



**AOA Research Foundation
2024 Grant Application Guidelines**

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1. Key Dates

Monday 1 April 2024: Grant applications open at 9.00am AEDT

Tuesday 30 April 2024: 5.00pm AEST: Grant applications close

Late-August 2024: Successful/unsuccessful grant applicants notified

Please note that dates are subject to change.

2. Application guidelines

The AOA Research Foundation performs an important role in providing support for short-term studies (in general up to two years) and initiating long-term studies carried out by AOA members. The fund is also an important backup source of funding for established orthopaedic research groups who receive their major financial support from other funding organisations. The Fund does not provide long-term support for projects or 'top-up' funding for ongoing studies.

Scope of research

Research proposals must be a clearly identifiable segment of work, even though it may be part of a much broader research initiative. All grant applications will be treated confidentially and will only be viewed by approved assessors and the AOA Research Foundation Board.

Research projects may cover a broad range of clinical and laboratory investigations that are relevant to the field of orthopaedics. Other types of research such as data linkage studies, observational studies, registry-based research and surgical education research will also be considered. Research projects must be well-defined with a testable hypothesis in order to be considered for funding.

Special consideration will be given to applications that propose to open up new areas of research as well as to projects that cover areas that would not be expected to attract funds from other funding organisations. For the purpose of encouraging clinical research, this will be considered separately for funding from laboratory research. Clinical research may be funded over two years at the discretion of the AOA Research Foundation Board and pending receipt of an interim annual progress report indicating satisfactory progress with the project deliverables.

Amount of funding

Amounts awarded for individual grants will be at the discretion of the Research Foundation Board. The total amount awarded each year may vary depending on the number and type of grant applications received. Regular grants may be any amount up to \$30,000 in value and early career researcher grants may be any amount up to \$10,000 in value.

Eligibility

The **lead investigator** must be an AOA Affiliate, Associate or Fellow. In addition, **one** of the other chief investigators must be an AOA Affiliate, Associate or Fellow.

The lead investigator is responsible for communication between the AOA Research Foundation and the research institution, and the direction of the research. They are responsible for the timely submission of the application, and the annual audit forms and financial statements to the AOA Research Foundation. They are also responsible for the subsequent presentation of the results of the research at the AOA Annual Scientific Meeting within three years of receiving the grant.

Grant applications are open to investigators at academic/university settings and others in the public and private sectors.

Successful lead investigators are not eligible to apply for funding in the year following the successful application, unless the second year is a continuation of previous grant funding for the same project. In these cases, applicants must submit a new application specifying that the application is for continuation of previously funded research for an additional year.

Only **one application per lead investigator is permitted**. Members may be listed as co-investigators on more than one grant application.

All applications will be judged on a competitive basis, without regard to the academic rank or title of the investigators. The researchers involved in patient care must be certified to practise their profession at their institution and must obtain institutional ethical approval.

Application Process

Applications must be submitted using the online **AOARF grant portal**. The portal can be accessed at <https://aoarf.grantplatform.com/>.

Applicants will need to create an account in the system by providing their name, email address and a password. The account will allow you to access past applications, edit applications (until the grant deadline) and receive correspondence.

A template of the application form is available on the [AOARF website](#) to assist you in preparing your application.

Early Researcher Grants

The Early Researcher Grant (ERG) has been introduced to encourage younger surgeons to engage in orthopaedic research activities. ERG grants are restricted to AOA trainees or Fellows who have been awarded FRACS no more than seven years prior.

These grants are intended to support pilot projects and other small research studies. Early career researchers applying for grants to support larger, high quality research projects may choose to apply for a regular grant rather than an ERG for these types of projects.

ECRs will not be disadvantaged in the scoring system, particularly as it relates to track records. Assessment of applications for ECR grants will not include a score for track record. In order to be assessed as an ECR, applicants must supply a curriculum vitae with their application and must not have been a chief investigator on any previous AOA grant application. This is intended to encourage our new and younger colleagues to apply for AOA Research Foundation grants.

Applications from early career researchers are expected to be of sufficient quality to merit award of a grant, and as such it is strongly recommended that individuals who are eligible for an ERG seek an experienced research mentor to assist them with their application. A list of potential mentors can be found via the AOA Research Networking Map or by contacting the Foundation on research@aoa.org.au.

Targeted research

The Research Foundation has two methods of overseeing sponsored research:

- A request for independent research in a particular field can be tendered and supervised by the AOA Research Foundation, or
- A sponsor of requested research may nominate a researcher but the supervision and auditing of the research is overseen by the AOA Research Foundation.

The latter method attracts an administrative cost of 10 per cent of the research grant, up to a maximum of \$1000.

This initiative on the part of the Foundation removes any potential for conflict of interest with a known company supporting known research by known researchers. All research funds will be allocated by the Research Foundation Scientific Committee, with awards being based purely upon scientific merit.

The program will allow a significant enhancement of the current symbiotic relationship.

Human and/or animal subjects/tissues

When human subjects or tissues are to be used in a research project, it is the responsibility of the grant recipient and their institution to ensure that the institution has a **complete copy of the research protocol** approved by the institution's human subject review board, **a copy of that board's current approval notice, and a copy of the patient informed consent form(s)**. If awarded a grant, these documents must be submitted before funding can be dispersed.

The AOA Research Foundation observes the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)'s *Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes*. Applicants for grants must accept and abide by the NHMRC animal experiment guidelines. All applications must be accompanied by an institutional ethics committee report whenever studies are to be carried out using humans or animals. If awarded a grant, this report must be submitted before funding can begin. Institutional ethics committees must be constituted according to the guidelines of the NHMRC. Applications should also be signed by the head of the department and of the institution.

All entities that receive funding from the AOA Research Foundation must adhere to the following principles:

- animals shall be used in biomedical research only when no other means of obtaining scientifically sound, valid and useful results are available
- the minimum number of appropriate animals required to obtain and validate results shall be used
- the acquisition, care and use of animals must be in accordance with all applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations
- certifications must be received from research facilities prior to being approved for a research grant that the facility, its researchers and employees adhere to the guidelines of the NHMRC
- in cases requiring the death of an animal, only the most appropriate and humane form of euthanasia shall be used consistent with the purpose of the research.

Please note that any application being considered for funding will be subject to review by at least one member of the **AOARF Animal Research Review Committee** prior to final approval.

3. Use of grant funds

In general, funds can be allocated for:

- a part-time salary of a research assistant but not for salaried employees of research institutions, and
- consumable items and inexpensive items of equipment essential to the conduct of the research, and
- publication fees (proof of publication will be required).

Expensive pieces of equipment (greater than \$5,000) **cannot be funded** unless it is shown they will be used by an orthopaedic research group over a long period. At least two quotes for the purchase of such items must accompany the grant application.

Funds are **not** available for:

- full-time personal secretarial assistance
- personal computers
- items considered standard equipment for any research institution
- travel expenses.

Where funding for a research project has already been provided by other organisations, matched or otherwise, this will be viewed as a positive. This should be clearly articulated in the proposed budget for the research grant application. If funds from other sources become available to the applicant during the review or tenure of a Foundation research grant, the RPC must inform the Foundation in writing. The AOA Research Foundation Board may choose to terminate the award, in which case the unexpended balance must be returned to the AOA Research Foundation.

4. Assessment and selection

Applications are assessed by the Research Advisory Committee against the following criteria:

- scientific merit and feasibility
- impact on or relevance to musculoskeletal disease
- track record of the applicant or research team

Please refer to the Grant Assessment Criteria for more details.

Following an assessment for the Research Advisory Committee, recommendations regarding funding of projects will be submitted to the AOA Research Foundation Board for final consideration. If successful applicants have applied to other funding organisations, the AOA Research Foundation will not commit funds to the project until the outcome of the other applications are known. If, after receiving payment from the AOA Research Foundation, the investigator receives support for the same person or project from other sources, the award will terminate and the unexpended balance will be returned to the AOA Research Foundation.

5. Grant terms

Funding availability

Grants to individuals will be made only through a recognised institution and on receipt of the following items:

- fully-executed Grant Agreement
- appropriate evidence of ethics approval
- valid invoice.

A grant for the acquisition of major items of equipment will be made available on request when payment for the equipment is due. Any major variation in the program from that outlined in the application must first be referred to the AOA Research Foundation Board. A transfer of expenditure from one cost heading to another, for example salaries to supplies, is permissible within reason.

However, any desired transfer of funds of a substantial amount should be referred to the AOA Research Foundation Board for approval.

Commencement of research

It is expected that the project will commence within six months after notification of the grant is received. The AOA Research Foundation Board is to be **notified of any delay in commencement**. If the lead investigator leaves the institution or the project before the expiration of the grant, the grant may terminate unless arrangements, satisfactory to the AOA Research Foundation Board, have been made.

Obligations of grant recipients

During the currency of the grant, the applicant (or other approved responsible person) is required to submit to the AOA Research Foundation Board, a report on the prescribed form detailing the work carried out on the project and the results achieved in the previous 12 months.

Progress reports are due by 31 August each year.

During the currency of the grant and at the termination of the grant, both the **Annual Progress Report Form and AOARF Expenditure Form** should also be completed and submitted, detailing the appropriation and expenditure of grant monies during the preceding year and including a refund of any surplus of unexpended funds at completion of the research. The applicant is required to complete a final **Annual Expenditure Form and Annual Progress Report Form** listing publications (full articles and published abstracts) and meetings at which the research has been presented in the period up to two years after receipt of the grant.

Failure to provide Annual Progress Report Form and AOARF Expenditure Form in a timely manner or not at all may result in future applications made by the Lead Investigator deemed ineligible at the discretion of the AOARF Board.

6. Further information

Should you have any questions regarding the AOA Research Foundation or the grant application process, please contact the Foundation on (02) 8071 8024 or email research@aoa.org.au.