Annual Open 2026
APPLICATION GUIDELINES

ALTERNATIVES RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

GENERAL PROGRAM INFORMATION

The mission of the Alternatives Research & Development Foundation (ARDF) is to fund and promote the development, validation, and adoption of non-animal methods in biomedical research, product testing, and education.

KEY INFORMATION

- **The deadline for letter of intent (LOI) submission is 11:59 pm (ET) on February 20, 2026**
- Applicants will be notified regarding an invitation to submit a full application by March 23, 2026
- The deadline for full applications (by invitation only) is 11:59 (ET) on May 25, 2026
- Applicants will be notified of funding decisions by August 10, 2026
- The preferred project period is September 1, 2026 to August 31, 2027. However, projects may start as late as November 1, 2026. All projects must be completed in one year (from the project start date). The maximum award amount is $50,000 (including indirect costs).
- Only non-profit, tax-exempt (501(c)(3)), non-governmental, educational and/or research institutions, or a non-U.S. equivalent, are eligible to receive Annual Open Grant program funds.

PROPOSALS WILL BE EVALUATED ON:

- The extent to which the project would contribute to reducing or replacing laboratory animals, and
- The scientific merit and feasibility of the proposed project

PROPOSALS WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED FOR PROJECTS THAT:

- Use intact, non-human vertebrate or invertebrate animals (note that this is more expansive than the U.S. regulations or policy regarding animal research and includes all non-human metazoans at all stages of life)
- Use monoclonal antibodies produced by in vivo methods

PREFERENTIAL CONSIDERATION WILL BE GIVEN TO PROPOSALS THAT:

- Are from U.S. institutions or organizations
- Utilize in vitro or in silico methods with human cells or data. However, this program discourages projects that are considered "human subjects research" under the U.S. regulations and require IRB oversight.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR MATERIALS/REAGENTS:

- If antibodies will be used, information regarding the source(s) and production method(s) must be clearly described in the full application. ARDF prefers non-animal methods of generation as well as production. As stated above, ARDF prohibits the use of monoclonal antibodies produced by in vivo methods.
- Investigators are strongly encouraged to minimize or avoid the use of serum or medium supplements obtained from non-human vertebrates (e.g., fetal calf/bovine serum). The type and source of all culture supplements must be clearly described in the full application (see Full Application Instructions). ARDF recommends investigators consider using the FCS-Free Database (https://fcs-free.sites.uu.nl/database/) as a resource.

CONDITIONS OF FUNDING:

- Proposals may be submitted without prior approval of the appropriate institutional review entity. However, successful applications must have such approval before funds can be disbursed. If the project involves human subjects research as defined by federal regulations (45 C.F.R. § 46.101-505), awardees must ensure Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the research activities. IRB approval must be provided before ARDF will disburse funds. Awardees must also comply with applicable state, local, and institutional regulations. The awardee institution bears ultimate responsibility for safeguarding the rights and welfare of human subjects.
- Applicants must state their intention if patents, copyrights, or intellectual property rights are expected to be secured from work sponsored by ARDF. If so, ARDF, which is a publicly supported nonprofit entity, retains an interest, financial and otherwise, in the work product. The extent of the interest can be negotiated in accordance with IP policies of the awardee institution.
- ARDF encourages the publication of funded research and expects awardees to submit at least one abstract for consideration (e.g., a conference presentation, call for papers) during the funding period.
- Any publications or presentations resulting from the funded work must include the "Alternatives Research & Development Foundation" in the acknowledgments, with copies sent to ARDF.
- Reporting: an interim progress report is due seven (7) months after the project start date. The progress report is a webform in ProposalCentral that is listed in the project deliverables. A final project report is due five (5) months after the project end date (including any no-cost extensions). The final project report should be uploaded to ProposalCentral in the "project deliverables" as a Word file or PDF. A separate financial report must also be uploaded to ProposalCentral. If funds are not used, ARDF must approve an extension or a refund must be issued.

PART I – LETTER OF INTENT (LOI) SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

The Annual Open program has a **required** letter of intent (LOI phase). **All applicants must submit an LOI prior to submitting a full application**. Only applicants who have been invited, after LOI review, will be able to submit a full application for funding.

LOIs will be reviewed to determine:

- Applicant and project eligibility with respect to program guidelines
- Compliance with LOI requirements
- Responsiveness to the Annual Open program criteria and goals, including the potential to reduce or replace the use of animals

Applicants should follow the LOI preparation and submission instructions carefully. LOI submissions that do not comply with the instructions will not be reviewed.

All LOI and application information must be submitted using ARDF's online application portal in ProposalCentral: https://proposalcentral.com/GrantOpportunities.asp?GMID=222.

A. GENERAL APPLICATION INFORMATION:

General application information should be entered directly into the proposal submission site (ProposalCentral). The applicant will need to provide the project title, anticipated project period, name and contact information for the primary investigator, and institution information. Note: The preferred project period is September 1, 2026 to August 31, 2027. However, projects may start as late as November 1, 2026. All projects must be completed in one year (from the start date).

B. ABSTRACT:

Applicants must submit an abstract (up to 300 words) describing the proposed research and explaining how the project would contribute to reducing or replacing current uses of laboratory animals in biomedical research, product safety testing, or educational demonstrations. It should briefly describe the long-term objectives of the project and include the specific aims. **NOTE:** The abstract provided during the LOI phase will be retained as part of the full application (if a full application is invited).

The abstract should be entered into the appropriate field ("Abstract") in the proposal submission site (ProposalCentral).

C. KEYWORDS:

Applicants should provide 4-6 keywords that describe the project; ideally these would cover the methodology (e.g., computational modeling, 3D cell culture), the area of biology (e.g., toxicogenomics, cancer), and intended application(s), if appropriate (e.g., drug screening, chemical safety testing). The keywords should be entered into the "Keywords" section in the proposal submission site (ProposalCentral).

D. LETTER OF INTENT (LOI):

Applicants **must use the LOI Template** provided and adhere to the format and requirements indicated in the template. Once completed, the LOI should be uploaded as a PDF to the proposal submission site (ProposalCentral) in the correct file location ("Letter of Intent"), listed in the dropdown menu after clicking "Attach Files" in the "Uploads" section.

The LOI Template includes the following sections along with additional instructions describing the information that should be included for each section and formatting requirements:

1. Background/Rationale of the Research Question
2. Study design and approach
3. Significance and potential impact on reducing or replacing animal use
4. Materials and reagents statement
5. Prior relevant experience
6. References

E. APPLICANT BIOSKETCH OR CV:

An NIH-format biosketch (new or old format) is required for the Principal Investigator (PI), who should be listed on the application as the Applicant/PI. The project team does not need to be finalized for the LOI phase; only the PI is required to be named, although applicants are strongly encouraged to indicate the complementary areas of expertise needed to successfully complete the project as part of the LOI text. If any co-PIs are named in the proposal, a biosketch must be included for each. Up to two individuals can be named as co-PI on a proposal.

The biosketch information should be uploaded as a single PDF to the "Biosketch/CV" section, using the "Attach Files" button in the "Uploads" section in ProposalCentral.

Applicants should follow the LOI preparation and submission instructions carefully. LOI submissions that do not comply with the requirements will not be reviewed. LOIs must be submitted by 11:59 pm (ET) on February 20, 2026.

All LOI and application information must be submitted using ARDF's online application portal in ProposalCentral: https://proposalcentral.com/GrantOpportunities.asp?GMID=222.

END OF LOI SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

The next section (PART II-FULL APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS) describes the process for preparing a full application. Full application submission is by invitation only, following the LOI phase. However, **all applicants are encouraged to carefully review the full application instructions** as they should inform LOI development.

PART II – FULL APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Applicants who are invited to submit a full application should use the instructions in this section to prepare and submit their application. ONLY APPLICANTS WHO ARE INVITED TO SUBMIT A FULL APPLICATION WILL BE ABLE TO COMPLETE THIS PHASE OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS.

Note: Full applications cannot include any major changes from what was submitted in LOI, including the research question, overall study design, specific aims, institution, and PI. Any major changes must be approved by ARDF program staff prior to full application submission.

A. GENERAL APPLICATION INFORMATION:

The applicant will need to provide the project title, project period, name and contact information for principal investigator, and institution information. Note: The preferred project period is September 1, 2026 to August 31, 2027. However, projects may start as late as November 1, 2026. All projects must be completed in one year (from the start date).

The application information entered during the LOI phase of the application process will be used for the full application and does not need to be entered again.

B. ABSTRACT:

Applicants must submit an abstract (up to 300 words) describing the proposed research and explaining how the project would contribute to reducing or replacing current uses of laboratory animals in biomedical research, product safety testing, or educational demonstrations. It should briefly describe the long-term objectives of the project and include the specific aims.

The abstract provided during the LOI phase of the application process will be used for the full application and does not need to be entered again. Applicants should consult with ARDF Program Staff before modifying the abstract text.

C. PROJECT PROPOSAL:

The project proposal will be uploaded to the proposal submission site (ProposalCentral) as three or four separate documents (PDFs): 1) Research Plan, 2) Budget and Justification, 3) Applicant biosketch/CV, and 4) Relevant Publications (optional). Each file should be uploaded in the correct file location, listed in the dropdown menu after clicking "Attach Files" in the "Uploads" section of the proposal submission site (ProposalCentral).

Formatting requirements:

- Font: Applications must use 11 or 12-point font for the text and no smaller than 9-point for figures, legends, and tables. Applicants can use Arial, Calibri, Helvetica, Georgia, Palatino Linotype, or Times New Roman.
- Spacing: Application text can be single-spaced (or larger spacing if desired).
- Margins: Page margins must be at least 0.75 inches (19 mm) on each side.
- Page limit: The Research Plan (excluding references) can be no more than ten (10) pages. The references section does not have a page limit.

1. RESEARCH PLAN:

The Research Plan should be a clear and detailed description of the proposed work that includes the following sections, which should be clearly marked with headings: significance and background, study design and approach, materials and methods, expected results, and references.

NOTE: The Research Plan must be no more than ten (10) pages, however, references are not included in this page limit. (I.e., the significance and background, study design and approach, materials and methods, and expected results sections cannot exceed 10 pages. There is not a page limit for references.)

1.A. Significance and Background

This section should describe the significance of the project, both in terms of its scientific value and its potential to address the program's mission of reducing or replacing the use of animals in research, testing, or education. It should include a clear and compelling statement of the research question and describe the novelty of the approach. It is not necessary to provide an estimate of the number of animals that would be affected but applicants should describe the specific applications or uses that the proposed work could address. This section should also include the long-term objectives and specific aims of the project, as well as sufficient background information to highlight its significance to the field.

1.B. Study Design and Approach

This section should describe the study design and overall approach for the project, including any preliminary data that support the proposed approach. Applicants are encouraged to consider potential challenges that could be encountered and how they might be mitigated.

1.C. Materials and Methods

The Materials and Methods section should include a detailed description of the materials and methods to be used in the proposed work as well as supporting information that justifies the selected methods. This section must include sourcing information for any biological materials or reagents, including cells, tissues, antibodies, or serum. The application should clearly describe the source and production method for all antibodies as well as the type and source of all culture supplements and matrix materials. A justification should be provided if non-human animal-derived serum will be used.

NOTE: Note that ARDF prohibits the use of monoclonal antibodies produced by in vivo methods (e.g., mouse ascites). While not required, ARDF encourages applicants to consider using recombinantly produced antibodies when possible, and recommends the Recombinant Antibodies and Mimetics Database (https://antibodies.humanspecificresearch.org/) as a potential resource. Investigators are also encouraged to minimize or avoid the use of serum or medium supplements obtained from nonhuman vertebrates (e.g., fetal calf/bovine serum). ARDF recommends that investigators consider using the FCS-Free Database (https://fcs-free.sites.uu.nl/database/) as a resource for considering animal-free alternatives.

1.D. Expected Results

This section should include a description of the expected results and the investigator's plans for analyzing and/or interpreting the results. This section can also include any plans for disseminating the study findings.

1.E. References

This section should include references for any citations that occur throughout the Research Plan. ARDF recommends that the format of citations follow the Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals (ICMJE Recommendations). (Examples available at: https://www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/uniform_requirements.html.) However, any citation format is allowed, provided that the following information is included: first author's last name, full title of the article, journal name (abbreviated), issue/volume/page (or equivalent for online publications) and year of publication. Do not include extraneous references that are not cited in the application text. (Applicants are invited to share their own publications relevant to the project in the "Relevant Publications" section.)

NOTE: References do NOT count toward the 10-page limit that applies to the Research Plan and there is not a word/page limit for this section.

2. BUDGET AND JUSTIFICATION:

A detailed Budget and Justification for personnel, materials, and supplies is required. ARDF does not require that applicants use a specific template for the Budget and Justification, but this section should include: 1) a table that lists the planned expenditures, and 2) a narrative justification of the expenditures. This section should also describe additional funding related to the proposed project over the past two years, for example, previous grant support related to the proposed work. If applicable, describe additional sources of funding for the project (both currently available or pending award).

Applicants should consider the following when preparing the Budget and Justification:

- Funding is for one year, with a preferred start date of September 1, 2026. However, projects may start as late as November 1, 2026.
- ARDF **funds may not be used for tuition, travel, or a Principal Investigator's salary or salary supplements**. Stipend costs for students working on the project are eligible as personnel expenses.
- Publication costs, up to $2000, are permitted expenses.

- ARDF can provide up to 10 percent for indirect costs. Applicants are encouraged to request an indirect cost waiver from their institution(s). If a waiver is not possible, indirect costs must be justified and assurances provided that funds will not support programs contrary to ARDF's mission to replace and reduce animal-based research methods.
- The total of direct and indirect costs may not exceed $50,000.

This section should be uploaded as a separate document (PDF) using the "Attach Files" button in the "Uploads" section in ProposalCentral.

3. APPLICANT BIOSKETCH OR CV:

An NIH-format biosketch (old or new format) is required for the Principal Investigator (PI), who should be listed on the application as the Applicant/PI. If the project includes a co-PI, a biosketch should be included for each co-PI. Up to two individuals can be named as co-PI on a proposal. Biosketch information for other members of the research team is recommended but not required, and this information should be no more than one page for each investigator. The biosketch section should be uploaded as a single, separate document (PDF) using the "Attach Files" button in the "Uploads" section in ProposalCentral.

4. RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS (OPTIONAL):

Applicants are encouraged to submit copies of their prior publications that directly support or are relevant to the proposed project. Publications should be compiled into a single PDF document and uploaded using the "Attach Files" button in the "Uploads" section in ProposalCentral. If applicants wish to include letters of support (optional), they should be added to this section and included in the single PDF upload, either before or after any relevant publications (if included).

NOTE: This section (Relevant Publications) is not required. Applications will be considered complete if no file is uploaded for this section.

REVIEW CRITERIA FOR FULL APPLICATIONS

Full applications will be reviewed to assess:

- **Scientific and technical merit**
  Considerations include: Is the scientific basis for the project strong and well supported by the state of the field? Is the project well designed to answer the research question proposed? Is the project technically feasible, and can it be completed within one year? Are the data analysis plans rigorous and likely to lead to valid study findings?
- **Potential for reducing or replacing laboratory animals**
  Considerations include: Does this project address an identified gap in the development of models or methods? Could the study findings have practical application in terms of reducing or replacing the use of laboratory animals in the near future? How likely is the potential for impact outside of the applicant's own research program and/or uptake of the project outcomes by others?
- **Investigator, environment, and budget**
  Considerations include: Do the PI and research team have the necessary expertise and experience to successfully complete the project? Will the research team have access to the facilities and institutional resources necessary to succeed? Is the personnel budget appropriate and reasonable for the proposed work? Are the equipment and supply budgets appropriate and reasonable for this project?

For technical assistance with the grant submission process:

Please contact **pcsupport@altum.com** or call **+1-800-875-2562** (8:30 am - 5 pm ET)

For programmatic or scientific questions:

Please contact **grants@ardf-online.org**

LOIs must be submitted by 11:59 pm (ET) on February 20, 2026 at:

https://proposalcentral.com/GrantOpportunities.asp?GMID=222

Full applications (invited only) must be submitted by 11:59 pm (ET) on May 25, 2026 at:

https://proposalcentral.com/GrantOpportunities.asp?GMID=222