant is Chair of their department, a letter of recommendation from the Dean should be submitted.

**G. Letter(s) of Collaboration (if applicable):** When applicable, letters confirming the availability of resources outside the Applicant’s institution or letters confirming any significant collaboration may be included (forwarded to the Applicant for upload). These are not additional letters of recommendation.

*Out of fairness to applicants who adhere to the Guidelines, applications that do not conform to the stated application procedures or that contain more than the specified number of pages or materials will be rejected.*

**HRIA is committed to making our resources accessible to everyone. If you require an accommodation or service to access our resources, please contact Program Staff.**

Frequently Asked Questions are available for download: [hria.org/tmf/ThomeAD](http://hria.org/tmf/ThomeAD)

**Contact Information:**

[ThomeAwards@hria.org](mailto:ThomeAwards@hria.org)

**Guidance for Letters of Support/Collaboration/Recommendation**

We are all working to reduce bias, and letters are sometimes biased in ways that systematically disadvantage people based on race and/or gender. As letters are being prepared, we have provided a table that provides suggestions for letter writing to help avoid bias as modeled after the University of Arizona's guidance on this topic.

Mention research & publications	Letters of reference for men are more likely to mention publications and to have multiple references to research. Put these critical accomplishments in every letter.
Don't stop too soon	On average, letters for women are shorter and more likely to make a minimal assurance ('she can do the job') rather than a ringing endorsement ('she is the best for the job').
We all share bias	Unconscious gender bias isn't exclusively a male problem. Research shows that women are as susceptible to these common pitfalls as men.
Keep it professional	Avoid gratuitous references to personal life and make sure you use formal titles and surnames for both men and women.
Stay away from stereotypes	Do not invoke negative stereotypes even indirectly ('she is not emotional'). Be careful evoking even positive gender stereotypes ('caring', 'compassionate', 'helpful'), as even these can potentially hurt a candidate.
Be careful raising doubt	Honest letters are crucial, but negative or irrelevant comments, such as 'challenging personality' or 'I have confidence that she will become better than average' are twice as common in letters for female applicants. Don't add doubt unless it is strictly necessary.