



Office of Research

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Advanced Support Program for Innovative Research Excellence (ASPIRE)

Request for Proposals

Application Deadline: by 5pm January 21, 2026

Award Announcement anticipated: By end of May

Purpose: ASPIRE funding is provided by the Office of the Vice President for Research to encourage faculty to develop innovative research projects leading to the pursuit of extramural funding. The ASPIRE program continues to emphasize support for early-career investigators intending to pursue extramural funding.

Eligibility: Eligible applicants include USC faculty (tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure track) with independent research programs, employed by any USC campus (Columbia, Schools of Medicine Columbia and Greenville, Senior campuses, and all Palmetto College campuses). This includes but is not limited to clinical, professional, and research track faculty. Priority in the awards process will be given to faculty who are within 10 years of completing their terminal degree. Faculty at all career stages are eligible to apply.

- Applicants may only submit one proposal to this competition as project lead per round.
- Proposals may include multiple investigators, but one investigator must be designated as the project lead.
- Faculty funded in the last two cycles of this program (2024 or 2025) as lead PIs are not eligible to submit as lead PIs for this round but may be co-Is/co-PIs.
- Faculty may resubmit a revised proposal that was not funded in a previous funding cycle. *Please see the Application Procedure below for additional guidelines for resubmissions.*
- Faculty previously awarded funds from the Office of the Vice President for Research (any faculty program: ASPIRE/AI, RISE, Excel, etc.) must be up-to-date with submitting reports as per the award terms and conditions.

Funds Available and Project Period: ASPIRE projects may be funded up to \$15,000. The project period is a maximum of 15 months beginning July 1. *VPR internal grants are permitted one account only. Subawards are not permitted.*

Budget Information: It is *required* to use the budget and budget justification forms found on the program webpage. Provide the project budget in the general categories listed on the form. The Budget justification form is used to provide details and explanations for all project expenditures. While the intention is to fund projects as closely as possible to the requested amount, grant awards may be reduced depending on the number of proposals received and the funds available. Cost share is not allowed.

Allowable Costs

- All 9-month FTE Faculty PIs (tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure track) are allowed to include up to one month of summer salary + fringe, if used directly to work on the funded project (please note no co-Is/co-PIs are permitted salary support from these funds)
- Salary and fringe benefits of non-faculty project research personnel, including undergraduate and graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and technicians
- Consultants and/or contractors

- Capital Equipment (article of non-expendable, tangible property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition, or valuation cost of at least \$5,000)
- Project supplies including software and participant incentives
- Project costs such as animal maintenance and sample testing
- Travel essential to conduct the project; strong justification must be provided
- Graduate Student Tuition

Unallowable Costs

- Course buyout
- Salary and fringe for Co-PIs or Co-Investigators
- Travel to professional meetings, conferences, etc.
- Food (for use in research, such as participant incentives, related to project events or activities, etc.; *research travel per diem is allowed as above*)
- Costs in connection with faculty degree requirements
- Undergraduate student tuition

Application Procedure and Proposal Preparation: Please use 11-point standard font (such as aptos, calibri, arial, times, etc.), single spaced, and 0.5-inch margins. Assemble the following into a single PDF file:

1. Cover Page with descriptive title of project, name of lead investigator and home unit/department, names and units of co-I/PIs, the total budget requested, and a brief summary of the proposed work.
2. Proposal Narrative*: Maximum of 3 pages; To include
 - a. A brief discussion of the background and significance of the proposed idea, including its relation to the present state of knowledge in the field.
 - b. A detailed narrative of the project that includes the objectives, significance of the research, the research tasks and expected accomplishments during the course of the project, the specific outcomes of the project, a discussion of potential external funding sources, and a timeline.
 - c. A maximum of one page should be devoted to discussing how the research activity will advance your research career.

**As per the review rubric, the narrative must be written in language clearly comprehensible to academic scholars outside the applicant's field of study.*

3. Bibliography (format as appropriate by discipline; no page limit)
4. CV/resume* (max 2 pages for each faculty member – PI and co-I/PIs) that includes:
 - Education
 - Professional experience
 - Evidence of scholarship: most significant refereed journal articles, books, book chapters, etc.
 - Significant accomplishments and contributions
 - Other information as appropriate

**Please do not format the CV/Resume as a narrative biographical statement*

5. Current and pending support form (lead PI only) Include current, pending, submitted, and to-be-submitted grant funding and requests for funding (internal and external support) using the form provided on program website.
 - Form is required even if you have no other support; mark “no other grant support”
 - Include all submissions where you are listed as either PI or co-PI/co-I
 - Include all projects receiving or requesting internal or external grant or award support, not just those related to the proposed project
 - Include current and pending grant funding as well as submitted and planned submissions in near future for any project
6. Budget form and justification It is *required* to use the budget and budget justification forms on the program webpage. The budget will be provided in two documents: 1) A detailed budget spreadsheet summarizing project

costs consistent with the list of allowable costs above and 2) a budget justification, with details and descriptions of project expenditures, including purpose or role in the project if not obvious or not included in narrative.

7. Appendices are allowed if highly relevant (e.g., letters from outside collaborators confirming role, access to resources not available at USC, etc.); however, do not use appendices to circumvent page limits. *Recommendation letters are not permitted.*
8. Previous VPR Funding Statement (lead PI only) If you received funding from the Office of the Vice President for Research as lead PI in the past 5 years (not including SPARC or Magellan awards) include a brief appendix that includes the titles, project dates, funding amounts, and description of the impacts for each award.
9. Resubmissions Investigators may revise and resubmit proposals that were not funded previously. Resubmissions need to include a one-page (max) response to the reviewers and a copy of the reviewer comments. Attach both the response page and comments after the cover page and before the current Proposal Narrative. *Resubmissions lacking the response page and previous reviews will not be reviewed.*

Submission: Combine all the above documents into a single PDF and submit in USCeRA by 5:00pm on deadline above.

- [This USCeRA submission guide may help with the process.](#)
- Be sure to check yes to "Internal Request," then "Vice President for Research" and choose the request type "ASPIRE" from the USCeRA drop-down menu to ensure proper proposal routing. Failure to check the box will result in your proposal NOT being submitted.
- The Internal Commit Form is used to enter the total amount you are requesting from the VPR in the Year 1 box. *Do not enter an amount in the Start-Up box.*
- Upload your proposal into USCeRA as a single PDF under the "Proposal/Proposal Summary" or "Other" category. *Do not separate or upload the budget or any other proposal sections or forms as separate documents.*
- Proposals must be submitted in USCeRA by the 5pm deadline but approval by administration/chairs/deans can be pending at that time. *Signatory approval is not required by 5pm.*

Review Process and Criteria: Applications that are complete, responsive, and submitted by the deadline will be evaluated by a peer review panel. Proposals will be evaluated in accordance with the review rubric (posted on program webpage) and final funding decisions will be made by the Vice President for Research.

Post Award Requirements:

Faculty must submit a final report through the on-line report form to the Office of the Vice President of Research 30 days after the project end date as outlined in the project award terms and conditions. *The report form link can be accessed from the program website.* In addition, an external grant submission is required within 1 year of the internal grant enddate.

For questions, please contact:

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