

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH**

Advanced Support Program for Innovative Research Excellence

Request for Proposals

Announcement Release Date:	February 15, 2024
Application Receipt Date:	April 4, 2024
Award Announcement Date:	June 5, 2024

Purpose: ASPIRE funding is provided by the Office of the Vice President for Research to encourage faculty to develop individual innovative research projects leading to the pursuit of extramural funding. For the 2024 funding cycle, **the ASPIRE program will emphasize support for early-career investigators who intend to pursue extramural funding.**

Eligibility: Eligible applicants include all tenure-track or tenured, clinical, and research faculty who are employees of the University of South Carolina and who have independent research programs at USC Columbia, USC School of Medicine Greenville, and USC Senior and Palmetto College Campuses. Priority in the awards process will be given to faculty who are within 10 years of completing their terminal degree. Nevertheless, faculty at all career stages are eligible to apply.

Faculty who received an ASPIRE I award in the last two years (2022 or 2023) are not eligible to receive an ASPIRE I award in 2024.

Faculty previously awarded funds from the Office of the Vice President for Research (either ASPIRE or RISE) **must** be up-to-date with submitting reports as per the award terms and conditions. Faculty may only submit a single *ASPIRE I* proposal for the 2024 funding cycle.

Faculty may resubmit a revised proposal that was not funded from previous funding cycles; resubmissions should clearly indicate that it is a revised proposal and should include an introduction (maximum: one page) responding to reviewers' comments. Previous reviews must be attached to the proposal, and the introduction will not be counted in the narrative page limit. In addition, the revised applications should highlight the changes made in the research narrative. Resubmissions lacking the introduction page and previous reviews will not be reviewed. An ASPIRE proposal can only be revised once. However, faculty can submit an application on a similar theme that was not funded on a previous ASPIRE cycle as a new grant. In such an instance, there should be major revisions in the proposal.

Faculty serving on the ASPIRE review committee are not eligible to apply for ASPIRE funds during the funding cycle in which they serve.

Funds Available: ASPIRE projects may be funded up to **\$15,000**. An applicant may request a project period of 15 months beginning July 1, 2024, and ending September 30, 2025. Under certain conditions and with justification, exceptions to these dates may be requested. Proposals may be submitted by more than one investigator, but only one investigator can be designated as the project lead.

Budget Information: Budgets will be presented in general categories and require detailed explanations. Although the ASPIRE Review Committee intends to fund projects as closely as possible to the requested amount, it reserves the right to alter the amount depending on the number of proposals received and the funds available. Cost share is not allowed.

Allowable Costs

- Salary and fringe benefits of project research personnel, including undergraduate and graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and technicians.
- Up to one month of salary may be included for the PI only if used directly to work on the funded project – however, please note clinical and research faculty cannot receive salary support from these funds.
- 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
- Animal maintenance
- Travel *essential* to conduct the project; strong justification must be provided.
- Graduate Student Tuition

Unallowable Costs

- Salary support for clinical or research faculty
- Costs in connection with faculty degree requirements
- Food (for use in research/as subject incentives)
- Travel to professional meetings
- Salary and fringe for Co-PI's or Co-Investigators
- Laptops
- Undergraduate Student Tuition

Application Procedure

1. Develop a three-page proposal narrative that provides:
 - 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 task 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 that you complete will advance your research career.
 - d. Text that is single-spaced with margins not less than one-half inch and using a font size not less than 11 pt.
 - e. A cover sheet attached to the proposal (not counted in the page limit) that includes the project title, the total budget request, the PI name, college/department, and e-mail address. The cover sheet also should include a brief summary of the proposed work.
2. Attach the following supporting documentation to the end of the proposal narrative:
 - a. Bibliography (should be included as appropriate and will not be counted in the narrative page limitation).
 - b. Two-page biographical sketch/cv of the principal investigator and the co- investigator(s), if any, that includes:
 1. Education
 2. Professional experience
 3. Evidence of scholarship: most significant refereed journal articles, books, and book chapters, etc.
 4. Significant accomplishments and contributions
 5. Other information as appropriate
 - c. Current and pending support. Include current grant funding and pending grant funding using the form (or similar) provided on the ASPIRE Program website. The ASPIRE submission should be included as pending support.

- d. A detailed budget on the form provided on the ASPIRE Program website and budget justification for total project costs consistent with the list of allowable costs shown above.
 - e. Appendices are allowed if highly relevant (e.g. letters of support and external review panel comments on related proposals); however, do not use appendices to circumvent page limits.
 - f. If you have received funding from the Office of the Vice President for Research in the past (not including SPARC or Magellan awards), you must include a brief appendix to your proposal that includes the titles and funding amounts of these awards, along with a description of the impacts of the award (s).
3. Submit the completed proposal packet:
- a. Through USCeRA (<https://sam.research.sc.edu/uscera/>) before 5:00 pm on the deadline date. Applications submitted after 5:00 PM on the deadline date will be returned without review.
 - b. **Application Receipt Date: Thursday, April 4, 2024.**
 - c. Select "Internal Request," "VP for Research" and choose the category 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 reviewed
 - d. The Internal Commit Form should be used to list the amount that you are requesting from the VPR. Do not enter an amount in the Start-Up box. Enter your total request in the Year 1 box.
 - e. Upload your proposal following the directions in USCERA; a single PDF file is strongly preferred.
 - f. Questions about submission? Contact: Beth Herron bherron@mailbox.sc.edu, 803-777-2885 or Julie Morris, jmorris@sc.edu, 803-563-8376.

Review Process: Applications that are complete and responsive to this announcement will be evaluated for merit by a committee of USC faculty. The committee will then provide a prioritized list of recommendations for funding to the Vice President for Research based on the quality of the proposals per the review criteria (see below). The VPR will make awards based on committee's recommendations and available funds.

Research Merit:

- Does the proposal provide a compelling argument for the funding?
- Does the proposed project represent a significant contribution to the investigator's field of study? If so, how?

Nature of Proposal:

- Does the proposal provide a clear statement of overall project objectives?
- Are the proposed methodologies appropriate and accurate?
- Does the proposal provide a sound justification with clear and specific budget information? Is there a timeline, and is it realistic?
- Is the text clearly comprehensible to other academic scholars, some of whom may not be experts in the applicant's field of study?

Leverage:

- Does it significantly improve chances for extramural funding?
- Does the project offer significant opportunities for funding from new sources?
- Does the project help build research networks or lead to new collaborations?

For more Information: Please contact Beth Herron bherron@mailbox.sc.edu, 803-777-2885 or Julie Morris, jmorris@sc.edu, 803-563-8376.