



# Request for Proposals:

## *Ann Theodore Foundation Learning Opportunities in Medicine and Sarcoidosis*

Recognizing that support for early-career talent in the sarcoidosis research and clinical field is key to accelerating breakthroughs, the Ann Theodore Foundation is launching the next cycle of the Ann Theodore Foundation Learning Opportunities in Medicine and Sarcoidosis (ATF-LOMAS) initiative, to provide funding support for early-career researchers interested in sarcoidosis research. The Milken Institute Science Philanthropy Accelerator for Research and Collaboration (SPARC) will administer the initiative.

ATF-LOMAS is now accepting applications for awards of up to \$100,000 per year for two-year research projects led by early-career investigators who seek to advance the foundational understanding of sarcoidosis through projects focused on the biology, epidemiology, and clinical care of the disease. Successful applicants will be paired with a mentor to provide guidance throughout the initiative.

**For this program, “early-career” investigators are defined as being within the first five years of an independent faculty appointment who have not yet obtained an R01, P01, or P50 grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) or a similar award (e.g., typically multiyear grants that provide substantial support for independent research programs, >\$250,000 per year in direct costs).**

*If you are interested in participating in the program as a mentor and are not an early-career investigator, please contact us at [sarcoidosisgrant@milkeninstitute.org](mailto:sarcoidosisgrant@milkeninstitute.org).*

***Mentors will receive an honorarium for their service.***

## Description

Sarcoidosis is a disease hallmarked by clusters of immune cells, known as granulomas, that can form in various organs. The lungs are the most frequently affected, but virtually any organ can be impacted. For some people, the condition resolves on its own, but for others, it can be chronic and debilitating. Symptoms can include difficulty breathing, fatigue, and heart arrhythmia, and if the granulomas persist, they can cause severe organ damage and death. The sarcoidosis field needs a strong, stable workforce pipeline to ensure that future generations of researchers will sustain and build upon progress made thus far.

ATF-LOMAS will award up to five two-year research grants led by doctorate-level investigators at qualifying research-based institutions worldwide. Projects will be eligible for up to \$100,000 USD annually in funding, inclusive of direct and indirect costs, totaling \$200,000 USD over two years. The maximum allowable indirect rate is 15 percent. Mentorship will be a key component of the program, so applicants must indicate the expertise and professional background that they seek in a mentor; additionally, applicants are welcome to provide specific names of potential mentors.

## Importance of Early-Career Investigators

Historically, it has been difficult for early-career investigators to find sustainable funding for sarcoidosis research. Promising researchers often leave the sarcoidosis community in favor of fields with more robust funding opportunities. Early-career investigators need enough resources to create a foothold in the form of initial data and publications that can, in turn, enable them to garner consistent funding and build a career studying sarcoidosis. When the field grows, so will the ability to discover life-saving interventions.

## Importance of Mentorship

Mentorship is a key component of career development in any setting, but its importance is especially pronounced in fields like sarcoidosis with limited research communities. Guidance from an experienced sarcoidosis researcher can be a vital asset for a junior faculty member as they navigate the ecosystem and develop their own research focus.

## A Need for Novel Approaches to Study Sarcoidosis

Sarcoidosis is a multidimensional condition, and answering its most pressing questions will require attention and dedication from researchers in various fields. We encourage researchers who study sarcoidosis as well as those who study other granulomatous, rheumatic, infectious, or inflammatory conditions, autoimmune diseases, or related fields to apply their insights and expertise to understanding sarcoidosis.

Sarcoidosis requires study from various perspectives, including but not limited to genetics, epidemiology, molecular biology, immunology, and cardiology. We encourage investigators to develop research approaches that allow for assessment and understanding across multiple relevant disciplines.

Projects investigating sarcoidosis that may be selected for funding should display novelty, creativity, and promise in seeking innovative approaches to understanding the etiology, genetics, epidemiology, or molecular basis of sarcoidosis.

## Scientific Focus on Sarcoidosis

ATF-LOMAS welcomes proposals to investigate sarcoidosis regardless of organ system. The scientific focus of ATF-LOMAS proposals must address one or more of the following focus areas:

- studies that seek to elucidate the underlying causes of clinical heterogeneity in sarcoidosis, employing approaches inclusive of genetics, molecular biology, epidemiology, and evaluations of determinants of sarcoidosis development and progression
- studies of sarcoidosis immunology, including studies of granuloma biology
- studies of other potential causes of sarcoidosis, including autoimmune and/or infectious risks for sarcoidosis
- studies that elucidate the mechanisms of downstream effects and comorbidities in sarcoidosis (e.g., fibrosis)
- studies that involve the application of new tools or technologies that will improve understanding of the basic biology of sarcoidosis

- ancillary studies that examine the cellular and molecular biological effects of repurposed existing therapeutics

Studies may be performed in digital, human, animal, or cell models. Applicants proposing to use human samples **must** describe the demographics of their cohort.

## Eligibility Criteria

1. Each applicant organization must be a nonprofit academic or research institution, including domestic and non-US nonprofit organizations and domestic and non-US public/private academic universities or institutions of higher learning (including colleges, universities, medical schools, and other related academic research institutions). Certain qualified governmental agencies with active biomedical research programs may also apply.
2. All proposed research projects must be led by a principal investigator (PI) who holds a doctorate (e.g., PhD, MD, or related research doctorate). The PI must be an independent investigator.
3. Institutions may submit more than one proposal, but a unique PI must lead each proposal.
4. Each applicant must be within the first five years of their first independent faculty appointment and must not have obtained an R01 from NIH or a similar award.

## Mentorship Expectations

Mentors who participate in ATF-LOMAS will be required to adhere to the following standards:

1. Mentors must have a track record of sarcoidosis expertise.
2. Mentors must be able to meet with their mentees via phone at least once every month.
3. Mentors are expected to provide timely, constructive, and supportive feedback to their mentees regarding their funded project. We expect mentors to respond to email inquiries from mentees within 48 hours.
4. Mentors are expected to support their mentees as the mentees execute their career plan and navigate their field.
  - a. Examples include reviewing grant applications and manuscripts, providing feedback regarding time allocation between research and other responsibilities, and explaining how mentees can recruit trainees to their lab.
  - b. More details on career plan requirements can be found in the “Application Requirements” section.
5. At the 12-month progress report mark, mentors will provide mentees with a written assessment of the mentees’ progress, strengths, and areas for improvement. The assessment will also be sent to ATF-LOMAS.
6. At the 12-month progress report mark, both mentors and mentees must agree to continue the mentor-mentee relationship in order to continue with the program. If the mentor is unable to continue in that role, the mentee must find another mentor within two months to serve for the remaining period.
7. Mentors agree to support mentees in networking, including finding opportunities to meet community members and participate in sarcoidosis-relevant in-person and virtual events.

Mentors will be provided an honorarium of \$1,000 per year of completed service.

## Optional Letter of Intent and Application Requirements

All completed applications must be submitted through a SurveyMonkey Apply grant portal at <https://milken.smapply.io/prog/atf-lomas/>.

It is recommended that each applicant consider the portal's requirements when preparing the application. **Applications must be single-spaced and formatted in Calibri 11-point font with one-inch margins, except where provided templates apply. The review team will strictly enforce formatting and length. Submissions that exceed the page limit or do not follow the requirements below will not be considered for review.**

All applicants are encouraged to submit an **optional letter of intent (LOI)**, which will be reviewed by the ATF-LOMAS review team. The LOI will be an opportunity for initial feedback on the project. Applicants who propose relevant projects will be notified that their project falls within the scope of the program. If ATF-LOMAS informs an applicant that their project does not fall within the scope of the program, the applicant is still able to submit a full proposal, but ATF-LOMAS would advise changing the scope of the project. As the LOI is optional, all applicants may submit a full proposal, regardless of their submission of an LOI.

1. **Optional letter of intent.** The LOI is a one-page letter briefly stating the intent to apply for a grant, project title, and project aims. The LOI also requires the applicant organization's legal name; PI name, degree, position, proposed mentor, and contact information; and the organization's tax ID (for US) or registered charity number.
  - a. LOIs are due Thursday, July 23, 2026, at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time.
  - b. LOIs will be submitted via the SurveyMonkey Apply grant portal, which can be accessed via this link: <https://milken.smapply.io/prog/atf-lomas/>.
  - c. Should the ATF-LOMAS team, in its sole discretion, find that a project described in an LOI falls in the scope of the program, the applicant will be notified by email within approximately two (2) weeks of the LOI submission deadline. The LOI is an opportunity for initial feedback and provides a chance to alter the project as needed before submitting a full proposal.
2. **Proposal** outlining the intended project must be no more than eight (8) pages in length, outlining the intended project, and will be organized as follows:
  - a. **Scientific approach.** An outline of which research methodology the PI intends to use in pursuit of the project, which also defines and justifies key project outcome measures. Four (4) pages maximum, inclusive of figures, but not of references in the applicants' preferred format. *Preliminary data are not required.*
    - i. All proposals must be focused on the biology, biochemistry, epidemiology, or immunobiology of sarcoidosis. Studies that are only tangentially related to sarcoidosis will not be considered.
    - ii. A maximum of two figures and accompanying legends may be included in an appendix.
    - iii. A brief protocol synopsis and timeline milestones must accompany proposals. As noted below, approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human studies or from the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) for animal studies will be required before initial payment is made for any project that ATF-

LOMAS, in its sole discretion, selects for funding. If new approvals are required during the course of the funding period, those approvals should be submitted to ATF-LOMAS as soon as possible.

- iv. Studies that entail human participants or patient samples should specify a plan for recruitment or acquisition, respectively, that will be inclusive of diverse backgrounds as much as possible, including race, gender, ethnicity, and geography.
  - v. Any intellectual property considerations that the proposed research may entail should be noted.
  - vi. If alternative plans exist that would be implemented in the event that local conditions prevent research from proceeding as planned, include a brief description of these arrangements.
  - vii. A statement detailing the innovative aspects of the scientific approach and question must be included.
- b. **Detailed career plan.** The plan will describe the specific steps, contingencies, and mentor engagement that the applicant will use to reach the next career stage and/or obtain follow-on funding for sarcoidosis research. Maximum of two (2) pages. The career plan must include:
- i. grants for which the applicant intends to apply during the two-year grant period
  - ii. meetings and/or conferences the applicant plans to attend during the grant period
  - iii. time allocation between research and other responsibilities
  - iv. how the applicant will become a mentor for the next generation of scientists
  - v. discussion of strategies the applicant will use to advance their career within and beyond their institution
- c. **Budget.** A detailed budget in USD with a narrative summary and justification for each item, including how the PI intends to spend their time on the project. Two (2) pages in length using the provided template and one (1) page in length providing narrative justification of budget items. Projects can be budgeted for two years. Projects led by individual researchers can be budgeted for up to \$200,000 (\$100,000 per year) in total costs, with a maximum indirect rate of 15 percent. Acceptable expenditures for direct costs include:
- i. salary for the PI, graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, staff scientists, and other personnel for protected research time (fringe benefits are also covered)
  - ii. equipment and software
  - iii. laboratory supplies, such as reagents and tools
  - iv. core services and consultant services
  - v. patient recruitment
  - vi. sarcoidosis event-related travel
  - vii. open-access publication costs (all publications resulting from ATF-LOMAS-funded research must be made available through open access)
  - viii. up to 15 percent of the total budget allocated to indirect costs (indirect expenses will be proportional to the \$100,000 budget and, therefore, will not exceed

\$13,000; it is not necessary to provide specific details regarding indirect cost expenditures)

*Note: The budget and justification must provide reasonable detail for an expert to understand whether the budget appropriately corresponds to the proposed activities.*

**Please note that grants will be awarded in USD, and the Ann Theodore Foundation is not responsible for changes in conversion rates. Proposals selected for funding will be made payable to the applicant organization. Under no circumstances will funding be paid to, or earmarked for, any individual.**

3. **Mentor specifications** must be provided via the application platform. ATF-LOMAS will match all awardees with a mentor before funded projects begin. Applicants may either preliminarily select a mentor in their application or opt to allow ATF-LOMAS to select a mentor for them based on their needs. One (1) page maximum.
  - a. Applicants without a preselected mentor should share the expertise and professional background that they seek in a mentor. ATF-LOMAS will use this information to help the applicant find a suitable mentor.
    - i. Applicants should include details regarding the skills, experiences, and support they would like to receive from a mentor.
  - b. Applicants who opt to preselect a mentor must provide the name(s) of one or more specific preferred mentors. The individual(s) listed must not have trained the applicant previously (e.g., postdoctoral or graduate advisor), but the preferred mentor(s) may be affiliated with the same institution as the applicant.
    - i. Applicants must detail the proposed mentor's (or mentors') expertise, experience, and why each would be a suitable mentor. This may include information on what the applicant can learn from each potential mentor and how each mentor's strengths complement the applicant's strengths.
  - c. A letter from each proposed mentor agreeing to this potential role must be included in the application. Awardees who are matched with a mentor may terminate their mentorship arrangement in consultation with ATF-LOMAS. If the arrangement is terminated, the awardee will be matched with another mentor as soon as possible.
4. **Additional documentation** within the online form will include:
  - a. The lead PI must provide a biosketch from the NIH template, five (5) pages or fewer. If applicants are unable to provide a biosketch, a CV will be acceptable.
  - b. The lead PI must submit a completed "Other support form" from the NIH template.
  - c. For the application to be considered complete, an electronic signature confirming that the grant proposal contains information that is true, complete, and accurate and that false or fraudulent statements may subject the applicant's institution to criminal, civil, or administrative penalties is required.
  - d. The applicant's institution must provide a letter of commitment stating that the applicant's institution will be able to support the research led by the applicant.
  - e. Organizational assurances: Upon request, an applicant institution may be required to submit additional information to document its nonprofit status.
    - i. **Please note that each mentor will be required to submit a letter of support for their mentee after they are matched with a mentee. This letter must demonstrate**

**that the mentor is able and willing to provide support to the level outlined in the “Mentorship Expectations” section.**

5. **US-based governmental organizations** (excluding academic/research institutions that are public charities) must provide:
  - a. a full copy of the enabling statute that authorized the organization’s creation
  - b. a copy of the organization’s governing documents (such as articles of organization or constitution and bylaws), if applicable
  - c. any correspondence from the IRS confirming the organization’s tax status, if applicable

## Review

The ATF-LOMAS Scientific Advisory Board will review each application based on the following:

- **Scientific and technical merit:** the quality of the scientific rationale and the use of resources, equipment, and experimental designs to evaluate the central scientific question rigorously or test the stated hypothesis/hypotheses. Experimental design must be highly rigorous, and the study must be appropriately statistically powered to produce meaningful findings even in the absence of supportive or positive results.
- **Career plan feasibility:** the overall likelihood that the applicant will be able to achieve the goals outlined in the description. Career plans should be achievable, but they must also entail meaningful career advancement for the applicant.
- **Budget realism:** a realistic budget that adequately supports personnel, equipment, overhead, open-access publishing costs, and other needs to carry out the project successfully.
- **Overall need:** the applicant’s other funding sources taken into account when making final decisions. Having other sources of funding will not prevent an applicant from being awarded.

## Key Dates and Timeline

1. **Wednesday, June 24, 2026:** Informational session about sarcoidosis and the ATF-LOMAS initiative will be held via Zoom at 3 p.m. Eastern Time. Please use the following link to register: <https://milkeninstitute-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/w2AD0le9QsS30ll8azcvfQ>.
2. **Thursday, July 23, 2026:** Optional LOIs are due [via the SurveyMonkey Apply grant portal](#) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time.
3. **Monday, October 26, 2026:** Applicants must submit their full proposals via [the SurveyMonkey Apply grant portal](#) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time.
4. **January 2027:** Awardees who are selected for funding are notified.
5. **February 2027:** Awardees are matched with mentors.
6. **March 2027:** Projects begin.
7. **Summer 2027:** The Funded Investigators Meeting takes place. Awardees are expected to attend.

## Grant Terms

Each funded research institution and the lead investigator will be required to cosign and agree in writing to ATF-LOMAS' grant terms within 30 days from receipt of notice of the award and prior to funds being released. ATF-LOMAS' grant terms include the following:

1. Signature confirming that the information provided in the grant proposal is true, complete, and accurate. False or fraudulent statements may subject the funded organization to criminal, civil, or administrative penalties.
2. Any substantial changes to the project, including activities, budget, protocols, or grant period, require written approval from ATF-LOMAS before proceeding with such activities, spending, or committing any remaining funds from the grant.
  - a. Any funds not expended or committed for the purposes of the grant must be returned to ATF-LOMAS unless otherwise agreed by the Ann Theodore Foundation in writing.
  - b. If an applicant organization proposes to supplement any funds provided by ATF-LOMAS with funds provided by a third party, the organization must first provide notice to ATF-LOMAS and must ensure that the funding terms that attach to any such third-party funds do not preclude sharing of data or publication of project results as stipulated in this RFP.
3. The applicant organization must be able to receive awarded funds and allocate them toward the funded sarcoidosis research project.
4. The funded investigators must submit a plain-language, nonconfidential, scientific abstract intended for a public audience for the Ann Theodore Foundation to display on their website.
5. All matched mentors will be required to submit a letter of support for their mentees.
6. Following receipt of the mentor's letter of support, SPARC and the Ann Theodore Foundation will request a brief mentorship plan from the awardee.
7. Awardees are expected to attend and participate in annual investigators' meetings to present and discuss their research plan and preliminary results in the research supported by ATF-LOMAS. The annual investigators' meeting is planned for summer 2027.
8. Funded organizations must agree to the following reporting requirements:
  - a. Submission of full written narrative and financial reports at the conclusion of the granting period, 24 months following the award payment.
  - b. At 12 months after receiving funding, applicants must also share brief updates describing major project highlights and/or progress based on predetermined milestones after the initial award payment, as well as participate in a brief virtual meeting with other grant recipients to discuss plans, progress, and findings.
9. Approval from an IRB or the local equivalent (for human studies) or from IACUC or the local equivalent (for animal studies) will be required before initial payments are made.
10. It is a condition of any funding provided by ATF-LOMAS that the funded investigator seeks to have the results of the funded project submitted to a peer-reviewed, open-access journal or a preprint journal within 18 months after the completion of the project. Each publication would acknowledge, in a manner approved by ATF-LOMAS, ATF-LOMAS' role in supporting the project. If the investigator does not publish the results within such a time frame, ATF-LOMAS would have the right to make such results public. It is acceptable for funded investigators to publish project results in journals that offer

an option to make a publication open-access after a given period of time behind a subscriber paywall, although investigators are encouraged to publish results such that the publications are open-access as early as possible. Specific financial support for such publications will be provided. Funded investigators must inform ATF-LOMAS of any publication supported by ATF-LOMAS funds within 30 days of publication.

## Data and Intellectual Property

Each funded organization would own the rights of all intellectual property developed on behalf of that organization under ATF-LOMAS funding in accordance with such organization's applicable intellectual property policies. ATF-LOMAS would have the right to use and to practice all such intellectual property for internal, noncommercial research purposes and would also have the right to publicly disclose research results in press releases, announcements, and otherwise (subject to the funded organization's advance approval if any such public disclosure would occur prior to publication of the applicable results). Intellectual property will be sublicensable to nonprofit research institutions for noncommercial educational and research purposes only and will only be used in research related to the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, or cure of sarcoidosis and conditions or complications caused by sarcoidosis.

Each funded organization must agree to share project results, data (de-identified where applicable), reagents, and other research tools developed under ATF-LOMAS funding with other ATF-LOMAS-funded investigators for noncommercial use to advance the understanding of sarcoidosis and maximize scientific impact.

## Funding Awarded at ATF-LOMAS' Discretion

Responding to this RFP with an application does not entitle any individual or institution to receive funding from ATF-LOMAS. Funding, if any, would be provided at ATF-LOMAS' sole discretion pursuant to the terms of a written grant agreement executed by ATF-LOMAS and the selected awardee institution and acknowledged by the funded investigator.

## Contact Information

For all inquiries about the online application process, necessary documentation, research priorities, or scientific requirements, please contact [sarcoidosisgrant@milkeninstitute.org](mailto:sarcoidosisgrant@milkeninstitute.org).

An automated email confirmation is generated upon submission of the application. If you do not receive a confirmation within 24 hours of submitting your application, please check spam filters and contact [sarcoidosisgrant@milkeninstitute.org](mailto:sarcoidosisgrant@milkeninstitute.org).