



Guidelines for Applicants for a 2026 Postdoctoral Fellowship

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) not-for-profit entity. Our mission is to fund physical therapy research and develop researchers to optimize movement and improve the health of society. Through the generosity of our donors and community of supporters, we fulfill this mission through research grants, scholarships, and fellowships.

Through our investments in academic research doctoral degree students and early career researchers, we are advancing the quality of physical therapy researchers and the impact of research evidence that helps ensure the profession will provide high-quality, evidence-based physical therapy to all who need it.

The fellowship supports early-career physical therapy researchers to build on their dissertation research and/or expand their knowledge, research skills and experience in new ways that will further strengthen their capabilities as researchers and therefore be well prepared for sustained and successful careers as impactful independent investigators.

2. General Information

The amount of the fellowship is \$75,000, which includes a \$62,000 stipend to the Fellow and \$13,000 to the Sponsoring Institution to cover a limited number of direct institutional costs. The duration is one year, and it is not renewable. The Foundation will award one fellowship in 2026, and it reserves the right not to make an award.

Applications must be submitted online using [ProposalCentral.com](https://www.proposalcentral.com) by **4:59 p.m. EDT, March 30, 2026**

Qualifying applications will be peer reviewed by the Foundation's independent and expert Scientific Review Committee. The results of the peer review will be reviewed by the Board of Trustee's Research Committee, which will recommend one applicant to the Board for approval to receive the fellowship. The Board expects to announce the fellowship recipient by the end of June 2026. The Board reserves the right not to make any award.

These guidelines are an overview of eligibility, basic administrative information, and application review criteria. Details about how to apply can be found in the [application instructions](#).

3. Foundation Priorities

The Foundation wishes to support fellows employed at institutions where they can devote 100 percent of their time to research and training. The primary Foundation priority is to fund postdoctoral fellows who relate their training and research to one or more of the most critical priorities identified in the [APTA Research Agenda](#) and/or research priorities of an APTA academy in which the applicant is a member. The Foundation prefers applications that demonstrate the following research and training priorities:

- Provide knowledge, skills, and experience that build researcher capabilities to substantively address the social and structural determinants of people's health and healthcare system disparities and inequities, including researching and analyzing costs.
- Prepare them for multidisciplinary, collaborative, and team-based research.
- Deepen and expand competencies in research methodologies and the ability to integrate them in designing high-quality, methodologically sound, rigorous, and impactful research that provides evidence that helps advance the profession.

4. Applicant Eligibility

Prior Foundation scholarship funding is not a requirement to apply. All applicants who meet the eligibility requirements outlined below are welcome to apply:

- Be a member of the APTA and agree to maintain membership for at least one year after the fellowship period.
- Possess a physical therapy license granted by a U.S. state or U.S. territory.
- Be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident of the U.S. with the right to work (Green Card) that is valid for the entire fellowship period.¹
- Have been awarded an academic doctoral degree (e.g., PhD, EdD, or DSc) from an accredited institution after June 1, 2024.
- Be employed by the institution where the fellowship will be undertaken (see also below) and have 100 percent time available for research and training during the entire fellowship period. **An applicant who has teaching responsibilities for any part of the fellowship is not eligible.**
- Have identified a mentor who has agreed to this role, which is reflected in the application.
- Refrain from using artificial intelligence in any part of the development and finalization of the research plan that relies on creative thought, skills, or expertise of the applicant.
- Demonstrate commitment to further the physical therapy profession through research and teaching in the U.S. or its territories.
- Be in good standing with the Foundation.
- Not be receiving any Foundation funding on or after the proposed fellowship start date.

¹ Applicants must be resident in the U.S. and have a valid Green Card or demonstrate that they have received a renewal that covers the fellowship period. Unfortunately, applicants who intend to apply under a J-1 visa for postdocs are not eligible to apply.

**For Applicants who are Holding or who Expect to Hold Other Funding
for the Same Research or Training**

If you will be holding or expect to hold any other funding that will cover any part of the research or training included in your application, please check with your grants office prior to applying for this fellowship. Your institution may not be able to sign an award contract for this fellowship if the periods of performance will overlap. Please read and complete the Other Financial Support section of the application carefully. For any overlap, you will have to state that your institution confirms that the overlap would not prevent them from signing an award for this fellowship. If you confirm there might be a problem, please contact the Foundation (info@foundation4pt.org) before proceeding.

5. Sponsoring Institution Requirements

Applicants must be employed by the institution where they will undertake their fellowship. The institution will sign the Foundation's Letter of Agreement on behalf of and with its agent, the Fellow (see Section 7 below). Therefore, the institution must meet these requirements:

- Be an accredited U.S. academic institution with Federalwide Assurances.
- Agree to sign the application, sign the contract with the Foundation to administer the fellowship funds, and comply with all funding requirements.
- Agree that the fellow will be able to devote 100 percent of their time to the fellowship training and research for all 12 months.
- Agree to provide the mentorship, facilities, and other resources detailed in the application.
- Agree not to charge any overhead or indirect fees.

6. Institutional Assurances, Approvals, and Training

Assurances

The Foundation expects that the applicant's academic institution will have current Federalwide assurances indicating compliance with Department of Health and Human Services regulations governing the protection of human and animal subjects. The Foundation expects that the institution will have suitable human resource policies and protections for employees. The fellowship application requires that part of the applicant's training will cover the conduct of responsible research.

IRB or IACUC Approval or Exemption

The Foundation does not expect that the applicant will be responsible for a research project as a principal investigator and therefore is not responsible for attaining any IRB or IACUC approvals or exemptions. The Foundation expects that the mentor(s) will be subject to compliance with all institutional requirements for approvals or exemptions and for compliance with the Privacy Rule, a federal regulation under the 1996 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

7. Overview of Legal and Administrative Requirements

This section covers only the most salient information and is not exhaustive. If an applicant has specific questions, they should contact the Foundation at info@foundation4pt.org. Draft or sample letters of agreement are not shared during the application process.

Letter of Agreement

The sponsoring institution (employer) for the fellowship awardee will sign a Letter of Agreement (i.e., contract) with the Foundation, which is also signed by the fellow. The Foundation reserves the right not to agree to any changes in the Letter of Agreement. Should the fellowship awardee and/or their institution and the Foundation not agree to the terms of the agreement, the award will be withdrawn.

Indicative terms and conditions include, but are not limited to:

- The fellow remains fully employed at their sponsoring institution through the 12 months of the award and implementation of the award will be according to the information provided in the application, which will be attached to the agreement.
- The fellow and institution provide an interim progress report and a final narrative report and full and final financial report.
- Stipend funds are fully disbursed by the end of the fellowship and any unspent funds from the \$13,000 designated for institutional costs will be returned to the Foundation.
- The fellow agrees to the Foundation's publicity consent form, which are limited to the fellow.
- The fellow agrees to provide post-award reporting on career progress, including all funding awards, publications, and career advancement updates for five years.

Finalizing a Provisional Award

All awards are provisional until the recipient indicates that they accept it, and the Foundation receives the following required documents or information:

- Finalized Letter of Agreement signed by the sponsoring institution, the fellow, and the Foundation;
- Color headshot photo;
- ORCID account and authorization set up completed on ProposalCentral.com (if not already done);
- Signed Foundation publicity consent form; and a
- Completed electronic funds transfer information form.

The first payment of funds will not be made until all these requirements are fully met. The Foundation reserves the right to change what is required without notice.

Payment of Funds

The fellow will receive their stipend in two payments: 50% at the beginning of the fellowship and 50% after acceptance of their progress report after the first six months. A fellow may be tax liable for any or all



stipend. The Foundation assumes no responsibility for any tax obligations incurred by the fellow and does not issue a 1099 to the fellow. The institutional allowance will be disbursed in full in the first payment.

Use of Funds

Allowable Expenses—Fellow. The \$62,000 stipend is meant to defray living costs during the fellowship and to help cover research-related expenses not otherwise covered by the fellowship allowance. Fellows cannot use any Foundation funds toward the purchase of a house or car.

Allowable Direct Expenses—Institutional Allowance. The sponsoring institution will receive \$13,000 to defray the following fellowship costs:

- Health Insurance. It is mandatory to use the allowance to cover this cost if the fellow needs it, and it must cover the 12 months of the fellowship. Coverage can extend to the fellow's dependents at the discretion of the institution.
- Research Supplies.
- Equipment. Equipment charges exceeding \$1,000 must be approved by the Foundation prior to any commitment or purchase.
- Books and Miscellaneous Supplies.
- Travel. The minimum to be allocated is \$3,000 for use by the fellow only.
- Tuition. The maximum is \$4,300.
- Other Training-related Direct Costs. The maximum is \$5,000.

No other costs are allowed.

Refunds of unspent funds. There should be no unspent stipend funds. If the final expenditure report shows an unspent balance for direct expenses under the institutional allowance, the sponsoring institution will be responsible for remitting those unspent funds to the Foundation.

Reporting Requirements

The fellow will be responsible for providing one interim narrative report six months after the fellowship starts, a final narrative report no later than 30 days after the end of the fellowship, and a full and final financial report that is due no later than 60 days after the end of the fellowship period, or as otherwise agreed by the Foundation.

8. Overview of Application Review Criteria

Guidelines for selecting the postdoctoral fellowship are established by the Foundation Board of Trustees. The Scientific Review Committee is appointed by the Board to independently and expertly review and score applications without bias. It is comprised of physical therapist researchers with experience preparing physical therapists for research careers and with experience conducting successful and impactful research. The Research Committee of the Board considers the committee's application review scores and recommends to the Board the best scored applicant to be awarded the postdoctoral fellowship. The Board makes final decisions on all awards and reserves the right not to make an award.

The following areas are expected to be the basis for the Scientific Review Committee to evaluate applications for the postdoctoral fellowship. The details are indicative, and the Foundation reserves the right to revise the review criteria without notice.

1. Preparedness and Potential

- The applicant is prepared to undertake the proposed training and research plans based on their doctoral training and research experience.
- The applicant demonstrates that they possess the scientific understanding, creativity, curiosity, resourcefulness, and drive that will result in successful training and research outcomes.
- The potential is high, and it is clearly demonstrated, that the fellowship will advance the applicant to the next stage of becoming a successful, independent, and impactful physical therapy researcher.

2. Training and Research Plans

- The training and research goals are clear.
- The training plan is feasible to achieve in one year.
- The research and training project is rigorous, and its completion will contribute to the applicant's development as a research scientist.
- The applicant makes a **substantive** link between their research and one or more priorities in the [2023 APTA Research Agenda](#).
- The training plan identifies specific areas where further development is needed and contains appropriate, realistic activities and milestones to address those needs.
- The sponsoring institution's scientific environment, facilities, and resources are adequate and appropriate for the proposed training and research plans.

3. Commitment to the Applicant

- The mentor(s) have the skills, experience, and expertise to support the applicant.
- The mentor's support is strong and aligned with the needs and goals of the applicant.
- The institutional commitment and resources are appropriate and sufficient to support the applicant's training and research plans.
- The level of commitment will contribute to the successful completion of the proposed plans and to the applicant advancing to a productive and sustained career in the physical therapy research workforce.

9. Key Dates

January 6, 2026	Applications open
March 30, 2026	Application deadline at 4:59 p.m. EDT/3:59 p.m. CDT/1:59 p.m. PDT
By June 30, 2026	Fellowship awardee will be announced

Please [sign up](#) to receive important updates and responses to FAQs about the application process.