New Research Grant Opportunity for Myopia Researchers

The American Academy of Optometry Foundation (AAOF), incorporated in 1947, has invested tens of millions of dollars to support Fellowships, research grants, educational scholarships, and student travel awards to improve patient care. Reality Labs Research (RLR), a division of Facebook Technologies, LLC, in collaboration with the AAOF, has committed funding to stimulate new investigations in the important field of myopia. RLR is providing $250,000 of funding for this project area.

Funding of $250,000 is available for one large award or multiple smaller awards ($50,000 minimum). Award money may be used over one or more years depending on project construction and needs. The final number of awards and their award amounts will be determined based on application pools and priority. All funding is provided for direct research costs only, including researcher salaries, key personnel, equipment, and supplies. Indirect costs will not be provided. Awards will be made only to investigators with institutional affiliation, and funding will be distributed to such institutions for management and disbursal to investigators in alignment with the AAOF agreement.

A comprehensive understanding of the risk factors in our visual environment that contribute to myopia development and/or progression is lacking. Therefore, we are soliciting proposals that aim to accelerate understanding of these potential risk factors
in more novel ways in an effort towards closing these knowledge gaps. Some example research areas could include investigation of the role of spatial frequency content, lighting characteristics, optical aberrations, genetics, etc., but all proposals relevant to myopia, excluding animal models, will be considered and evaluated based on their scientific merit.

Eligibility requirements:

This opportunity is being announced to all Fellows of The American Academy of Optometry.

- The PI(s) must be an Academy Fellow(s) in good standing.
- PI(s) must have an institutional affiliation, where the proposed work will be conducted, and the institutional affiliation should not include a for-profit corporation.
- The research project must address a relevant research question(s) and have the potential to positively impact the field of myopia research and clinical management.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS:

The Letter of Intent (LOI):
RLR and AAOF are initially accepting LOI’s for grants addressing myopia.

1. Prospective applicants should submit an LOI for the purpose of defining the applicant’s eligibility. The LOI must be no more than 5 pages of single-spaced, Arial 11-point font with half-inch margins, uploaded as a single PDF file, and include the following:

   a. Rationale and Background for Proposed Research: Briefly describe what important myopia research question(s) the project is addressing and how the proposed study achieves the purpose of the AAOF-RLR award. Pertinent background and rationale for the proposed research question should also be provided.

   b. Objectives and Research Aims: Describe the overall scientific question including proposed hypotheses, specific study aims and objectives.
c. Research Approach: Provide a concise but thorough overview of the proposed study design and methods, including primary outcome measure(s), sample size justification, and data analysis plans.

d. Research Team: List key members of the research project team, including PI, clinical investigators, academic partners, and consultants. Indicate whether members are an Academy Fellow, Diplomate, or Candidate. Provide a description of each member’s role in the project, their expertise, and their affiliations/appointments. If members of the research team are separated geographically, outline the proposed methods for collaboration.

e. Budget Overview: Provide an overview of the budget and any additional support. Reminder: This grant award does not provide funds for indirect costs.

2. In addition, the NIH Biosketch of each member of the research team should be provided, which do not contribute to the 5-page LOI limit.

3. In a given application cycle, an applicant (PI) can only submit one LOI, and upon approval/invitation, one full proposal. Additional LOIs or proposals from the same PI per funding cycle will not be considered.

Invited Full Applications:

1. The grant proposal should follow the standard NIH format with modifications as outlined below. Instructions and forms can be found at the following web site: https://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html

   a. Applications should be in Arial 11 font with half-inch margins and be single spaced.

2. In general, the following items should be included in the proposal:
   a. Cover Letter
   b. Title Page with Approval from Institutional Signing Official
   c. Table of Contents
   d. Detailed Budget and Justification for All Years
   e. Biosketch(es) in NIH format
   f. Resources and Environment
   g. Scientific Abstract
   h. Specific Aims and Scientific Impact (1 page)
Significance and Innovation (1 page)
Research Plan (6 pages)
Project Timeline (1 page)
Literature Cited
Human Subjects (statement of equity, diversity, and inclusion)
Biohazards, if applicable
Letters of Support from Collaborators
Applicant’s Highest Impact and/or Relevant Paper Published or In Press
Other current funding having overlap with this application

Target Application & Review Timeline for LOI and Invited Proposals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call for LOI submission</td>
<td>Mar 29, 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter of Intent (LOI) submission deadline</td>
<td>May 2, 2022</td>
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<td>Decision on selected LOI’s to submit full proposals</td>
<td>June 6, 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grant proposal full application submission deadline</td>
<td>Aug 15, 2022</td>
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<td>RLR/AAOF selection of awardee(s) and RLR ratifies decision</td>
<td>Oct 10, 2022</td>
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<td>AAOF Board of Directors ratifies decision</td>
<td>Oct 17, 2022</td>
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<td>Notification of award letter(s) and award documents</td>
<td>Oct 25, 2022</td>
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<td>Funds disbursed 10 days upon finalization of documents</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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LOI submission:

Please respond to this call by submitting your LOI to: FRLAAOF@aaoptom.org (notate ‘LOI Application’ in the subject line).

Please include your name and contact information in the email.

Review Process
A review committee composed of representatives of the American Academy of Optometry (AAO) and/or the AAOF with expertise in the research topic area (4) and Reality Labs Research (3) will perform the review process of both the LOIs and full proposals. This committee will seek external reviewers with topical expertise to provide scientific merit reviews, as necessary. Following review of LOI’s, applicants will not be provided any review feedback other than a request to submit a full proposal or not. Review of full applications will include a detailed summary statement of their scientific merit, and review information will be sent to the AAOF. The Programs Approval Committee (PAC) will then determine awardee(s) based on merit and programmatic
goals. However, RLR retains the right to not fund any proposals not felt to be consistent with the goals of this funding mechanism.

Additional Grant Notes

Grant Disclaimers
To aim to protect applicants and all parties involved, the AAOF and award sponsor (RLR) have entered into a contractual agreement. The sponsor (RLR) is involved in the review and selection process. To aim to provide protection, upon award selection, awardees and their institution will enter a contractual agreement with the Academy Foundation as is standard practice for all research-based awards. Given that RLR members will be involved in the review process, it is possible that applicants not selected for funding through the AAOF mechanism may be contacted by an AAOF representative about other potential RLR grant funding mechanisms after announcement of the AAOF awardee has been made (e.g., RLR R&D funding). These potential collaborations do not involve the Foundation in any way and should be negotiated through the processes established by each investigator’s institutional policies.

It should be explicitly understood that in alignment with standard practice, any presentation, publication, or grant application are deemed disclosures of intellectual property, which often precludes further protection. Therefore, investigators should aim not to disclose any intellectual property within their application and should establish appropriate protection prior to submission of the application. Progress Reports to the Academy Foundation which will be shared with RLR will also be required. The awardee gives RLR the right to reproduce and distribute these progress reports as RLR chooses. Distribution may be delayed for up to 12 months at the awardee’s request in order to pursue publication of study findings. Despite these protections, the Academy Foundation cannot guarantee that acts of malice will not occur. Although any act of malice will be handled to the extent enforceable by the contract and legal means, applicants may wish to minimize confidential information provided in applications.

Award Recognition and Publication Submission
The award recipient and an institution representative will be invited to be recognized and participate at AAOF events and the annual AAOF Celebration Luncheon at the AAO annual meeting.
Recipients are encouraged to submit a manuscript reporting the major outcomes of the funded project to *Optometry and Vision Science*. All award recipients by application and acceptance of an award agree to allow the AAOF and/or the sponsor of the program to which they applied to publish their name, image, institution information, and any statement or quote provided by the recipient. These may appear in a variety of media formats that will announce and promote the program including, but not limited to, the AAOF’s and/or sponsor’s annual report, website, annual meeting promotional materials.

Any manuscript or publication material produced must acknowledge the American Academy of Optometry Foundation and Reality Labs Research as a funding source.

Questions: please email FRLAAOF@aaoptom.org.