

TO: School of Medicine Faculty  
FROM: Katherine L. Nathanson, MD and Matthew D. Weitzman, PhD  
Co-Chairs, PSOM Limited Applications Selection Committee  
SUBJET: FY26 Rita Allen Foundation Scholars Award Program  
<http://ritaallen.org/scholars/>

The University has been invited to submit one nomination for the 2026 Rita Allen Foundation (RAF) Scholars Award Program. The Office of the Vice Provost for Research (OVPR) is coordinating the final applicant review and selection process. Each school within the University may submit one nomination to OVPR. Faculty based at CHOP are eligible to apply through PSOM for this opportunity.

**Program Summary:**

Since 1976, the Rita Allen Foundation (RAF) has awarded millions of dollars in grants to early-career biomedical scholars. These grants allow them to establish labs and pursue research directions with above-average risk and promise.

The RAF Scholars program funds basic biomedical research in the fields of **cancer, immunology, and neuroscience**. The Program supports research scientists in the early stages of their careers and aims to advance transformative ideas and leverage them to promote breakthrough solutions.

The Foundation seeks research projects with above-average risk that challenge the status quo. This award encourages innovative, cutting-edge research with above-average risk and groundbreaking possibilities. RAF Scholars are distinguished by their bold approaches to basic scientific questions that address problems of global concern, as well as their potential for learning, leadership, and collaboration. Rita Allen Scholars have gone on to make fundamental contributions to their fields of study and have won recognition, including the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, the National Medal of Science, the Wolf Prize in Medicine, the Lasker-Koshland Award for Special Achievement in Medical Science, and the Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences.

**Eligibility:**

- Appointment: The nominee must hold a full-time tenure track academic appointment.
- Career Stage: Candidates should be independent investigators in the early stages of their careers and research, preferably within the first three years of their tenure track.
- Training: Candidates must have completed their training and provided persuasive evidence of distinguished achievement or extraordinary promise in research in one of the relevant fields (cancer, immunology, or neuroscience).
- Employment: United States citizenship is not required; however, awardees must be legally employed at the time of application at a U.S. degree-granting or research institution that is an invited participant in the Rita Allen Foundation Scholars Program.
- Institutional Support: Candidates must have received committed startup funds and lab space from their respective institutions.
- For any sponsored research projects, the applicant must be eligible to serve as Principal Investigator for the project, unless otherwise noted in the LSO. Please see [Penn's PI Eligibility requirements](#) to ensure you are eligible.
- *Note: Candidates nominated by the University in previous years should not be re-nominated. A previous PSOM candidate not selected by the University may reapply for consideration again through the internal PSOM review process.*

**Award Amount:**

- An unrestricted research award of \$110,000 per year for a maximum of five years.
- Entire grant is for direct project expenses, including up to 50% of the Scholar's compensation.
- No overhead is provided.

**Note:** Rita Allen Foundation Scholars may not accept an award from the Beckman Young Investigator Program, Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences, Searle Scholars Program, or Vallee Scholars Program that would take effect beginning in year one of the RAF award. Rita Allen Scholars may apply for awards from these organizations that would take effect beginning in year two of the RAF award. Other sources of funding also may influence selection.

For FAQ and a list of all previous Scholars please go to the following link: <http://ritaallen.org/scholars/>

**PSOM Limited Applications Committee Review and Selection Process:**

Candidates must submit the following in their application:

- Cover page with the project title, nominee's name, department, rank, track, phone number, address, e-mail address, date of appointment to tenure track position (month and year), confirmation of institutional start-up funds and lab space.
- Research proposal (maximum 2 pages, not including references; single-spaced, 12-point font with one-inch margins) describing the proposed research in the areas of cancer, neuroscience, or immunology. The proposal should include how the award would enable the candidate to pursue new ideas and take strategic risks, and an explanation of how this proposal differs from or relates to the candidate's other supported projects.
- CV or Biosketch, which includes educational background, professional appointments, awards and honors. Include all current research support (start-up and external) and pending support, including dollar amounts and start/end dates.
- Prior Submission Update: If you have submitted for this funding mechanism in the past, please provide on a separate page a brief explanation (1-5 sentences) explaining how the current application differs from prior submissions, highlighting any significant updates or changes to the proposal or your circumstances.

Submission should be in a single pdf file in the following order: cover page, research proposal, CV or biosketch, prior submission update (if applicable). The pdf document should be titled as follows: RAF\_\_InvestigatorSurname\_Investigator first name. For example: RAF\_Doe\_Jane.pdf.

Proposals must be submitted to **Kaitlyn Hagarty** at [kaitlyn.hagarty@pennmedicine@upenn.edu](mailto:kaitlyn.hagarty@pennmedicine@upenn.edu) by **12:00 PM on Friday, August 1st**.

Questions can be directed to Kaitlyn Hagarty at [kaitlyn.hagarty@pennmedicine@upenn.edu](mailto:kaitlyn.hagarty@pennmedicine@upenn.edu).