Solve M.E.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Supporting new and early-career investigators to advance ME/CFS discovery and build the foundation for future breakthroughs.

RAMSAY RESEARCH GRANT PROGRAM

2026

OVERVIEW

The Solve M.E. Ramsay Research Grant Program is designed to grow and strengthen the scientific workforce studying ME/CFS, Long COVID, and related infection-associated chronic conditions and illnesses (IACCIs). The program provides targeted funding for innovative, early-stage studies that advance biological understanding, with a primary focus on Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) and Long COVID.



The Ramsay Scholars Grant Program honors ME/CFS pioneer Dr. A. Melvin Ramsay, whose careful clinical descriptions helped establish ME/CFS as a serious medical condition. His determination to understand the disease continues to inspire Solve M.E.'s work today. (Photo: ME-pedia)

Since its inception, Ramsay has supported high-impact pilot research that generates critical preliminary data, attracts new investigators to the field, and lays the groundwork for larger studies and downstream funding. Ramsay prioritizes innovative, mechanistically driven studies with the potential to open new lines of inquiry or accelerate progress in the field. Projects may leverage emerging technologies, existing datasets, biospecimen repositories, or cross-disciplinary approaches, particularly where these resources can help researchers enter the field efficiently and generate actionable preliminary findings.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The Ramsay Scholars Grant Program aims to:

- **Expand the ME/CFS and IACCI research workforce** by attracting new investigators and supporting sustained engagement in the field
- **Generate rigorous preliminary data** that can enable larger studies and external funding
- **Advance biological understanding** of ME/CFS and Long COVID through innovative, hypothesis-driven research
- **Strengthen the research pipeline** by connecting investigators with relevant expertise, resources, patient-informed priorities, and the broader research community

AWARD INFORMATION

Solve ME is currently soliciting proposals for:

- **Ph.D. Student Award:** $50,000 for one year
- **Postdoctoral / New Faculty / Returning Faculty Awards:** up to $100,000 over two years
    - *This includes investigators re-entering the field after career interruptions (e.g., medical leave, family leave, or military service)*
- **Collaborative Research Award:** up to $150,000 over two years
    - *This award prioritizes collaborations between at least two researchers. Ideally, at least one of these researchers is new to ME/CFS, Long COVID, or infection-associated chronic condition research. Multi-site projects are acceptable, but the award budget limit applies per project, not per institution.*

ENCOURAGED RESEARCH AREAS

The Ramsay Scholars Grant Program welcomes rigorous pilot studies that advance biological understanding of ME/CFS and Long Covid. Areas of particular interest include, but are not limited to:

- **Mechanistic, systems biology, and multi-omic research**: studies identifying disease pathways, patient subgroups, biomarkers, or therapeutic targets through approaches such as genomics, proteomics, metabolomics, immunologic profiling, neuroimmune biology, cellular metabolism, vascular biology, microbiome studies, or integrated multi-system analyses.
- **Comparative and cross-disease research:** studies comparing ME/CFS with Long COVID or other chronic, post-infectious, infection-associated, or overlapping conditions to clarify shared and distinct mechanisms.
- **Biobank-enabled research and existing data resources**: studies using biospecimens, pre-pandemic ME/CFS cohorts, public datasets, registry data, or other high-quality resources to accelerate discovery, replication, or validation.
    - *Pre-pandemic ME/CFS cohorts are of particular interest because they can help distinguish ME/CFS biology from SARS-CoV-2-related effects and clarify overlap with Long COVID.*

ELIGIBILITY

Applicants may include:

- Graduate students enrolled in a PhD program, pre- or post- qualifying exam
- Postdoctoral fellows
- New faculty:
    - Early-stage Investigators (within the first 5 years of leading an independent research program)
    - Established investigators who are new to ME/CFS, Long COVID, or IACCI research
- Faculty re-entering academic research after career interruptions
- Collaborative research teams involving two or more institutions or research groups.
    - Collaborative awards are intended to bring new expertise into the field. Applications may include an established ME/CFS investigator, provided the collaboration meaningfully engages at least one investigator or research group new to ME/CFS, Long COVID, or infection-associated chronic condition research.

ALLOWABLE COSTS

Funds may be used for research personnel, supplies, core services, biospecimen processing, data analysis, participant compensation, and other direct research costs necessary to complete the proposed work.

Equipment, travel, publication costs, subcontracting, and indirect costs (up to 10%) must be justified and are subject to Solve M.E. approval.

NON-RESPONSIVE TOPICS

Applications will generally be considered non-responsive if they:

- Do not focus on ME/CFS, Long COVID, or infection-associated chronic conditions
- Lack a clear research question, hypothesis, or measurable scientific outcome
- Are primarily educational, advocacy-based, or programmatic rather than research-focused
- Focus on general wellness or symptom management without a rigorous research design
- Do not align with the goals or scientific priorities of the Ramsay Research Grant Program

Clinical, behavioral, rehabilitation, or care-delivery studies may be considered responsive if they include a rigorous research design and a clear rationale for advancing clinical translation, trial readiness, patient-centered outcomes, or future research.

SUBMISSION AND REVIEW PROCESS

The Ramsay Scholars Grant Program uses a **two-step application and review process**. The Step 1 Research Plan is intended to provide a concise overview of the project concept and fit with the Ramsay program. The Step 2 full proposal should provide the methodological, analytical, and feasibility detail necessary for reviewers to evaluate scientific rigor and likelihood of success.

Step 1: Initial Research Plan

All applicants must first submit a concise, high-level **Research Plan** and a current CV or biosketch through the application portal.

Initial application deadline: November 13, 2026

The initial Research Plan should not exceed ~800 words total (not including references, budget, supplement, or CV) and should include:

- Specific Aims
- Background and Significance
- Preliminary Data, if applicable, or scientific rationale
- Research Design and Methods
- Proposed use of biobanks, existing datasets, and/or pre-pandemic cohorts, if applicable
- Expected Outcomes and Future Directions
- Potential Problems and Alternative Strategies
- References
- High-Level Project Budget
- Supplemental Materials, if applicable
    - This includes preliminary figures, tables, or graphs, uploaded in Word or PDF format.
- Current CV or Biosketch

Initial applications will be reviewed for scientific merit, alignment with Ramsay program priorities, feasibility, and potential to advance ME/CFS, Long COVID, and related IACCI research.

Step 2: Full Proposal and Blinded Peer Review

A subset of applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal for **double-blind peer review**.

Invitation to submit full proposal: December 4, 2026
Full proposal deadline: January 8, 2027

Full Proposal Components

Applicants invited to Step 2 will receive detailed submission instructions and templates. The full proposal should build substantially on the initial Research Plan and provide sufficient detail for rigorous, blinded scientific peer review.

The full application will include:

- Cover Pages and Applicant Information
- General Audience Summary
    - A concise, nontechnical description of the project, its significance, and potential impact for the ME/CFS, Long COVID, and broader IACCI communities.
- Technical Abstract
    - A scientific summary of the central hypothesis, aims, approach, and expected outcomes.
- Full Research Plan, including:
    - Specific Aims and Central Hypothesis
    - Background and Significance
        - Clear description of the knowledge gap being addressed and why the proposed work is important to the field.
    - Innovation
        - What is novel about the question, approach, technology, dataset, model, or application.
    - Preliminary Data and/or Scientific Rationale
        - Relevant prior findings supporting feasibility and the proposed hypothesis.
    - Detailed Research Design and Methods
        - Study design, cohorts or models, inclusion/exclusion criteria where applicable, experimental procedures, assays, technologies, and analytic approach.
    - Statistical Analysis and Power Considerations
        - Sample size justification, statistical methods, primary outcomes, and plans for handling missing data or multiple comparisons, where applicable.
    - Use of Existing Resources
        - Planned use of biobanks, existing datasets, pre-pandemic cohorts, shared infrastructure, or other established resources, where relevant.
    - Rigor, Reproducibility, and Data Quality
        - Key controls, validation strategies, batch-effect mitigation, replication, and other measures to ensure robust findings.

    - Potential Problems and Alternative Strategies
    - Expected Outcomes and Milestones
        - Specific deliverables and benchmarks for determining project progress and success.
    - Future Directions and Path to Follow-on Funding
        - How the findings will position the work for larger studies, external funding, collaborations, or translational development.
- Project Timeline and Milestones
- Full Budget and Budget Justification
- Facilities and Resources
- Full NIH-style Biosketches
- Letters of Collaboration or Support, as applicable
- Human Subjects / IRB or Vertebrate Animal Information, if applicable
- Data and Resource Sharing Plan, if applicable
- Supporting Documentation, as requested

Finalists will submit the completed application through the designated submission process provided with the invitation.

Evaluation of Final Proposals

Finalist applications will be evaluated based on:

- Scientific rigor and feasibility
- Innovation and mechanistic insight
- Alignment with program priorities
- Potential to generate meaningful preliminary data and support future external funding
- Appropriate and strategic use of existing resources, including biobanks, datasets, and pre-pandemic cohorts where relevant
- Expected impact on the field and potential to advance the research pipeline

Blinding Requirements for Final Proposals

- To support the double-blind peer review process, finalists must not include identifying information in blinded sections of the full application.
- Do not include names of investigators, collaborators, institutions, universities, hospitals, laboratories, or core facilities. Applicants should instead use generic terms such as “Principal Investigator,” “Co-Investigator,” “Institution,” “Clinical Site,” or “Core Facility.”
- In the references section, applicants should not highlight themselves or co-applicants as authors.
- **Failure to follow blinding instructions may result in administrative rejection or a request to revise and resubmit.**
- Supporting documentation that necessarily contains identifying information, such as letters of collaboration, consortium agreements, subcontract documentation, CVs/biosketches, or institutional materials, should be submitted separately from blinded application sections as instructed.

TIMELINE

- **Initial Research Plan Deadline:** November 13, 2026
- **Invitation to Submit Full Proposal:** December 4, 2026
- **Full Proposal Deadline:** January 8, 2027
- **Final Award Decisions:** February 8, 2027

A Ramsay Award notice will include the recommended funding level, applicable award conditions, program policies, and project reporting requirements. Applicants whose proposals are not selected will be notified as promptly as possible.

AWARDEE EXPECTATIONS

Awardees will be expected to:

- Participate in the Ramsay Scholar Network, including quarterly mentorship meetings and engagement in Solve M.E. research programming
- Contribute to the Ramsay Scholar Hub through research summaries, publications, progress updates, webinars, or short-format content
- Acknowledge Solve in relevant study publications and conference presentations
- Partake in community-facing scientific and development communications such as webinars, research summaries, quotes, or presentations when appropriate.
- Present findings through Solve M.E. events and/or partner conferences, when appropriate

CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions regarding this RFA, please contact the Solve ME Research Team at grants@solvecfs.org

FAQ

The following FAQs provide additional guidance on eligibility, research priorities, application requirements, budgeting, and award expectations. These responses reflect questions raised during the Ramsay Scholars Grant Program Researcher Office Hours.

1. Research Scope and Priorities

Q: Will projects outside the research priority areas listed in the RFA be deprioritized?
No. The listed research priorities highlight areas of particular interest to Solve M.E. but are not intended to limit the scope of eligible research. We welcome innovative, exploratory, mechanistic, clinical, translational, and interdisciplinary projects that advance our understanding of ME/CFS and/or Long COVID. Proposals introducing novel methodologies, expertise, or research approaches into the field are encouraged, even if they fall outside the identified priority areas.

Q: Are projects focused on other infection-associated chronic conditions and illnesses (IACCIs), such as POTS, eligible?
Projects investigating other IACCIs may be considered, provided they include a comparative cohort of individuals with ME/CFS and/or Long COVID. We recognize the substantial overlap, frequent comorbidities, and potentially shared biological mechanisms across these conditions, as well as the scientific value of investigating their similarities and differences. Comparative research can help identify shared and distinct disease mechanisms, improve patient subgrouping, and inform future diagnostic and therapeutic approaches. However, because the Ramsay Scholars Grant Program is primarily focused on advancing ME/CFS and Long COVID research, proposals centered on other IACCIs must include a direct comparative component involving ME/CFS and/or Long COVID populations.

Q: Must a study include a pre-pandemic ME/CFS cohort to be eligible?
No. Although studies directly comparing pre-pandemic ME/CFS and Long COVID cohorts are of particular interest, they are not required. Studies focused exclusively on Long COVID, including analyses of existing clinical trial datasets or other relevant populations, may be considered if they clearly articulate their scientific significance and potential implications for ME/CFS and/or Long COVID.

Q: Are public health, epidemiological, or clinical validation studies eligible, even if they do not investigate underlying biological mechanisms?
Yes. While mechanistic and translational research are among Solve M.E.'s priorities, proposals addressing important gaps in public health, epidemiology, clinical assessment, screening, or validation of existing tools are also welcome. Applicants should clearly describe the significance of the proposed work and its potential impact on ME/CFS and/or Long COVID research or patient care.

2. Applicant Eligibility and Award Categories

Q: Are researchers affiliated with institutions outside the United States eligible to apply?
Yes. The Ramsay Scholars Grant Program welcomes applications from eligible researchers and institutions internationally. Collaborative projects are not required to include a U.S.-based investigator or institution.

Q: Are researchers with nontraditional academic backgrounds, non-PhD qualifications, or transitional research appointments eligible?
Yes. Eligibility is not necessarily limited to researchers holding a PhD or a traditional faculty appointment. Applicants with relevant research qualifications, including those in transitional appointments between postdoctoral training and independent faculty positions, may be considered under the appropriate award category. Applicants should provide their current appointment information, relevant credentials, and research experience to support eligibility.

Q: Can an applicant qualify for more than one award category?
Potentially. Some researchers or projects may meet the criteria for multiple award categories. Applicants should select the category that best aligns with their career stage, proposed research structure, and funding needs. If uncertain, applicants are encouraged to indicate potential eligibility for another category in their initial application. Solve M.E. may work with selected applicants to determine the most appropriate award category before submission of a full proposal.

Q: Can independent or community-based researchers apply?
Independent and community-based researchers are welcome to submit an initial application. Proposals will be evaluated in the context of the applicant's qualifications, available resources, and capacity to complete the proposed research. Depending on the project's requirements, applicants may be encouraged to establish collaborations with academic, clinical, or research institutions to ensure access to necessary infrastructure, expertise, or research resources.

3. Collaborative Research Awards

Q: Does the Collaborative Research Award require an investigator who is new to ME/CFS or Long COVID research?
A central goal of the Ramsay Scholars Grant Program is to expand the research workforce by attracting new investigators and expertise into ME/CFS and Long COVID research. Accordingly, collaborative proposals that meaningfully engage researchers who are new to these fields will be prioritized. Such collaborations may combine established disease-specific knowledge with complementary scientific expertise, methodologies, or perspectives from other research disciplines.

Q: Does an established ME/CFS or Long COVID investigator need to serve as the lead principal investigator (PI) on a Collaborative Research Award?
No. Either an investigator with established disease-specific expertise or a researcher entering the field may serve as the lead PI. The emphasis is on the scientific value of the collaboration and its potential to strengthen research capacity in ME/CFS and Long COVID.

Q: Must collaborators be affiliated with different institutions or located in different countries?
No. Collaborators may be based at the same institution or at different institutions, including international institutions. The emphasis is on complementary expertise and the scientific value of the collaboration rather than geographic or institutional affiliation.

Q: Can PhD students participate in a Collaborative Research Award?
Yes. PhD students may participate as collaborators or members of a research team. However, Collaborative Research Awards should have an appropriately qualified lead PI responsible for overseeing the project. PhD students seeking support for their own research may also consider the dedicated PhD trainee award category.

Q: Must all collaborators be confirmed when submitting the initial application?
Applicants are encouraged to identify anticipated collaborators when possible. Prospective collaborators may be listed with an indication that their participation is pending confirmation. Research teams and collaborative arrangements can be further developed during the full proposal stage.

Q: Can an individual investigator apply for a non-collaborative award while receiving guidance or support from other researchers?
Yes. Individual investigator awards may include collaborators, mentors, advisors, or other research personnel who provide scientific expertise, data access, or technical support. The distinction between individual and Collaborative Research Awards generally depends on the leadership structure, nature of the collaboration, and

funding needs. Applicants whose projects could reasonably fit either category should explain their proposed research structure in the initial application.

4. Application Process and Peer Review

Q: What is required for the initial application, and will a detailed budget be necessary?
The initial application (Step 1) is intended to be a streamlined, preliminary submission outlining the proposed research, its significance, and an estimated budget. Applicants do not need to prepare a detailed, itemized budget or use a separate budget template at this stage. The information requested in the application form is sufficient. Applicants invited to submit a full proposal (Step 2) will receive additional instructions and templates.

Q: When will applicants be notified if they have been invited to submit a full proposal?
Applicants selected to advance to Step 2 will be contacted by email by **December 4, 2026**, with instructions for submitting a full proposal.

Q: Must applications be anonymized for the peer review process?
Anonymization is not required for the initial application (Step 1). However, applicants invited to submit a full proposal (Step 2) will be expected to minimize identifying information in the scientific proposal to support a blinded peer review process.
Applicants should avoid unnecessary references to their identities or those of participating investigators while retaining information essential to scientific evaluation, such as relevant datasets, published studies, clinical trials, or research methodologies. Solve M.E. recognizes that complete anonymity may not always be feasible, particularly when proposals rely on identifiable existing studies or specialized resources. Solve M.E. will review full proposals and may recommend adjustments to improve anonymization where practical.

Q: How will peer reviewers be selected, and how will conflicts of interest be managed?
Proposals will be evaluated by reviewers selected for their relevant scientific and methodological expertise. Where possible, Solve M.E. aims to include a combination of reviewers familiar with ME/CFS and Long COVID and specialists with expertise in the proposed research approaches or methods.
Applicants invited to submit full proposals will be asked to disclose relevant conflicts of interest. Solve M.E. will use these disclosures to inform the review process and manage potential reviewer conflicts appropriately.

Q: What supporting documents are required for collaborative applications?
For the initial application, applicants may upload the lead investigator's CV along with CVs for participating collaborators, where applicable. Multiple CVs may be combined into a single PDF for submission. Additional documentation requirements will be outlined for applicants invited to submit full proposals.

5. Budget and Funding

Q: Can applicants request less than the maximum award amount, including funding for smaller projects or microgrants?
Yes. Applicants may propose budgets below the maximum amount specified for their award category, including smaller-scale projects or microgrant requests. Applicants should indicate the amount requested and provide a brief justification. Funding decisions will depend on scientific merit, program priorities, and available resources.

Q: How is the 10% indirect cost cap calculated, and are indirect costs included within the total award amount?
Indirect costs are included within, rather than added to, the total award amount. The current indirect cost cap is 10% of the total award budget. Applicants whose institutions have specific indirect cost requirements or restrictions are encouraged to contact Solve M.E. to discuss their circumstances. Any exceptions would be considered individually and are not guaranteed.

Q: Are there restrictions on how much of the award budget may be allocated to personnel effort or salaries?
Personnel effort and salary support may represent a substantial portion of the proposed budget when justified by the research activities. For example, allocating approximately 50% of a budget to personnel effort may be appropriate, depending on the project. Applicants should provide reasonable estimates during Step 1, with detailed budget allocations and justifications required at the full proposal stage.

Q: Can budgets include compensation or reimbursement for patient and community research partners?
Yes. Reasonable expenses associated with meaningful patient and community engagement may be included in proposed budgets. These may include compensation for contributions to research activities, travel reimbursements, accessibility accommodations, or resources necessary to support participation. Applicants should briefly describe these expenses in the initial budget and provide additional detail if invited to submit a full proposal.

Q: Can publication fees be included in the budget?
Applicants are encouraged to account for anticipated publication-related expenses when developing their project budgets, where allowable under the award terms. In some circumstances, Solve M.E. may also consider requests for supplemental or follow-on funding to address publication costs or other emerging project needs. Additional funding is not guaranteed and depends on available resources.

Q: Can a project request the full award amount for a shorter period than the maximum project duration?
Potentially. Applicants proposing projects with shorter timelines may submit an initial application outlining their anticipated budget and project duration. Funding disbursement schedules and proposed project periods will be discussed further during the full proposal stage. Approval will depend on the applicable award requirements, feasibility, and funding arrangements.

6. Award Expectations, Reporting, and Community Engagement

Q: Must all proposed research activities be completed within the award period?
Not necessarily. Solve M.E. recognizes that some research projects, particularly doctoral research and longitudinal studies, may extend beyond the funded award period. Applicants should nevertheless identify achievable milestones and measurable outcomes within the proposed funding period. Awardees will be expected to provide progress updates and may be asked to share subsequent outcomes as their research advances.

Q: What are the reporting and engagement requirements for awardees?
Awardees will be expected to submit an annual progress report of approximately 1–2 pages summarizing progress to date, key findings, and relevant data or milestones. Awardees will also be expected to acknowledge Solve M.E.

support, engage with the Solve M.E. research network, and participate, when appropriate, in scientific and community-facing communications such as webinars, research summaries, presentations, quotes, or development materials. Additional reporting requirements, if applicable, will be communicated according to the award category.

Q: Is patient or lived-experience engagement expected in the proposed research?
Applicants invited to submit full proposals will be asked to describe how patient perspectives and lived experience have informed, or will inform, their research where relevant. This may include patient input into study design, recruitment considerations, feasibility, accessibility, selection of outcomes, or dissemination of findings. Solve M.E. encourages meaningful community engagement appropriate to the nature and scope of each project.

