

SAM DAY FOUNDATION

THE SPARK GRANT - EARLY CAREER INVESTIGATOR AWARD

$150,000 over two years

GRANT SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Mission: The Sam Day Foundation (SDF) advances research for childhood and young adult cancers and facilitates wellness-centered support and experiences so kids with cancer can survive and live well.

Letters of intent deadline: January 5, 2027
Invited applications deadline: March 12, 2027

About SDF

The Sam Day Foundation was founded in memory of Sam Day, who died from Ewing Sarcoma in 2016 at the age of 15. Sam fought his disease for six years. In that time, he endured multiple surgeries including two amputations, two out-of-state clinical trials, radiation treatments, and several high-dose chemotherapy regimens. During those difficult years, it became evident to Sam's parents that childhood sarcoma treatment is exceptionally hard on young people and leaves them at risk for serious health issues later in life. While many adult cancers have experienced hopeful improvements in survival rates, childhood cancer research lags behind in much-needed advancements. SDF exists to partner with the childhood cancer community in order to advance research for some of the most neglected and devastating childhood cancers.

What We Fund

The Sam Day Foundation is interested in innovative research projects with a high likelihood of generating more curative and less toxic therapies for children, adolescents, and young adults with cancer. SDF is focused on the most

destructive and challenging cancers in the field of pediatric oncology and seeks partnerships with researchers and clinicians who demonstrate a commitment to creating a better future for young people with cancer.

SDF Research Focus Areas

- **Pediatric sarcomas and brain tumors,** including related young adult tumor types.
- Any phase of research from bench to bedside, including correlative studies.
- Research studies focused on nutrition and childhood cancer, especially ones that seek to improve treatment tolerance, long-term health outcomes, quality of life, and anti-cancer properties.
- Ultra-rare sarcoma and brain tumor research is encouraged, especially studies that span more than one cancer type.
- Clinical trial funding will only be considered for proposals that include robust and well-designed correlative biology aims.
- SDF does not fund projects outside of the United States.

The Spark Grant (Early Career Investigator Award)

- **Purpose:** The Sam Day Foundation believes in fueling bright ideas at their beginning — the ones with the power to change the course of childhood cancer research. This award is designed to *ignite potential*–to help new investigators establish independence, generate critical preliminary data, and position themselves for larger, sustained funding.
- **Eligibility:**
  - The PI must be affiliated with a nonprofit, academic, or research institution
  - Early-career researchers within the first five years of their first independent faculty position, with their own lab, demonstrating strong potential and originality in their work.
  - Must provide a clear mentorship plan and evidence of institutional support for their professional development.
  - Must not have previously received an NIH RO1 Grant.
  - There is no limit to the number of applications an institution may submit.
- **Award Amount:** Up to $150,000 over two years.
- **Review Emphasis:** Reviewers will prioritize the applicant's potential for leadership and discovery, scientific rigor, innovation, quality of mentorship, and alignment with SDF's mission to advance more curative and less toxic therapies for young people with cancer.

FUNDING OF INDIRECT COSTS

SDF recognizes that institutions incur necessary overhead expenses to conduct research. To promote sustainable research environments and reduce administrative barriers, SDF now allows limited reimbursement for indirect costs (IDC), as outlined below and in Appendix A—Allowable Cost Matrix:

Maximum Allowable Indirect Costs (IDC)

- IDC reimbursement is capped at the lesser of (a) the institutional federally negotiated rate or (b) the SDF maximum allowed percentage of 10%.
- Total award budget including up to 10% IDC cannot exceed $150,000.
- IDC must be requested and justified within the project budget.
- SDF reserves the right to reduce or disallow IDC requests to ensure maximum funds are directed to scientific work.
- IDC requests must be proportional to project size and justified in context.
- IDC is not automatically applied to all awards; it must be included in the proposed budget at submission.

NO COST EXTENSION POLICY

Grantees may request one extension of up to 12 months to complete the original aims of the project, using only the funds already awarded. Requests must be made before the grant end date and include remaining funds, progress to date, and a brief explanation for the delay. Any remaining funds at the close of the extension must either be returned or repurposed in alignment with the original intent, subject to approval by the Sam Day Foundation.

REVIEW PROCESS

Applications are reviewed through Proposal Central, according to the following published deadlines:

November 2, 2026 – Request for Letters of Intent (LOI) posted
January 5, 2027 – LOI's due
January 19, 2027 – Notifications of LOI approvals + request for full proposals from approved LOI's
March 12, 2027 – Full applications due
June 4, 2027 – Award notifications
July 1, 2027 – Funding begins

1. The Research Advisory Committee will review all submitted proposals that meet the submission requirements.
2. Proposals will be ranked based on SDF research priorities using a scoring rubric aligned with each funding track.
3. Final funding decisions are made by the SDF Board of Directors.

LETTER OF INTENT GUIDELINES

1. **Project title and summary**
2. **Principal investigator(s)**
   Name, title, institution, and contact information for the PI, key team members.
3. **Objectives and significance**
   Describe how the project advances understanding or treatment of childhood cancer.
4. **Methodology overview**
   Summarize the study design and any key methodologies or innovative techniques.

FULL APPLICATION GUIDELINES

1. **Cover Page**
   a. Title of project
   b. Institution
   c. Principal investigator
   d. Primary contact information
2. **Lab Focus & Relevance**

   Brief description of ongoing lab research and how this project advances SDF priorities.
3. **Proposal**
   a. Background & Innovation *(2 page max)*

b. Specific Aims *(1 page max)*
c. Project Plan including data figures *(4 page max)*
d. Timeline *(1 page max)*
e. References *(2 page max)*

4. Budget & Justification

a. Include a comprehensive budget for the proposed project, clearly separating direct costs from indirect costs according to the Allowable Cost Matrix below. Indirect Costs should not exceed percentages listed in the Maximum Allowable Indirect Costs section above (10%).

b. Provide an indirect cost justification statement explaining how indirect costs support project infrastructure. *(1 page)*

c. Identify other funding sources, funding pursuits, and leverage opportunities, and describe your plan for managing any overlapping funds.

5. Biosketches & Supporting Documents

a. Include biosketch for each key person and relevant prior publications or reports.

b. Provide a letter from a research mentor, and that mentor's involvement in the project.

All LOI's and applications must be submitted through Proposal Central.

**For technical support related to the online submission process, please contact Proposal Central Customer service at (800) 875-2562 or by email at pcsupport@altum.com during business hours, Monday - Friday, 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM (Eastern Time).*

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Awardees must participate in **Annual Progress Updates**, and **Final Report** (see below). In addition, SDF may request marketing materials for donor updates at any time within the funding cycle (e.g., lab photos, summaries, videos, charts, etc.).

Annual Progress Update & Mid-Cycle Review

1. **Narrative Summary** *(3 pages max)***:** Progress toward project aims, accomplishments to date, and any deviations from the original workplan.
2. **Updated Metrics Table:** Include quantitative measures such as publications, abstracts, presentations, collaborations, new grant applications, and personnel supported (e.g., postdocs, students).
3. **Budget Report:** Spending summary and projected use of remaining funds, noting any reallocation requests.
4. **Future Plans:** Brief outline of next steps for the coming year and anticipated deliverables.
5. **Visuals (if requested):** Photos or figures suitable for donor and communications use.

The SDF Research Committee may request a brief virtual check-in to discuss progress and offer support if needed.

Final Report

1. **Comprehensive Project Narrative** *(3 pages max)***:** Summary of all work completed, key findings, challenges encountered, and lessons learned.
2. **Final Metrics Table:**
    - Publications and citations
    - Presentations and abstracts
    - Grants or funding leveraged from SDF support
    - Trainees mentored or advanced

- Data sharing or clinical translation outcomes (if applicable)

3. **Budget Close-Out Statement:** Final accounting of expenditures, including confirmation that indirect costs align with the approved rate.
4. **Institutional Verification Letter:** Confirmation from grants or finance office that funds were spent as approved.
5. **Acknowledgments & Outputs:** Provide a list of all publications, presentations, patents, and other project outputs that include acknowledgment of SDF support.
6. **Data Sharing Plan:** Awardees are required to place data into a publicly accessible repository such as the Childhood Cancer Data Initiative Data Catalog. Describe how the data from your award will be shared. Discuss any intellectual property considerations and how they will be addressed.
7. **Optional Media Assets:** Photos, charts, or short quotes suitable for SDF communication materials.
8. **Optional Brief Interview (15–30 minutes):** Conducted by SDF staff to capture stories or qualitative insights.

Long-Term Reporting and Acknowledgments

1. Any resulting publications, presentations, posters, press releases, articles, abstracts and interviews featuring results of the study funded by SDF should acknowledge SDF.
2. Findings from the study, whether positive or negative, will be made available to the broader research community by providing a written summary of outcomes to SDF.

Appendix A—Allowable Cost Matrix *(✔ Indicates cost allowed; ✖ Indicates cost NOT allowed)*

Cost Item	Description / Justification	Direct Cost	Indirect Cost
Personnel – Scientific Staff	Salaries and fringe for PI, co-investigators, postdocs, technicians directly conducting the project.	✔	
Personnel – Administrative Support	Departmental/institutional administrators whose work benefits multiple projects (HR, finance, compliance).		✔
Trainees / Students	Stipends for graduate students or fellows working on the project. Tuition not allowable unless pre-approved.	✔	
Supplies / Reagents	Laboratory consumables used solely for this project.	✔	
Equipment < $5,000	Small instruments and tools essential to project execution.	✔	
Equipment > $5,000	Major capital equipment purchase, depreciation, or maintenance.		✔
Core / Service Facility Fees	Charges for use of institutional cores (sequencing, imaging, biostatistics).	✔	
Computers / Software Licenses	Dedicated computers or software directly required for project.	✔	
Publication / Open Access Fees	Costs of publishing results in peer-reviewed journals.	✔	
Participant Costs / Clinical Expenses	Patient enrollment, specimen collection, or study coordination costs.	✔	
Travel – Project Related	Travel for project implementation or scientific presentations.	✔	
Travel – Administrative or General	Travel for institutional or fundraising purposes.		✔
Consultant Services	Fees for external consultants providing specialized expertise.	✔	
Subcontracts / Collaborating Institutions	Costs of work performed at external sites.	✔	
Facility Operations / Utilities	Shared building utilities, custodial, security, maintenance, IT infrastructure.		✔
Library / Core Infrastructure Services	Institutional library, data center, or shared equipment maintenance.		✔
Institutional Compliance / IRB Administration	Central compliance, legal, or IRB offices supporting all research.		✔
Human Resources / Payroll / Finance Offices	HR, payroll, accounting, or grants administration staff.		✔
IT Support & Networking	Shared institutional systems, servers, cybersecurity, IT services.		✔
Building Depreciation / Rent	Institutional facility depreciation or rent for non-project-dedicated space.		✔
Fundraising / Development Activities	Costs related to donor relations, marketing, or advancement.	✖	✖
Entertainment / Meals	Non-scientific meals, events, or social activities.	✖	✖
Tuition Remission	Academic tuition for students or trainees (only if pre-approved).	✖	✖
Contingency Funds	Unspecified or miscellaneous costs without justification.	✖	✖