

Strategies for Training and Advancing Researchers (STARs) **Program**

Request for Applications

Background

Research shows that teams working together and capitalizing on innovative ideas and distinct perspectives outperform homogenous teams. Scientists and trainees from different backgrounds and life experiences bring different perspectives, creativity, and individual enterprise to address complex scientific problems. Benefits include fostering scientific innovation, enhancing global and national competitiveness, contributing to robust learning environments for our students, improving research quality, and advancing the likelihood that communities across Arkansas will participate in, and benefit from, health research.

The TRI Strategies for Training and Advancing Researchers (STARs) Program provides the structured mentoring, grant writing skills and connections to institutional research resources and support to help strengthen the research acumen of junior faculty and faculty new to the research enterprise. Importantly, it also provides a community of real support to ensure participants' success in becoming independent investigators.

The TRI STARs Program

The STARs program aims to build a peer support community of faculty in biomedical, clinical, behavioral and social sciences research to foster career development and research success. This is accomplished by:

- Establishing a structured peer support group that engages in a five-month program of grant training and development. This model addresses issues of isolation often felt by junior and new-to-research faculty in academic settings. It also provides and encourages the development of innovative research ideas in a safe environment. This peer support group can also help improve confidence and self-efficacy in clinical and translational research development and execution.
- Providing practical research skill development and grantsmanship.
- Offering access to research mentors and research support services, i.e. IRB protocol development and submission, recruitment, etc.
- Supplying \$10,000 in seed funding upon course completion to help jumpstart future grant applications and generate preliminary data.

In addition, the STARs Program aims to promote applications to the TRI Pilot Studies and other funding opportunities, allowing scholars to build their research idea and proposal with TRI mentors and apply for follow-on funding to build upon their seed funding. STARs scholars will be expected to apply for follow-on funding (intramural or extramural) within 18 months of completing the STARs didactics.

Join us August 20, 2026, at 12:00 PM, or August 26, 2026, at 3:00 PM for an information session to answer your questions. Please register for the [STARs Informational Sessions](#).

Program Leadership

The TRI STARs program is led by a multi-disciplinary team that will provide the didactics, grant training and review, and ongoing mentorship of the scholars. The leaders are:

- **Antiño R. Allen, PhD**, Professor, Associate Director of Pathway Initiatives at TRI
- **Mario Schootman, PhD**, Professor, Co-Director of TRI's Workforce Development Program, Vice-Chair for Mentoring & Innovation, Department of Medicine
- **Corey Hayes, PhD**, Associate Professor, Pharmacy Practice in the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) College of Pharmacy, with secondary appointments in the departments of Biomedical Informatics and Psychiatry in the UAMS College of Medicine. He holds the Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Professorship at UAMS.
- **Laura James, MD**, Professor and Associate Vice Chancellor for Clinical and Translational Research, Director, Translational Research Institute,

Eligibility

- Eligible participants should have a terminal degree; must be full-time faculty at UAMS, UAMS-NW, Arkansas Children's Hospital and Research Institute, or Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System who hold non-temporary positions at the rank of instructor, assistant professor, or associate professor; and must be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident.

Use of funds

A broad range of research activities, including but not limited to, consultant fees, supplies, software, transcribing and analyzing existing data, data collection, publication fees, participant incentives, and other activities to prepare for applying for extramural funding. **Funds must be expended within one year of the award date.**

Award amount: \$10,000

Application Process

All applicants are required to use our online application system to enter their basic information and application information. The application must be completed by **5:00 pm, September 11, 2026**, through the TRI's [Apply Grant Application](#) system. Applicants are required to establish an account with Apply to submit for this funding opportunity. [Click here for instructions](#) on how to make an account in Apply. Contact Adam Kleinerman at akleinerman@uams.edu with any questions.

The application will include:

- ☐ Application research summary letter (no more than 2 pages) that must contain the following:
 - Research questions to be addressed and/or specific aims.
 - Project summary
 - How your project aligns with [TRI's mission](#) to develop new knowledge and approaches that will measurably address the complex health challenges of rural populations
- ☐ Survey of self-reported confidence on grant and project management skills. Specifically:
 - Grant writing confidence
 - Project leadership experience
 - Current research training (CITI/RCR)
 - Research release time/support
 - Main area of need/expectation from the program
- ☐ List of Current Publications (most recent 2 years)

Timeline:

RFA Released:	July 31, 2026
Informational Session:	August 20, 2026
Informational Session:	August 26, 2026
Deadline to Apply:	September 11, 2026
Scholars Notified of Acceptance:	September 18, 2026
Orientation:	September 28, 2026, 1:00 – 2:00 PM
Didactics Begin:	October 7, 2026, 1:00 – 2:00 PM
Seed Funding Starts:	June 2027

Outcomes/End of Program Report

Each STARs Scholar is expected to:

- Submit a final research proposal developed over the course of the didactic training for seed funding
- Submit for follow-on funding to any intra- or extramural funding opportunity within 18 months of completing STARs didactics
- Submit a manuscript for publication within 18 months of completing STARs didactics. **TRI will pay publication fees for one manuscript accepted for publication.**
- Participate in pre- and post-surveys on grant writing self-assessments.
- Provide feedback to the program.

Program Structure and Schedule

Phase 1 – Didactics, proposal development	Phase 2 – Project implementation and dissemination
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☐ The basics of grantsmanship ○ Identification of the knowledge gap and strategy to fill it ○ Formulating a central hypothesis ☐ Developing the specific aims and impact sections ☐ Writing the significance and innovation sections ☐ Writing the research plan ☐ Future studies and creating a powerful title for your proposal			☐ Project implementation ☐ Monthly WIPs/check-ins ☐ Deliverables ○ Abstract submission ○ Final paper ○ Submit for TRI pilot award or another mechanism		
Date (maybe subject to change)	Program Activity		Deliverable/assignment		
September 11, 2026	Application Deadline		Project summary and application due September 11		
September 18, 2026	Awardees announced		Notice of selection sent to awardees and kickoff of didactics announced		
September 28, 2026 1:00 – 2:00 PM	Orientation/Overview of Program Scope project to \$\$/feasibility		No Homework		
Oct 7, 2026 1:00-2:00 PM	Overview of abstract		Homework: 250-word abstract of future proposal (Due: 10/12/26)		
Oct 15, 2026 1:00 – 2:30 PM	Basics of grantsmanship, specifics of the TRI pilot grant, identification of the knowledge gap and strategy to fill it, formulation of central hypothesis		Homework: ~1-page justification for your hypothesis, single-sentence hypothesis, Specific Aims (rough draft) and impact drafts (Due: 10/21/26)		
Oct 28, 2026 2:30 – 4:00 PM	Review of the Hypotheses, Discuss Specific Aims, Impact sections, Significance, and Innovation sections		Homework: Finalizing Specific Aims and Impact; writing Significance and Innovation sections (~1-1.5 page) (Due: 11/02/26)		
Nov 5, 2026 2:30 – 4:00 PM	Review of Specific Aims and Impact page, Significance, and Innovation sections. How to write Approach section: basics. (Budgets with Laura Joy Wilson)		Homework: Writing first half of Approach section (~1.5 page); Internal group peer-review of the Specific Aims page. (Due: 11/10/26)		
Nov 16, 2026 12:30 – 2:00 PM	Review of the 1 st Aim/half of Approach sections. How to write Pitfalls and Alternative Approaches in the Approach section		Homework: Finalizing the Approach section (~1.5 pages). (Due: 11/23/26)		
Dec 1, 2026 12:30 – 2:00 PM	Review of the Approach sections. How to write Future Studies, Plan for Extramural funding and create a powerful title for your proposal		Homework: Future studies, Plan for extramural funding (~.25 page), and Title. (Due: 12/07/26)		
Dec 10, 2026 12:30 – 2:00 PM	Review of Future Studies, Extramural Plan and Title. How to peer-review Introduction to TRI Services		Internal group peer-review of the entire proposal (Due: 1/04/27)		
Jan 7, 2027 12:30 – 2:00 PM	Nuts and Bolts of an IRB Protocol Michael Bailey, CCRP Budget development overview		No homework. Internal group peer review of the entire proposal (Due: 1/12/27)		

Jan 19, 2027 12:30 – 2:00 PM	Peer reviews presented and discussion/review of final proposal and presentation of TRI pilot RFA	Final proposal after editing for comments for seed funding. (Due: 3/05/27 COB)
March 5, 2027	The finalized proposal is due to Program directors no later than 5:00 P.M.	The finalized proposal is due no later than 5:00 P.M.