



2026 Research Awards

As the Academic Core of Advocate Health, Wake Forest University School of Medicine is proud to present the 2026 Research Awards, including award categories, qualifications, and requirements. These awards are open to all colleagues from the Midwest (Illinois and Wisconsin) and Southeast Regions (Charlotte, Georgia, and Winston-Salem). We hope you will consider nominating your colleagues. The following categories will be awarded:

INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

Early-Career Investigator

Assistant professor or associate research scientist in basic and translational or clinical and population science

Clinical Trial Investigator

Investigator of any rank who demonstrates exceptional leadership, efficiency and innovation in the implementation and execution of clinical trials

Mid-Career Investigator

Associate professor or research scientist in basic and translational or clinical and population science

Emerging Leader

Instructor, assistant professor, or associate research scientist who shows qualities of a successful emerging leader

Established Investigator

Full professor or senior research scientist in basic and translational or clinical and population science

Entrepreneurship

Investigator of any rank who contributes significantly to innovation and entrepreneurship

aLHS

Investigator of any rank who contributes significantly to our transformation to an Academic Learning Health System (aLHS)

Health for All

Investigator of any rank who contributes significantly to research improving and benefitting all populations

Mentoring

Associate professor, research scientist, or higher who has played a significant role in mentoring successful investigators

Research Staff

Staff member (non-faculty) who contributes significantly to the success of research programs

Research Educator

Associate professor, research scientist or higher who excels at educating others in the realm of research

Special Achievement

Full professor or senior research scientist with significant history of high-level contributions to the research environment

TEAM AWARDS**Clinical Trial Team**

Teams from any department or unit that demonstrate outstanding collaboration, operational excellence, and impact in the implementation and execution of clinical trials

Established Team

Active multi-disciplinary teams working on a project that has made highly significant research contributions with notable scientific or clinical impact

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF AWARDS

Early-Career Investigator

Eligibility for Early-Career Investigators is limited to individuals at the assistant professor or associate research scientist rank who have been at their institution for at least three years at the time of nomination with a focus on basic and translational science or clinical and population science. The award consists of a framed certificate and monetary gift.

Criteria Include:

- A significant contribution to the field
- Originality and independence of thought
- Outside recognition
- Collaboration
- Potential for an outstanding scientific career

Ideally, the candidate will have made at least one independent contribution that meets the above criteria. In recognition of the collaborative nature of research during the early phases of most careers, the candidate must have played a major role in at least one of the cited contributions.

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter (from an individual at or above the rank of the nominee)
- CV
- Biosketch

Mid-Career Investigator

Eligibility for Mid-Career Investigators is limited to individuals at the associate professor or research scientist rank who have been at their institution for at least three years at the time of nomination with a focus on basic and translational science or clinical and population science. The award consists of a framed certificate and monetary gift.

Criteria Include:

- Significance of contributions to the field
- Originality of the work
- Value of the work in shaping and furthering the field
- Productivity and collaboration
- National and/or international recognition
- Contributions to the research environment of their current institution
- Contributions as a mentor and colleague

We recognize that successful candidates for this award may be earlier in their development of leadership, collaboration, and mentoring than candidates for the Established Investigator award.

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter (from an individual at or above the rank of the nominee)
- CV
- Biosketch

Established Investigator

Eligibility for Established Investigators is limited to individuals at the full professor or senior research scientist rank who have been at their institution for at least three years at the time of nomination with a focus on basic and translational science or clinical and population science. The award consists of a framed certificate and monetary gift.

Criteria Include:

- Significance of contributions to the field
- Originality of the work
- Value of the work in shaping and furthering the field
- Productivity and collaboration
- National and international recognition
- Contributions to the research environment of their current institution
- Contributions as a mentor and colleague

Established Investigator nominees are expected to have made major contributions to their field and have established an important research program. In addition, to qualify for this award, the nominee must have contributed significantly to the research environment through mentoring, scientific leadership, collaboration, and service to the school/health system and scientific community.

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter (from an individual at or above the rank of the nominee)
- CV
- Biosketch

Academic Learning Health System (aLHS)

This category recognizes individuals who contribute to the aLHS and advance health through one or more of the following: 1) Biomedical Informatics; 2) Improvement or Implementation Science; 3) System Science and Organizational Change Management; 4) Stakeholder Engagement, Leadership, and Research Management; 5) Ethics of Health System Research; and/or 6) Health Systems Research Methods. Investigators of all ranks who have been at their institution for a minimum of three years at the time of nomination are eligible. The award consists of a framed certificate and monetary gift.

Criteria Include:

- Impact on the health system or provision of care
- Originality of the work
- Value of the work in shaping and furthering the field or changing the way care is delivered
- Contributions to transforming our health system into an aLHS

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter (from an individual at or above the rank of the nominee)
- CV
- Biosketch

Clinical Trial Investigator

The Clinical Trial Investigator Award recognizes faculty who have demonstrated exceptional leadership, efficiency, and innovation in the implementation and execution of clinical trials. Faculty of all ranks who have been at their institution for a minimum of three years at the time of nomination are eligible. The award includes a framed certificate and a monetary gift.

Criteria Include:

- Demonstrated ability to consistently open clinical trials on schedule, effectively meet recruitment goals, and maintain high standards of protocol adherence and data integrity
- Proven success in coordinating complex trial activities at one site or across multiple sites as the primary Principal Investigator (PI), including oversight of regulatory submissions, site activation, and inter-site communication
- Contributions that have advanced clinical research through efficient trial conduct, leading to improved patient outcomes, accelerated timelines, or enhanced trial accessibility
- Use of novel strategies to optimize trial operations, such as adaptive recruitment methods, streamlined workflows, or integration of digital tools to enhance trial efficiency
- A strong reputation as a clinical trial leader, with peer recognition for excellence in trial management and execution

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter (from an individual at or above the rank of the nominee)
- CV
- Biosketch

Emerging Leader

The Emerging Leader category recognizes instructors, assistant professors, and associate research scientists who are up-and-coming leaders within their field of research and the health system. These individuals should possess exemplary leadership qualities, such as integrity, curiosity, resilience, and compassion. Instructors, assistant professors, and associate research scientists, who have been at their institution for a minimum of three years at the time of nomination are eligible. The award consists of a framed certificate and monetary gift.

Criteria Include:

- Participation in leadership role within health system
- A significant contribution to the field
- Collegiality

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter (from an individual at or above the rank of the nominee)
- CV
- Biosketch

Entrepreneurship

The Entrepreneurship category recognizes those whose scholarly work exemplifies the successful translation of academic research into real-world impact through innovation and entrepreneurial activity. It acknowledges individuals who have demonstrated exceptional leadership in initiatives that bridge academia and the private sector and transform ideas into tangible contributions that advance economic growth, public health, or societal well-being. Individuals of all ranks, who have been at their institution for a minimum of three years at the time of nomination, are eligible. The award consists of a framed certificate and monetary gift.

Criteria Include:

- Recognition as an outstanding innovator
- Leadership role in either an entrepreneurial or research-focused effort to translate scholarly and creative academic work through interaction with industry or other elements of the private sector
- History of spearheading collaborative research or scholarly efforts with private organizations that have led to an economic or health related innovation

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter (from an individual at or above the rank of the nominee)
- CV
- Biosketch

Health For All

The Health for All category recognizes the research accomplishments of individuals who have made significant contributions to advancing comprehensive, accessible and impactful health research that benefits all populations. Faculty of all ranks who have been at their institution for a minimum of three years at the time of nomination are eligible. The award consists of a framed certificate and monetary gift.

Criteria Include:

- Recognition as an outstanding investigator whose work promotes health for all individuals, regardless of background or circumstances
- Demonstrated impact in shaping the field through the development and evaluation of evidence-based solutions that improve health outcomes across varied populations
- Originality and innovation in research approaches that address broad determinants of health and promote universal access to care and wellness

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter (from an individual at or above the rank of the nominee)
- CV
- Biosketch

Mentoring

The Mentoring category recognizes those who have played a significant role in mentoring investigators in their trajectory in becoming highly successful researchers in the biomedical sciences. Eligible individuals must have obtained the rank of associate professor, research scientist or higher and must have been a member of their institution for at least five years at the time of nomination. The award consists of a framed certificate and monetary gift.

Attributes/Components of a Successful Mentor:

- Introduces mentee to professional contacts and networks
- Takes personal interest in the mentee
- Provides coaching, supervision, and consulting
- Models and discusses healthy professional and personal balance
- Provides encouragement and advice to mentees seeking leadership positions
- Collaborates with other investigators on scientific projects and grant submissions

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter (from an individual at or above the rank of the nominee)
- CV
- Biosketch
- Two testimonials from mentees
- List of mentees with current positions

Research Educator

The Research Educator Award will be given to an individual who excels at educating others, specifically in the realm of research. This individual is a leader in their respective field and is recognized for educating faculty, staff, and students within and beyond their department. Eligible individuals must have obtained the rank of associate professor, research scientist or higher and must have been a member of the institution for at least three years at the time of nomination. The award consists of a framed certificate and monetary gift.

Attributes/Components of a Successful Research Educator:

- Takes personal interest in educating those around them
- Provides research coaching, consulting, and supervision
- Collaborates with other investigators on scientific projects and grant submissions
- A significant contribution to the field

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter (from an individual at or above the rank of the nominee)
- CV
- Biosketch
- Two research education-focused testimonials

Research Staff

The Research Staff category recognizes the accomplishments of research staff who contribute significantly to a research team. There are separate categories for administrative and scientific staff members. Staff of any level, who have been at their institution for a minimum of three years at the time of nomination, are eligible. The award consists of a framed certificate and monetary gift.

Criteria Include:

- Recognition as an outstanding staff contributor to research
- Clear articulation of a specific contribution to the success of a research study or program
- History of leading or contributing to collaborative research or scholarly efforts with a successful research team

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter (from a faculty member)
- Two testimonials from other faculty who work with the staff member
- Biosketch

Administrative Staff

Those who operate in an administrative role, such as (but not limited to): Project Managers, Programmers, Study Coordinators, etc.

Scientific Staff

Those who operate in a staff scientist/PI/ Investigator role, such as (but not limited to): Pharmacists, Research Associates, Epidemiologists, etc.

Special Achievement

The Special Achievement Award is the highest category of career recognition, reserved for individuals who have made exceptional and sustained contributions to the research environment at their current institution. Eligibility for the Special Achievement award is limited to individuals who have attained the rank of full professor or senior research scientist and have a distinguished record of impactful contributions in mentoring, scientific leadership, collaboration, and service to the school, health system and broader scientific community. The award consists of a framed certificate and monetary gift.

Criteria Include:

- A distinguished record of scientific achievement and impact
- Demonstrated mentorship of trainees and junior faculty
- Evidence of scientific leadership and innovation
- Substantial collaborative contributions across disciplines
- Meaningful service to the institution and scientific community
- National and international recognition as a leader in their field

Ideally, the candidate will have made multiple, sustained contributions meeting the above criteria. In recognition of the collaborative nature of academic research, an acceptable candidate must have played a central and sustained leadership role in the contributions cited.

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter (from an individual at or above the rank of the nominee)
- CV
- Biosketch

Clinical Trial Team

The Clinical Trial Team Award honors the collective achievements of research teams who have demonstrated outstanding collaboration, operational excellence, and impact in the implementation and execution of clinical trials. Teams from any department or unit that have worked collaboratively for a minimum of three years are eligible. The award consists of a framed certificate for each team member (investigators and staff).

Criteria Include:

- Demonstrated success in opening trials on schedule, meeting or exceeding recruitment targets, and maintaining high standards of data quality and regulatory compliance
- Effective management of trial activities at one site or across multiple sites, showcasing strong communication, centralized oversight, and streamlined workflows
- Completion of trials that have advanced clinical knowledge, improved patient care, or accelerated the development of new therapies through efficient and high-quality execution
- Adoption of creative and effective strategies to enhance trial operations, including participant engagement, recruitment optimization, and use of technology to improve trial efficiency
- Evidence of strong interdisciplinary teamwork, shared leadership, and a commitment to mentorship, inclusion, and continuous process improvement

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter that should include the name of the department or unit, when the team was formed, a description of the team's implementation excellence as well as specific examples of effective trial management, impactful contribution(s) to research, innovation and collaboration.

Established Team

The Established Team Award recognizes established, active teams of researchers working across disciplines on a project that has made significant research contributions with notable scientific or clinical impact. The award consists of framed certificates for each team member (investigators and staff).

Criteria Include:

- Team must be comprised of at least three current investigators/staff
- Team must demonstrate exemplary research achievement
- Team must include investigators working across disciplines and/or departments
- Team must demonstrate remarkable scientific product with high impact

Nomination Requirements:

- Nominating Letter that should include a description of the team's significant findings, including contributions of each member to the team's effort, the contributions to scientific research, and the impact to their field and to the larger scientific community.