2026 Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapy Research Grant Application Guidelines

1. INTRODUCTION

The **Foundation for Physical Therapy Research** is the research funding organization for the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) and is a registered 501(c)(3). Our vision is to shape the future of health through physical therapy research. Our mission is fund research and develop researchers to optimize movement and improve the health of society.

Through the generosity of our donors and community of supporters, our sole purpose for the past 46 years has been to fund physical therapy research and researchers through grants, scholarships, and fellowships. Through our investments in PhD students and early career researchers, we are creating a pipeline of highly skilled and capable researchers. They are building our knowledge of and evidence about effective and innovative physical therapy practices, tools, guidelines, and education across the spectrum of our professional specialties.

Our growing number of larger grants allows us to fund both emerging and established researchers who have been helping build the physical therapy evidence base in priority areas and help define the value of physical therapy for patients and clients, health care professionals, and payers.

Through the generosity of our donors, we have created a sustained pipeline for future researchers and of research funding to help launch careers and advance the profession's evidence-based practices.

Research Integrity

The Foundation expects all grant recipients to adhere to the highest ethical standards and to comply with public laws and regulations when undertaking any type of research we support. We expect grant recipients to demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Be intellectually honest in proposing, performing, and reporting research;
- Be accurate in representing contributions in research proposals and reports;
- Act without discrimination or bias in all aspects of research;
- Be collegial in scientific interactions, such as communication and sharing of resources;
- Be transparent in conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest;
- Ensure the protection of human subjects by conducting research in compliance with the Department of Health and Human Services' regulations governing the protection of human subjects, as well as adherence to a project's IRB approval and all the sponsoring institution's research and conduct policies;

- Ensure the humane care of animals by conducting research in compliance with the Public Health Service's policy on humane care and treatment of laboratory animals, if applicable; and
- Adhere to the mutual responsibilities between principal investigators and their research teams.

This grant is generously supported with funds from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists Endowment Fund.

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2. GENERAL INFORMATION

Award

The Foundation expects to make one (1) award of **$40,000** for a period of either one or two years. The amount of the award will be the same, regardless of the period of performance. The Foundation reserves the right not to make this award.

All the funded research must be carried out in the United States (U.S.).

The deadline for submitting a completed application on ProposalCentral.com will be **July 31, 2026 at 4:59 p.m. EDT**. The Foundation expects to make research grant awards in December.

3. FUNDING OBJECTIVE

The purpose of the Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapy Research Grant is to support rigorous, high-quality, clinically impactful research that advances the science and practice of contemporary orthopedic manual physical therapy (OMPT). Successful studies will generate evidence that informs clinical reasoning, examination, and treatment strategies within OMPT. They will have strong potential for clinical translation and meaningful contributions to strengthen evidence-based OMPT practice and to influence clinical decision-making, implementation, or future research directions.

For the purposes of this grant, OMPT is defined as a subspecialty of physical therapy featuring a systematic, active approach for the management of a broad spectrum of physical disorders. Based on a patient-centered advanced clinical reasoning model taught in the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapist's fellowship training, OMPT has key distinguishing characteristics that include expertise in hands-on iterative examination and treatment strategies inclusive of thrust and non-thrust manipulation. Essential to OMPT is a focus on continuous reassessment throughout all aspects of care, the synergistic application of carefully designed and

dosed exercise, and a patient-centered long-term mindset driven by available scientific and clinical evidence and the biopsychosocial framework of each individual patient.[1]

4. AREAS OF STUDY AND FUNDING PRIORITIES

Proposals may focus on any area of OMPT and must clearly articulate how OMPT principles, as defined above, are central to the proposed research question, intervention, or analytical framework. Pilot or feasibility components may be included if clearly justified, for example, to support eventual applications for larger studies. However, proposals should extend beyond purely exploratory aims.

Proposed studies must explicitly reference and address one or more of the priorities found in the 2023 APTA Research Agenda. Research plans that fail to explicitly identify at least one bulleted priority will not advance to review. While not a qualifying requirement, preference may be given to studies that explicitly state a focus on one or more of the following AAOMPT priorities:

- Examination or treatment strategies central to OMPT clinical reasoning
- Thrust and/or non-thrust manual physical therapy interventions, alone or synergistically applied with exercise
- Continuous reassessment models and their influence on outcomes
- Real-world implementation of OMPT principles in clinical practice
- Patient-centered outcomes informed by the biopsychosocial framework
- Comparative effectiveness of OMPT-informed care approaches

Highly competitive proposals will demonstrate high potential for successful completion within the time and budget available and some, if not all, of these characteristics:

- Propose research that is justified by the research literature or by knowledge or evidence gaps in the literature;
- Include clearly described conceptual and analytical frameworks that are clearly linked to design and variables;
- Use appropriate quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods that are well described and demonstrate competency to apply them;
- Have a well-developed recruitment strategy that explicitly identifies risks to timely recruitment and shows a plan for mitigating risks;
- Evaluate the clinical effectiveness of therapeutic interventions;
- Have clearly defined and measurable outcomes;

[1] Silvernail JL, Deyle GD, Jensen GM, Chaconas E, Cleland J, Cook C, Courtney CA, Fritz J, Mintken P, Lonnemann E. Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapy: A Modern Definition and Description. Phys Ther. 2024 Jun 4;104(6):pzae036. doi: 10.1093/ptj/pzae036. PMID: 38457654.)

- Consider social determinants of health and drivers of health disparities;
- Assess the interaction between patient characteristics and therapeutic methods;
- Have direct, real-world application to improve the evidence-base for clinical practice; and/or
- Have a strong likelihood of leading to funded larger impactful studies.

5. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR AND SPONSORING INSTITUTION ELIGIBILITY

In general, the Foundation reserves the right, on the basis of statutory, regulatory, published policy limitations, changes to donor agreements, or decisions by the Foundation Board of Trustees, under certain programs or types of awards, to limit eligibility to, or exclude from eligibility, classes, or types of entities.

One Principal Investigator must submit the application, whether they are applying as an individual working with a research team and regardless of whether they are naming co-investigators and do so through the legally registered, US-based sponsoring organization or Institution at which they are employed. The Foundation does not allow co-Principal Investigator.

The Principal Investigator must meet these requirements:

- Hold an academic research doctorate. If the principal investigator does not hold a post-professional, academic doctorate, this eligibility can be met one of two ways: Hold a master's or certificate that required least six credit hours in research methodologies or have an expert on the research team who is explicitly responsible for providing the requisite design and methodological skills and experience.
- Be employed by a U.S.-registered, domestically operating, public or private, non-profit, or for-profit organization or institution that is eligible to receive research grants that agrees to act as the Sponsoring Institution.
- Be a member of APTA[2] and of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists at the time of submission and for the life of the grant.
- Possess a license to practice physical therapy in the U.S. or in a U.S. jurisdiction **OR**
    - Have met all the requirements for physical therapy licensure in the U.S. or in a U.S. jurisdiction, including having received a passing score on the licensure exam; **OR**
- Possess a physical therapist assistant license in the U.S. or in U.S. jurisdiction **OR**
    - Have met all the requirements for licensure as a physical therapist assistant in the U.S. or in a U.S. jurisdiction, including having received a passing score on the licensure exam.
- Be a U.S. citizen **OR** a permanent resident with a valid Green Card for the life of the grant. *Note: validity may involve renewal or applying for naturalization.*

[2] You may become an APTA member here.

- Have a substantive research and leadership role on the study, as well as being responsible for its implementation.
- If a prior Foundation award recipient, the Principal Investigator must be in Good Standing with the Foundation.
- If the Principal Investigator currently holds any scholarship award or research grant from the Foundation, that award or grant must be successfully completed and closed prior to the start of this research grant. **No recipient will hold more than one Foundation award or grant at one time.**

Foundation Definition of a Principal Investigator

The Principal Investigator is the only investigator named on the research grant along with their Sponsoring Institution. They are the only investigator that signs the Letter of Agreement. They have a major ongoing role in the study and provide overall research leadership, have direct oversight of the research process, and are accountable for the quality of the study. They are fiscally accountable to their institution for the funds awarded. They are responsible for submitting all required reports to the Foundation. They are responsible for disseminating the results of the study through a research brief, submissions to peer-reviewed publications, public presentations, posters, and as appropriate, other channels, such as APTA or Foundation publications.

Considerations for Physical Therapist Assistant Applicants

The Foundation only supports intervention studies in which the interventions are provided by physical therapists, or in which selected components of the interventions are provided by physical therapist assistants under the direction and supervision of physical therapists.

Considerations Regarding a Research Team

The Foundation expects the applicant to be working with a team that contributes the expertise needed to deliver a successful, high-quality study. The composition of the team should satisfy the reviewers that all skills and expertise needed for the successful completion of the study will be available. One of more co-investigators may be named on a research team, but they cannot be assigned role responsibilities reserved for and expected of the principal investigator. The Foundation does not allow co-Principal Investigators. If the applicant is unsure about team composition and roles, they are advised to contact the Foundation (info@foundation4PT.org) prior to submission.

The Sponsoring Institution must meet the following requirements:

- Be legally registered in the U.S. as a domestically operating, public or private, non-profit, or for-profit institution or organization;
- Have an OHRP number and have policies and requirements to protect research team personnel and human and animal subjects;

- Not have a conflict of interest;
- Sign the Letter of Agreement; and
- Be accountable for implementation of the research project, as agreed in the Letter of Agreement, including for the appropriate expenditure and accounting for funds according to Foundation requirements.

Ineligible Applications

In addition to ineligibility due to not meeting one or more of the requirements listed above, there are other conditions that would render an application ineligible.

Academic degree requirements. Research studies that are to be completed in fulfillment of requirements for an academic degree are not eligible to be funded by this grant.

Foundation limit on awards or grants. An applicant is limited to one grant submission per cycle. There can be no overlap of award or grant periods of performance. Any current awards or grants must be completed and closed prior to the start of the period of performance for this grant. This limitation pertains to the principal investigator and not to the sponsoring institution.

Failure to complete award or grant requirements on an existing Foundation scholarship award or research grant. The applicant will not be in Good Standing and will not be eligible to apply for any research grant.

The Principal Investigator cannot be a student. The applicant must have completed any academic degree work by September 1, 2026 to be considered for this grant. This restriction applies to Principal Investigators who have full-time qualifying employment, but who are also enrolled in a post-graduate degree program that will be ongoing on or after this date.

Product prototype or pre-commercialization testing studies. These types of studies are not eligible for Foundation funding.

The Principal Investigator must be independent and not have a conflict of interest in the design or conduct of the study. The following examples are indicative and not exhaustive: they should have no restrictions from any source that would compromise the independence of the conduct of the study and the reporting of all results; neither the PI nor research team members can have ownership rights or have a financial interest (includes salary) in a company that owns a technology being studied itself or used in a study.

6. REQUIRED APPROVALS, ASSURANCES AND TRAINING

Institutional Review Board or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee Approval or Exemption

The Foundation requires all study proposals to be approved or exempted by the Sponsoring Institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Institutional Animal Care and Uses Committee (IACUC). Should a Sponsoring Institution not maintain an IRB or IACUC, they may contract with a qualified entity. Foundation funds cannot be used to pay for privately contracted approvals or exemptions. The Sponsoring Institution will be responsible for ensuring that any required IRB approval or exemption is maintained for the life of the research project.

The Foundation strongly suggests that applicants consider submitting their request for an IRB approval or exemption by the time the full application is submitted. The Foundation is working to ensure that no award is delayed because IRB approval has not been given or exempted by the time Letters of Agreement are signed. No payments will be made until the duly executed IRB or IACUC approval or exemption has been submitted to the Foundation. All grants are provisional until all required documents are submitted.

If data are to be collected on human subjects, or if data used in the study contain identifiable private information that can be linked to human subjects, the plan must include specific procedures for reviewing the protocol and for securing informed consent of subjects in compliance with federal policy on the protection of human subjects.

Multi-site studies and Collaborators. The IRB approval or exemption must be on the Sponsoring Institution's letterhead and signed by the appropriate institution official. If the proposed research project has more than one site, IRB approval or exemption **must** be obtained for **every** site in the project. Multi-site collaborators may agree to operate under a central IRB issued by the Sponsoring Institution. Site collaborators will have to attest, in their letters of confirmation, that they will either agree to a central IRB and data-sharing agreement or agree to secure their own IRBs with a data-sharing agreement within two months of the applicant receiving the award. **If invited to submit a full application, The Applicant and any site collaborators will need to confirm how IRBs and data-sharing agreements will be handled expeditiously and without undue delay to the start of the study.**

Standards for Privacy of Individually Identifiable Health Information

The Privacy Rule is a federal regulation under the 1996 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) that governs the protection of individually identifiable health information from covered entities through collaborative or contractual agreements. Decisions about whether and how to implement the Privacy Rule reside with the Principal Investigator and their institution.

Assurance Agreement

The Sponsoring Institution must be covered by an assurance agreement indicating compliance with Department of Health and Human Services regulations governing the protection of human subjects.

Conduct of Research and Human Subjects' and Animal Protection Training

The Foundation expects that the applicant and key personnel will have fully complied with their institutions' conduct of research training requirements. If data are to be collected on human subjects, or if data used in the research project contain identifiable private information that can be linked to human subjects, the Principal Investigator and all key personnel involved in the conduct of the study must provide documentation showing full compliance with their institution's conduct of research requirements. The applicant must submit, at a minimum, a certificate of completion for human subjects protection training (initial or refresher) that meets the Sponsoring Institution's IRB requirements. Similar certificates must be provided if the study involves animal subjects. Certificates must be dated within the past three years. **Letters cannot be substituted for certificates.**

7. DATA MANAGEMENT AND SHARING

To ensure that knowledge, including data, produced by the research supported by this grant can be **publicly** accessed, used and built upon, the Foundation supports the goals and approaches taken in the NIH's 2023 Data Sharing Policy. Foundation grant recipients are expected to follow their institution's data sharing policies and reflect them in their application as appropriate. Applicants that do not have any institutional requirements are still expected to include plans to share their data publicly as part of their proposed study. The Foundation does not accept the lack of institutional data-sharing requirements as a reason not to agree to data sharing. The Foundation accepts that there may be data-sharing restrictions imposed by the owners of data sources.

8. OVERVIEW OF LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS

This section covers only the most salient information and is not exhaustive. If a Principal Investigator or their institution have specific questions, they should contact the Foundation at info@foundation4PT.org.

Letter of Agreement

All Sponsoring Institutions will sign a Letter of Agreement (i.e., contract) with the Foundation on behalf of the Principal Investigator. The Sponsoring Institution will agree to administer grant funds and ensure compliance with all institutional and Foundation requirements.

Indicative terms and conditions include, but are not limited to, use of funds, reporting, payments, changing principal investigators or institutions, changes to approved plans, breach or default, and the rights of the Foundation concerning patents, royalties, and licenses.

Sponsoring Institutions shall not be allowed to refuse any part of whole of any clause or add any whole clause. The Foundation is committed to working with Sponsoring Institutions to reach mutually agreeable text to address legitimate concerns, so long as they will be resolved without undue delay in finalizing the Agreement. The Foundation reserves the right to withdraw a provisional award due to unresolvable disagreements that prevent finalization of the Agreement.

Subcontracting. The Foundation understands the need for and allows the Sponsoring Institution to subcontract implementation of parts of the study with certain restrictions and considerations as illustrated but not limited to the following:

- No fringe benefits, administrative fees, or other indirect charges may be part of any personnel rates and payments to individuals, institutions, or organizations operating under a subcontract.
- Subcontracting arrangements (singular or multiple) that exceed 40% of the total budget may be subject to further review and approval as part of compliance checks prior to application reviewing.
- Subcontracting cannot effectively transfer the burden of responsibility and accountability for implementation of the study itself to an institution not a signatory to the Letter of Agreement. The Foundation does not allow multiple institutions to sign the Agreement.

Applicants are strongly advised to contact the Foundation prior to submission with any questions about subcontracting prior to submission.

Finalizing a Provisional Award

All awards are provisional until the Foundation receives the following required documents or information:

- Letter of Agreement signed by the Sponsoring Institution and the Principal Investigator;
- IRB or IACUC approval(s) or exemption(s) on letterhead and signed by the appropriate official(s);
- A publicity consent form signed by the Principal Investigator; and
- Information required for the electronic transfer of funds.

The first payment of funds will not be made until all these requirements are fully met.

Payment of Funds

Funds will be sent electronically to the US-based and legally registered sponsoring organization or institution for administration through its financial office. Payments will be made according to a schedule in the Letter of Agreement, which will usually be an initial payment and then every six months. After the initial payment, further payments are conditional upon the timely submission of progress reports that fully provide requested information about implementation progress and, for 2-year grants, a first-year financial report.

Use of Funds

Funds are available for research done in the U.S. by legally registered U.S. institutions and eligible researchers.

By means of the application budget form, funds may be requested to meet types of expense reasonably associated with the research project, including salaries and fringe benefits (of employees of the sponsoring institution only), subcontracts (no fringe or indirect costs or fee, and subject to overall budget limitations), necessary consultant contracts, purchase (see below) or rental of equipment, supplies, travel to study sites or study-related conferences, publication costs (if incurred during the grant period, printing or postage, and special services, such as computer time, photographic services, and secretarial or research assistant support. Upon finalization of the award, changes of 10% or more to any part of an application budget must be approved by the Foundation in advance.

Limitations on Use

The following uses of Foundation funds are not permitted under any circumstance:

- **NO INDIRECT (OVERHEAD OR ADMINISTRATIVE) COSTS OR ADMINISTRATIVE FEES ARE ALLOWED. Please make sure your institution and any subcontracted institutions or consultants are fully aware of this restriction before you submit your Letter of Intent. There are no exceptions.**
- No funds may be used for expenses or debts incurred prior to the start of the grant period of performance stated in the finalized, signed Letter of Agreement.
- No award funds will finance cost overruns on the funded project. Unexpended funds must be returned when the grant closes.
- Support for the purchase of major pieces of permanent equipment is limited to **20 percent or less** of the total award unless the Foundation has pre-approved a higher proportion has been given by the Foundation prior to submission.

- Conference travel support is limited to the principal investigator only and subject to travel expense guidelines. Requests for international travel exceptions must be approved in advance.

9. EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS

Overview of the Process

Guidelines for the distribution of funds and criteria for selecting research grant recipients are established by the Foundation Board of Trustees. The Scientific Review Committee (SRC) is appointed by the Board to review and score applications. It uses review criteria similar to the ones used by NIH. As of the 2026 funding cycle, the Foundation criteria have been revised to align with the 2025 NIH revised review criteria where appropriate. The SRC uses the NIH scoring system, where 1 is exceptional and 9 is poor.

The SRC is comprised of successful independent physical therapy researchers with experience mentoring academic doctoral students and candidates and/or postdoctoral fellows. The Board's Research Committee considers the SRC's review results and recommends one applicant for each grant to the Board. If there are no qualifying applicants, no recommendation is made for that grant. The Board then makes a final decision for each of the research grants. The Board reserves the right not to make an award.

Updated Review Criteria for Research Grant Applications

Below are the newly revised review criteria the SRC will use to evaluate all the $40,000 grant applications, as well as the two Paris Patla grants starting with the 2026 applications. The Foundation reserves the right to update and refine the review criteria.

Significance

1. Evaluate the **importance** of the proposed research for advancing knowledge and/or high-quality evidence in the field by assessing how the proposed study results:
   (1) would address an important gap in knowledge or evidence that would likely advance PT practice; (2) would address a critical real-world problem or barrier to progress in the field; or (3) would create a valuable conceptual or technical advance.
2. Evaluate the **rationale** for undertaking the study (1) the rigor of the scientific background for the work (e.g., justification is based on prior literature and/or preliminary data), and (2) whether the applicant includes lived experiences and priorities of stakeholders to justify the proposed study.

Innovation

3. To what extent is the proposed study innovative because:
   - it asks a **new question** that is important to an intervention or its validation; or
   - it uses **novel concepts, methods, or technologies** to shift research or clinical practice.

4. If it is not innovative, does the study pose a question(s) of critical importance to the field?

Approach (Quality)

5. Are the **overall strategy, methodology, and analysis** well-reasoned, well described, and appropriate to answer the research questions, accomplish the specific aims of the project, and result in reproducible findings?

Rigor

6. For experimental designs, is the **sample size** appropriate and well justified for the size of the study and for answering the primary research question? Are power calculations and effect sizes discussed? Are appropriate controls in place?
7. Are **conceptual and analytical frameworks** present and well described?
8. Are **participant characteristics** appropriate for the proposed research strategy, including any biological and socioeconomic variables identified?
9. Is the participant **recruitment and retention** plan well thought out, including inclusion and exclusion criteria and mitigation of risks?
10. Evaluate the **plans** for analysis, interpretation, and reporting of results, including whether limitations, potential problems, alternative strategies are adequately considered.
11. Are the **outcomes** clear, justified, and measurable?

Feasibility

12. Is there very high likelihood that this study will be **successfully completed** in the requested period of performance for the available budget?
13. If there are dependencies, do they present an appropriate alternative plan?

Investigator and Research Team (will be scored)

14. Evaluate whether the Principal Investigator and research team have demonstrated the background, training, and expertise to conduct the proposed work. Career stage is relevant for grants limited to emerging investigators.

Environment (will not be scored)

15. Are the institutional support, equipment, and other physical resources available to the researchers adequate to ensure the successful and on-time execution of the proposed work?
16. If multiple sites are included, are their selection and roles appropriate for the study, and has the approach to securing IRB or IACUC approvals or exemptions and data-sharing agreements been adequately described?

10. USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Foundation, consistent with NIH policies and standards, does not consider applications that are substantially developed using artificial intelligence (A.I.) to be considered original work. The Foundation expects applicants to submit original ideas in proposing research training or studies. If A.I. use is found to be substantive and undue, the application will be disqualified from review, and the Foundation may declare that applicant to be Not in Good Standing. Applicants Not in Good

Standing cannot apply for or hold any Foundation funding. The Foundation is under no obligation to justify its decision, nor will it be subject to discussion, appeal, or any other form of recourse by the applicant. All risk associated with the use of A.I. rests solely with the applicant. If an award has been issued and the Foundation later discovers substantive and undue reliance on A.I. it reserves the right to revoke the award and take legal actions available under the Letter of Agreement.

11. QUESTIONS

Please sign up for the research grant application FAQs email list to receive important clarifications and updates directly. Please read the application instructions carefully. Please submit any questions you have about these guidelines to info@foundation4PT.org.

End of the 2026 Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapy Research Grant Guidelines