

Catalyst Grants 101

A QuickStart Guide to the Catalyst Grant Program at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab
January 2025



What is a Catalyst Grant?

The Catalyst Grant Program is part of the Research Accelerator Program at SRAIab, and it's our largest internal funding opportunity for research and innovative thinking! These grants are available to all employees. If you have an idea that will help improve patient outcomes or an organizational process, you should apply! All applications must include a researcher or QI mentor and a non-researcher. Consequently, you do not have to have research experience to participate and, if needed, the Catalyst Grant administrative team can help partner you with an appropriate researcher.

There are six types of Catalyst Grants, each with a specific purpose. Please see below for a brief overview of each and information to guide you in the application process.

Catalyst Grant Types

Project

These grants are for relatively low-cost projects (\$1,000-10,000) that are easy to develop and implement and will have an immediate impact on our patients or organization. This is a great place to start if you've never done research before. If you have an idea of how to improve something, you can partner with a researcher to design a solution. Some previous examples include building a device to prevent a tracheostomy tube from disconnecting, creating a menu with pictures to support patients with communication challenges to order their own meals, and analyzing patient data to determine predictors for successful ventilator weaning.

Quality Improvement

Quality Improvement Grants specifically focus on quality improvement (QI) projects that lead to a positive change in processes or patient outcomes. The funding amount for this category is \$10,000-\$25,000. QI projects are not traditional research projects. Submissions in this category must utilize a QI framework such as the four-stage Plan-Do-Study-Act Model and include a QI mentor.

Mentorship

Mentorship Grants are a great starting place for people with limited research experience to develop their professional research skills. Consequently, the goal of this grant is twofold: (1) Complete a project of \$10,000-\$25,000 that will impact patient outcomes while (2) developing research skills. For example, a therapist may propose a project that addresses a clinical problem they see with their patients or develop/evaluate a new tool they would like to use in the clinic. While completing the project, the mentee develops specific, measurable research skills. At the end of the project, the mentee provides evidence of research skill development and their plan for future research involvement.

Foundational 1

Foundational 1 Grants fund a scientist and clinician collaborative project of \$10,000-\$25,000 that impacts patient care and/or outcomes. The goal of this grant is to perform high quality translational research that warrants dissemination to the rehabilitation community at the national/international level. However, unlike a Foundational 2 Grant, data leading to additional research and external funding is not an expectation of a Foundational 1 Grant.

Foundational 2

The Foundational 2 Grant is intended to fund a scientist and clinician collaborative project that will potentially impact patient care and/or outcomes and lead to external funding and additional research. In addition to serving as the foundation for future work, these grants are intended to create the pilot data necessary to apply for a substantial external grant (*e.g.*, NIH, VA, DOD).

Renewal Grant

The Renewal Grant is intended to provide additional time and funds (\$1,000-\$10,000) to extend highly successful Project or Quality Improvement Grants. To be eligible for a Renewal Grant, you must have successfully completed the original grant and have the goal of expanding, further advancing or amplifying the same project's impact.

Who can apply?

All Shirley Ryan AbilityLab employees are eligible to apply! Each Catalyst Grant application must include two Primary Applicants.

Project, Mentorship, Foundational 1, Foundational 2, and Renewal Grants must include a Primary Research Applicant and a Primary Non-research Applicant.

- **Primary Research Applicant:** SRALab Research Scientist or Team Scientist who is primarily responsible for overseeing all aspects of planning and conducting the research project. Engineers may be the Primary Research Applicant for a Project Grant.
- **Primary Non-research Applicant:** Team member who is primarily responsible for the aspects of the project that include clinical care, business operations, or environmental/operational support.

Quality Improvement Grants must include a Primary QI Applicant and a Primary Project Applicant.

- **Primary QI Applicant:** QI mentor who is primarily responsible for overseeing all aspects of planning and conducting the project, including following QI protocol and format.
- **Primary Project Applicant:** Team member who has knowledge of the clinical or research process or outcome targeted in the project. They are responsible for completing QI activities as planned in collaboration with the Primary QI Applicant.

Additional Eligibility Details

- All Primary Applicants must be SRALab employees and/or have grant funding through SRALab.
- Employees may serve as a Primary Applicant on up to three Catalyst Grant applications.
- **Postdoctoral Fellows** may not serve as Primary Applicants or include effort on the budget.
- **Graduate Students** may not serve as Primary Applicant or include effort in the budget.
- **External Collaborators** may contribute to the project in an advisory or mentorship capacity but may not serve as Primary Applicants or include effort in the budget. If your project includes an external collaborator, please include a letter of support.
- **Paid Consultants** may provide specific services that are not available within SRALab. These services may be included in the budget as non-labor expenses (*e.g.*, video editing, Northwestern's Biostatistician Collaboration Center).
- **Alliance Sites:** SRALab employees at Alliance sites are eligible to serve as Primary Applicants and include effort on the budget.

I have an idea. Now how do I find a partner?

If you need assistance identifying a research or non-research partner, please email your request to Melissa Briody (mbriody@sralab.org). The deadline for making this request is typically about a month before the submission deadline in order to allow enough time for collaboration.

If you have an idea for a Quality Improvement Grant, please contact Melissa Briody (mbriody@sralab.org) to be connected with a QI mentor for a preliminary discussion before starting the application. You may also include a researcher on the project, but it is not required. The QI mentor will assist in identifying the best team members to support your project.

How Much Money Should I Ask For?

You'll need to make it clear exactly how you will use the funding and why you need it. Below are some typical budget items included in Catalyst Grant applications. Be sure to use the budget template provided in the application form. It will make this process much easier!

DIRECT COSTS

Labor Expenses

A big part of your budget will likely be used to pay your team members. You will need to determine what type of experts you need to make your project successful and how much time they will need to complete their role. For example, if you think a new device may be useful during therapy, you will want to make sure an engineer is on board to help you develop the device and fix it if it stops working. Team members should enter their salary information in the budget. If you plan to hire a new employee, you can contact Azra Ehrenreich, Manager, Grant Administration (aehrenreich@sralab.org) to request an estimated hourly rate.

A final thing to remember is that labor expenses also include covering benefits like health insurance. These “fringe” costs are around 30% of an employee's salary and they are automatically added to your budget.

Equipment and Supplies

You may have equipment costs of less than \$5,000 included in your budget or materials and supplies such as medical tape, adhesive electrodes, syringes, etc.

Participant Reimbursement

The amount of money budgeted for research participants depends on what they will be doing (*i.e.*, completing surveys, performing a six-minute walk test, or taking a device home to use). Your research partner will help you determine the appropriate stipend amount for your study. The key factor is that the amount must not be so high that it coerces people to be involved in a study that they might not otherwise take part in.

INDIRECT COSTS

Research budgets also include indirect costs for organizational overhead expenses. For the Catalyst Grant program, these indirect costs are 10% of your budget. Again, be sure to use the budget template located in the Catalyst Grant application form. It automatically calculates this amount and makes your life much easier!

OTHER BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

Principal Investigator and Team Scientist Effort

SRAlab PIs and Team Scientists whose roles include research education and mentorship may include effort “in-kind” for Project, Quality, Mentorship, or Renewal Grants. PI salary support for project mentorship is strongly discouraged.

Non-allowable Expenses

Publication fees, conference registration, and travel are not allowable for any grant type.

How do I show I'm qualified to do the work?

A biographical sketch (formatted to NIH requirements), CV or resume for each team member is required. PIs, Team Scientists, and other employees with research experience should include a biosketch. Others may include CV or resume. This serves to illustrate team members' qualifications to do the proposed work and to demonstrate their commitment to the project. A biosketch template is available at the [NIH Grants webpage](#).

What kind of projects are typically funded?

Funding priorities include applications that: align with SRALab's mission and vision, foster new interdisciplinary collaborations, demonstrate significant innovation, have potential for high clinical/organizational impact, and have no alternative funding sources.

How does the review process work?

All Catalyst Grant proposals are carefully evaluated through an internal review committee that includes representatives from research and clinical departments. After carefully reading each proposal, the reviewers rate the proposals and then meet to discuss them and make funding recommendations. At this point, a project manager may reach out to you to request some minor modifications to the proposal, such as reducing your budget, or verifying a few things, such as a quote for equipment. After all this information is gathered, Dr. Lieber, Dr. Sliwa and the executive leadership team make final funding decisions.

I got the award! What's next?

All applicants will receive an email notifying them of their award decision. If your project was selected for funding, a project manager will provide information about next steps.

I thought my proposal was pretty good, but I didn't get it. Why not?

Researchers often need to submit proposals several times before they are funded. Don't get discouraged! Unfortunately, even strong proposals are not always funded because there is a limited amount of money to go around. However, it is important to keep in mind there are a couple of deal-breakers; if you do not follow instructions or your application is incomplete, it probably won't be reviewed.

If your project was not chosen for funding, you will receive feedback and suggestions to further develop your idea. You are welcome to contact the project manager and discuss your proposal individually to determine how to improve your proposal for the next application round.

Help! I have more questions!

Visit <https://www.sralab.org/catalystgrants> or contact Melissa Briody, Senior Project Manager, Research (mbriody@sralab.org) for additional information.

Who Can I Talk to About All This Cool Research Stuff?

Reach out to research leaders via the contact information below.

Levi Hargrove, PhD

Scientific Chair, Center for Bionic Medicine

lhargrove@sralab.org

José Pons, PhD

Scientific Chair, Legs + Walking Lab

jpons@sralab.org

Leora Cherney, PhD, CCC-SLP, BC-ANCDs

Scientific Chair, Think + Speak Lab

lcherney@sralab.org

Allen Heinemann, PhD

Director, Center for Rehabilitation

Outcomes Research

aheinemann@sralab.org

Monica Perez, PT, PhD

Scientific Chair, Arms + Hands Lab

mperez04@sralab.org

Richard L. Lieber, PhD

Chief Scientific Officer

rlieber@sralab.org

Katherine Earnest,

RN, MSN, CRRN, CNML

Director, Nursing Research

kearnest@sralab.org

NEED HELP WITH A LITERATURE SEARCH?

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's medical librarian is a great resource if you need advice on your search strategy or require assistance to obtain full text resources.

Andrew Wahl, MSLS

Medical Librarian

awahl@sralab.org

WANT MORE INFORMATION ON THE RESEARCH ACCELERATOR PROGRAM?

We have an employee at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab to help answer all your questions or get you involved! Please feel free to contact Melissa to discuss any aspect of the grant program, application process or to discuss your idea.

Melissa Briody, MOT, OTR/L, MS, HSM

Senior Project Manager, Research

mbriody@sralab.org

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit <https://www.sralab.org/catalystgrants> for application forms and additional information.

To learn about additional research activities and opportunities at SRA Lab, please reference [Research 101](#) available on SRA Lab Connect.