



ALF 2026 PILOT RESEARCH AWARDS

LETTER OF INTENT (LOI) DEADLINE (MANDATORY): April 10, 2026

APPLICATION DEADLINE: May 15, 2026

AWARD PERIOD: October 1, 2026 – September 30, 2027

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the 2026 Pilot Research Awards is to provide funding to early career investigators for highly innovative projects that address novel and important questions related to liver transplantation and other RFP focus areas described below.

Advanced liver therapeutics encompass a broad range of cutting-edge interventions designed to treat, repair, or replace the liver in patients with end-stage or complex hepatic conditions. The focus of this RFP is innovative research that could ultimately lead to therapeutic advances in this area. Focus areas encompass liver transplantation (spanning clinical to experimental research approaches), stem cells, liver regeneration, advanced *in vitro* human models, and gene/cell-based therapies (see below for details).

Pilot Research Awards provide funding to **Junior Faculty** during the **pilot phase of research projects focused on new areas of investigation, innovative ideas, or "high-risk, high-reward" projects** that have the potential to generate breakthrough findings and significantly advance the field. Pilot projects should address key outstanding questions in basic, translational, or clinical research on the topics listed below.

Proposals do not require extensive preliminary data but should articulate a clear, testable hypothesis and well-defined goals that are achievable within the award duration and amount. Funded projects are expected to result in acquisition of key preliminary data that will enable early career recipients to successfully compete for research awards from NIH and other national sources to support larger studies in these innovative research areas.

ALF will accept applications focused on research areas listed below (please contact research@liverfoundation.org if you have questions about the topics under consideration for this award):

- **Liver transplantation** (including clinical, translational, and experimental research such as xenotransplantation, donor organ optimization, ex vivo organ preservation and machine perfusion, graft engineering, ischemia reperfusion injury, immunomodulation and tolerance induction, and integration with gene- or cell-based therapies)
- **Stem cells and stem cell biology** (including hepatic stem or progenitor cells, lineage specification and differentiation, and stem cell derived hepatocyte like cells)
- **Liver regeneration** (including molecular and cellular mechanisms of regeneration, injury responses, and strategies to enhance endogenous liver repair)
- **Advanced *in vitro* human liver models** (including organoids, engineered liver microenvironments, microphysiological systems, and bioartificial liver platforms)
- **Gene- and cell-based therapies for liver disease** (including hepatocyte transplantation, engineered or genetically modified cells, and immune cell-based approaches)

PILOT RESEARCH AWARD AT-A-GLANCE

Career Level: Junior Faculty

Award Type: Pilot Research Award

Research Topic: Liver transplantation and other related topics (see above)

Research Type: Basic, Translational, or Clinical Research

Funding Amount: \$50,000

Award Duration: 1 year

Optional Letter of Intent Deadline: April 10, 2026

Application Deadline: May 15, 2026

ELIGIBILITY

In order to be eligible for a Pilot Research Award, all following eligibility criteria must be met:

- 1) **Principal Investigator:** The Principal Investigator (PI) must:
 - a) Be sponsored by a public or private non-profit institution accredited in the United States (U.S.) and engaged in health care and health-related research. Individuals employed at the NIH, FDA, and CDC are not eligible to apply.
 - b) Hold an MD and/or PhD (or equivalent degree), and a full-time faculty or equivalent position at an institution in the U.S. by the start date of this award.
 - i) If the applicant does not have a faculty appointment at the time of application, a letter signed by the department chair confirming that the applicant will have a faculty appointment no later than the Award start date must be submitted.
 - c) Be able to guarantee 50% protected research time overall.
 - d) Be within the first five (5) years of their first faculty appointment (including prior appointments in universities outside of the United States) at the start of the award.
 - i) ALF is sensitive to personal matters that impact career trajectories. An appropriately documented leave of absence (e.g, parental leave, medical leave, long-term care of a parent/spouse/child/dependent) will not be counted toward the above five-year eligibility criteria. Applicants in this situation must reach out to ALF staff **at least two weeks before the application deadline** to ask for an exemption.
 - ii) Applicants who are outside of the eligibility time frame because of other exceptional circumstances may also request to be considered for an exemption. Applicants requesting an exemption must email research@liverfoundation.org **at least two weeks before the application deadline** to ask for an exemption. Exemptions will be provided on a case-by-case basis and must be included in the application if granted.
- 2) **Collaborators:** Collaborators are allowed if they are necessary for completion of the proposed research project, with the following requirements:
 - a) The proposed research project must be primarily conducted by the PI at the PI's institution.
 - b) The need for collaborators must be justified in the research plan.
 - c) Collaborators must be included in Key Personnel and Budget Justification, and relevant documentation must be provided as indicated in the Required Documents section of the Application Instructions.
- 3) **Research project:** The proposed research project must:
 - a) Clearly differ from existing funded research. If the candidate already possesses research

funding, candidates must explain how the proposed project differs from their existing funded research portfolio in the “Research Differentiation” section of the application form. If the application includes collaborators, candidates must also explain how the proposed project differs from the collaborators’ existing research.

- b) Not be part of a larger project with alternate funding.
 - c) Be hypothesis-based.
 - d) Include specific aims that can be completed within the award duration and amount.
- 4) Funding Overlap:
- a) The PI (and collaborators, if any) must not hold or have held funding directly related to the proposed research at the time of application.
 - b) ALF does not provide duplicate funding and must be notified immediately if the applicant receives funding on the same or comparable research project during the application process or during the award period.

AWARD DETAILS

An award of \$50,000 will be provided over one year in quarterly installments of \$12,500.

Award terms:

- Recipients must acknowledge the award in all publications (abstracts, manuscripts, or other documents) resulting from research performed during the tenure of this award.
- Awards cannot be transferred to another institution without prior written approval from the American Liver Foundation.
- Recipients are directly responsible to the sponsoring institution.
- Unexpended funds at the end of the award period must be returned to the American Liver Foundation.
- If the award is relinquished prior to the specified end date of the award period, unexpended funds starting from the relinquishment date must be returned to the American Liver Foundation within 60 days.
- Final award payment will be held until receipt of all final reports.
- Recipient’s personal and medical leaves of absence that last longer than 4 weeks must be communicated to the American Liver Foundation.
- Award recipients agree that their photograph and a brief summary of their research project will be featured in a press release and posted on the American Liver Foundation website and social media channels.

MANDATORY LETTER OF INTENT

A Letter of Intent to apply for funding is required. The purpose of the Letter of Intent (LOI) is to allow ALF staff to estimate the number of, and plan for the review of, submitted applications.

The Letter of Intent must be prepared using the fillable LOI PDF template form provided by ALF. Download the [LOI template form](#) and submit the completed form ***via email*** no later than **April 10, 2026**, to:

Helene Jordan, PhD
American Liver Foundation
National Senior Director, Research Program Management
research@liverfoundation.org

The LOI template can also be downloaded from the Pilot Research Award [webpage](#). Please contact research@liverfoundation.org if you need assistance.

BUDGET AND JUSTIFICATION

Applicants must provide a budget and a separate budget justification with an explanation for each budget item (including a description of key personnel and their role in the project). For any budget costs not covered below, please contact research@liverfoundation.org to determine if these costs are allowable for this award.

Allowable costs:

- Salary and benefits for graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, laboratory technicians or other key personnel necessary for completion of the proposed research project.
- Laboratory supplies, animals, or other materials necessary for completion of the proposed research project.
- Biostatistics, informatics, biobank, or other core facility costs necessary for completion of the proposed research project.

Non-allowable costs:

- Salary and benefits for principal investigator (i.e., award recipient) or faculty collaborators, if any.
- Indirect costs (e.g., university overhead).
- Equipment.
- Registration and travel costs to attend scientific conferences.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Submission Deadline

The deadline for the mandatory Letter of Intent is April 10, 2026.

The deadline for the application is May 15, 2026. Applications received after the deadline will not be reviewed.

Submission Instructions

- Download the 2026 Pilot Research Award [Application Guidelines](#) for details on eligibility and required application materials
- Download the [LOI template form](#) and submit the mandatory **via email by April 10, 2026**.
- Applicants who submitted a Letter of Intent will be contacted directly by April 15, 2026 at the latest with detailed instructions on how to submit their application.

Required Documents

Applicants will need to submit the following materials:

- 1) **Lay (non-technical) summary** of your research project for a general audience – Please note: the lay summary may become public if the award is selected for funding, therefore, it should not contain any proprietary information. **2,000 characters maximum**, including spaces.
- 2) **Scientific abstract** that summarizes the proposed research project – **3,000 characters maximum**, including spaces.
- 3) **Research Differentiation** paragraph that explains how the proposed project differs from your existing funded (if any) research portfolio – **2,000 characters maximum**, including spaces.
- 4) **Budget** – Provide a detailed budget using the template form provided by ALF. The template will be included in detailed instructions on how to submit an application that will be provided directly to applicants who submitted a Letter of Intent.
- 5) **Key Personnel and Budget Justification** – Provide a description of key personnel (including their percent effort and role in the project) and an explanation for each budget item. All key

personnel must be listed regardless of salary support in the budget (e.g., the PI and faculty collaborators must be included as Key Personnel but their salary cannot be supported by this pilot research award). **Limit two pages.**

- 6) **Biosketch** – Provide biographical sketches for the applicant, collaborators (if any), and any other key personnel using the NIH Non-Fellowship [Biosketch template](#) (ALF is still using the “legacy” NIH Biosketch and Other Support forms that were approved for NIH applications until January 2026). See NIH [Biosketch Instructions](#) and [Sample Biosketch](#) for additional guidance. **Limit five pages each.**
- 7) **Other Support** – Provide a list of all other active and pending institutional, federal and non-federal support using the NIH [“Other Support” template](#) for the PI and collaborators, if any ALF is still using the “legacy” NIH Biosketch and Other Support forms that were approved for NIH applications until January 2026). See NIH [Other Support Instructions](#), [Other Support Sample](#), and [Example Scenarios Monetary Donations as Other Support vs. Gifts](#) for additional guidance.
- 8) **Research Plan** – The research plan must be prepared and assembled in the following order: Specific Aims, Background and Significance, Innovation, Preliminary Results (optional), Research Design and Methods, and References. Results of unpublished observations may be summarized using text, tables or figures and must be included in the three-page limit. **Limit three pages, not including references.**
- 9) **Research Facilities** – The research environment should be described, including, as applicable, laboratory space, access to patients’ materials or data, animals, core facilities, consultants and technical resources (including computer). **Limit one page.**

SELECTION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on the scientific merit of the research project (innovation, significance, feasibility, approach, design and methods), the PI’s background and commitment to a research career, and the environment in which the project will be conducted.

Applications will be reviewed based on the written materials submitted. **Incomplete applications and applications that fail to adhere strictly to the instructions (including the submission deadline and page limitations) will not be reviewed.** All decisions are final.

PROGRESS REPORT

A scientific progress report, a progress report in lay language, and a financial report must be provided within 60 days of completion of the award.

Following the conclusion of the award, recipients must provide a report once a year for two (2) years that includes articles published or accepted for publication, new funding, patents, and any other relevant outcome that results from work funded by the pilot research award.

GLOSSARY

Basic Research: Research focused on fundamental scientific investigations and usually conducted in controlled laboratory settings, with the primary goal of understanding basic biology or disease mechanisms. It aims to expand knowledge, discover new principles, and understand underlying mechanisms without specific applications towards processes or products in mind. However, the results of basic research form the foundation for translational and clinical research. This category can involve animal studies, cell culture and other in vitro studies, “omics” research, and studies using human biospecimens or human data that cannot be linked to a specific individual.

Clinical Research: Patient-oriented research with the primary goal of directly impacting the prevention,

diagnosis, treatment, or outcome of liver disease in patients. Clinical research often involves direct contact with human subjects and aims to assess the safety, efficacy, and effectiveness of medical interventions, treatments, or diagnostics to inform clinical practice and improve patient care. Clinical trials are a common form of clinical research, and it can also include interventional, observational, epidemiological, or behavioral studies, outcomes research, and health services research studies.

Collaborator: An individual who works with the principal investigator on the scientific development or execution of the project. Collaborators typically devote a specific percent of effort to the project and should be identified as key personnel. Collaborators may be employed by or affiliated with either the grantee organization or an organization participating in the project under a consortium or contractual agreement. See Eligibility Criteria section for specific considerations related to collaborators.

Grant Administrator: The staff member who oversees new grant agreements and grant payments; ensure that grants comply with relevant laws and regulations; guarantees that all required reports are submitted; and administers the grant after award.

Indirect Costs: Costs that are necessary to support a particular activity project or program but that cannot be easily or directly attributed to such activity, project or program. Examples of indirect costs are rent, utilities, and administrative personnel.

Junior Faculty: Faculty member for no more than five years at the time of the award (usually at the rank of Assistant Professor or equivalent). See Eligibility section for additional details and exemptions.

Principal Investigator (PI): The Principal Investigator or PI is the lead researcher for the grant project and has overall responsibility for the design, conduct, reporting and scientific integrity of the research. For ALF Pilot Research Awards, the applicant is considered the PI and the PI/applicant will be the award recipient.

Translational Research: research that bridges the gap between basic research and clinical research, with the goal of translating observations from the laboratory, clinic, and community into potential interventions that improve health. Translational research can include converting basic research discoveries into practical medical interventions, therapies, or diagnostics that can then be tested in clinical research studies. For example, if basic research identifies a gene that could play a role in a certain disease, translational research could identify ways to target this gene and test their efficacy in the laboratory before moving to human testing. Translational research also investigates how results of successful clinical research studies can be translated into best practices and implemented by physicians in clinical care.