

The Pershing Square Sohn Cancer Prize

An initiative from the Pershing Square Sohn Cancer Research Alliance (PSSCRA)

2027 Prize Application Guidelines

“For a challenge this huge, we need incredible innovators who don’t take the standard approach.”

– Dr. Deborah Hung

PRIZE OVERVIEW

The Pershing Square Sohn Cancer Prize provides early-career scientists the freedom to take risks and pursue their boldest research at a stage when traditional funding is lacking. While the Prize initially focused on the greater New York City area, as of 2026, applicants and winners now represent institutions from across the United States. **Prize winners each receive \$250,000 a year for three years, totaling \$750,000.**

The Pershing Square Sohn Cancer Research Alliance (PSSCRA) is dedicated to accelerating cures for cancer by advancing the pursuit of innovative cancer research and by facilitating collaborations between the science and business communities. PSSCRA seeks to guide philanthropic funds to feed critical scientific discoveries, attracting like-minded investors to the cause of fighting cancer and creating a pipeline for early-stage biomedical investments.

In addition to receiving funding, Prize winners are given access to a unique network and are invited to participate in select programs, including:

- Facilitated partnerships with other researchers within and across institutions
- Networking programs (including but not limited to: collaborations/discussions between Prize winners and industry leaders, introductions to philanthropic and for-profit investors, invitations to special industry networking and entrepreneurship events, and more)
- Annual retreat
- Ability to present the best ideas at conferences and events (hosted by PSSCRA and other organizations)

APPLICATION PROCESS

The application process will be conducted in two stages:

Stage 1: Letter of Intent (LOI) – Opens on **Monday, September 21st, 2026**, to all eligible research organizations. LOIs must be submitted online through our application submission website: <https://prizeapplication.smapply.io>. Please note: We do not have a full proposal stage. Projects will be evaluated solely through the LOI.

Stage 2: Presentation – Finalists will be invited to present their proposal to the Governing Board, Prize Advisory Board, and Scientific Review Council at the 2027 Prize Finalist Review Board Meeting.

TIMELINE AND KEY DATES

Please note that PSSCRA may adjust the notification dates without notice to applicants:

September 21, 2026: Portal opens to receive Letter of Intent (LOI) applications

October 26, 2026: Deadline to submit LOI

Mid-February 2027: Applicants notified regarding the status of their application; selected applicants invited to present at Finalist Review Board Meeting

April 13 & 14, 2027: Finalist Review Board Meeting in NYC (*finalists invited to one of the two days*)

Late April 2027: Prize winners notified

June 14, 2027: Prize Award Dinner in NYC

July 1, 2027: Projects start

KEY CRITERIA

Radically innovative and scientifically sound research: Novel approaches in cancer research characterized by a strong scientific rationale and novel methodologies. Research areas may include, but are not limited to, basic research and technological applications. PSSCRA is seeking high-risk, high-reward proposals characterized by radically novel scientific approaches that would otherwise not be funded. The objective is to support projects that may be too innovative and speculative for traditional funding sources but still have a likelihood of producing important findings. It should be a unique project for scientists, who are encouraged to stretch their imagination into areas that can substantially change their area of research. Scientific merit will be evaluated and determined by the Pershing Square Sohn Cancer Prize Scientific Review Council and Prize Advisory Board. For more insight, please review our panel of board members and archive of past winning proposals [on our website](#).

Quality of the applicant: Applicants must display creativity, adaptability, strong written communication skills, and the ability to collaborate with others. They embody an entrepreneurial spirit for driving impact and scale.

Potential impact on the cancer field: Proposals that articulate a clearly defined impact on/importance to the cancer field will be favored. The goal is to advance research in new ways that will have an impact on understanding, diagnosis, prevention and/or treatment of cancer. Consider the significance of the research question being asked, and the potential to shift paradigms or address unmet needs.

ELIGIBILITY

An MD, PhD, or MD-PhD degree (or equivalent) is required. Applicants must have at least **two (2) years** of experience running their own laboratories but no more than **six (6) years of experience** by the start date of the Prize (July 2027). Exceptions due to prolonged medical or family leave will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Principal Investigators (PIs) must hold faculty appointments at academic research institutions (or equivalent) in the United States of America at the level of Assistant or Associate Professor (or equivalent). Multiple applicants from the same institution may apply as long as eligibility criteria are met. **Applicants may only apply to the Prize a total of two (2) times.**

Applicants to The Pershing Square Foundation (PSF) prize programs (the Pershing Square Sohn Cancer Prize, MIND Prize, and Lotus Award) can **only apply to one program at a time**. For example, if you apply to the 2027 Pershing Square Sohn Cancer Prize, you cannot apply to the 2027 Lotus Award.

Current PSF grantees (including MIND Prize and Lotus Award winners) may not apply to the Pershing Square Sohn Cancer Prize until their existing award term has concluded, and final reports have been received.

An applicant who is not a U.S. citizen or permanent resident, by submitting an application for this funding, assures that his/her visa status will provide sufficient time to complete the project and grant term within the United States. Investigators need not be specifically trained in cancer research; however, they should be working in an environment capable of conducting high-quality, high-impact cancer research.

The Pershing Square Sohn Cancer Research Alliance does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability or any other legally protected characteristics.

LETTER OF INTENT (LOI)

LOIs are due **Monday, October 26th, 2026 by 5pm ET**. Applicants must fill out and submit the LOI online. The LOI is a **1.5-page document** in Georgia, 11-point font, single-spaced, with one-half inch (.5) margins. Figures are accepted but must remain legible within the 1.5-page limit. References are not included in the limit.

Please include the following sections:

1. Scientific background and rationale – **One-half page (400 words maximum)**
 1. Briefly describe the biological question and rationale underlying the proposed research.
 2. Why are you particularly well positioned to undertake this work?
2. Proposed Research Project – **One page**
 1. Describe the project aims, experimental approach, research plan, and innovation/impact of the work.
 2. What important gap or unmet need exists in the field, and how will your proposed research address it?
 3. If successful, how could this project meaningfully advance the field?
 4. Why is the project innovative within the specific research focus area?
 5. Why is this project worth funding now?

A **budget** and a **biosketch** (slightly different from NIH format, using our own template) will be required along with the LOI. Templates for both will be provided, and applicants **must** use these templates. The submission form and these templates can be found on our application portal once a user has created an account and started the application: <https://prizeapplication.smapply.io/>.

NOTE: The total budget per year must reach, but should not exceed, \$250,000 (this includes direct and indirect costs). Therefore, the budget should be constructed as follows:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Total Direct Costs	\$225,000	\$225,000	\$225,000	\$675,000
Indirect Costs (up to 10% of total annual payment)	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$75,000
TOTAL (Direct & Indirect)	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$750,000

Applicants can absolutely have less than \$25K in indirect costs and more than \$225K in direct costs, but totals must reach \$250K/year.

REVIEW MECHANISMS

- After submission of the LOI, applications will undergo review by the PSSCRA [Scientific Review Council](#).
- Applicants will be selected from a group of qualified individuals based on their credentials, the merits of their proposals, and the connection of their proposals to the goals of the PSSCRA.

- Finalists will be invited to present their proposal to the PSSCRA [Governing Board](#), [Prize Advisory Board](#), and Scientific Review Council at the 2027 Prize Finalist Review Board Meeting in New York City. A virtual option will be available, although in-person attendance is preferred and encouraged, and travel expenses will be reimbursed.
- The final selection will be contingent upon ratification by the PSSCRA Governing Board.
- As a policy, PSSCRA does not provide reviewer critiques or evaluations to applicants.

PRIZE ADMINISTRATION

Award Agreement

Upon acceptance of the Prize, the PI and their employing institution will be required to sign an award agreement indicating acceptance of The Pershing Square Foundation Grant Terms and Conditions. Among other requirements, PSSCRA must be notified in advance and approve of any significant changes in research objectives, key personnel, or budget, and must be acknowledged in publications. As the agreement template reflects over a decade of collaboration with institutions on best practices and fair terms, we do not allow ANY edits to the award agreement unless there is information included that is factually incorrect. If you have questions about this before applying, please email us.

Publicity

By submitting an application for funding, the PI grants PSSCRA permission to use their name, image, likeness and quotes at any time in connection with the publicity relating to this Award (whether during the Award period or after) provided that such use is factual, accurate and for non-commercial purposes only. PSSCRA will coordinate with the appropriate individuals with the employing institution for use of institution name. (Further publicity terms related to the PI's institution will be outlined in the award agreement and will be agreed to upon agreement execution.)

Funding

PSSCRA will allow no more than 10% of the award amount (\$25,000/year) to be allocated to indirect costs. Full term funding will be contingent upon review of annual progress reports and other oversight activities conducted by PSSCRA. PSSCRA will determine future funding at its sole discretion. Multi-year support is not automatic and is conditioned on meeting certain milestones and deliverables defined in the Award Agreement, including submission of complete and accurate progress reports indicating that the project is meeting measurable objectives.

Annual Retreat

Prize winners, academic and industry leaders, Scientific Review Council and Prize Advisory Board members, and select guests will be invited to attend the Pershing Square Sohn Annual Retreat, held each fall.

Reporting Requirements

All grantees are required to provide an annual progress (narrative and financial) report in accordance with applicable IRS requirements. The reports will be reviewed to ensure that the purposes of the grants are being fulfilled. A template and reminder will be sent in advance of the deadline.

The procedures outlined above are in accordance with the procedure for making grants to 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations approved by the IRS for The Pershing Square Foundation.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Please find answers to [Frequently Asked Questions here](#).

We also recommend [reading this article](#) from *PLoS Computational Biology* on best practices for grant applicants.

Any additional questions concerning this RFP should be addressed to Christy Hudson:
chudson@persq.org

About the Pershing Square Sohn Cancer Research Alliance: <http://psscra.org>