

August 10, 2023

**The Paul G. Allen Frontiers Group  
Letters of Intent (LOI)  
Allen Discovery Center (ADC) Program  
Neurobiology in Changing Environments – 2024**

LOI release date: August 10, 2023

LOI submission deadline: September 20, 2023

### **Purpose**

**We request letters of intent for Allen Discovery Center proposals that will elucidate the molecular, cellular and/or circuitry-level neurobiology governing fundamental biological processes (development, reproduction, etc.) in response to anthropogenic-driven environmental perturbation.** There will be up to one award made for up to \$10M in total funding support provided over four years.

### **Topic Details**

The nervous systems of organisms around the globe are coping with rapid and unpredictable change. Mechanistic understanding of the architecture and constraints of neurobiological components underlying key survival processes is insufficient for most species and hampers our ability to predict resilience and design high-impact mitigation and conservation investments.

This anthropogenic change in the environment provides “natural experiments” that could reveal molecular, cellular, and developmental elements underlying nervous system sensitivity and resilience and could (1) leverage existing or potentially new animal model systems particularly useful for cross-species comparative studies and (2) open opportunities for new technological approaches as probes.

Teams embracing the call will integrate the interdisciplinary expertise needed to connect neurobiological resilience capabilities with phenomenological observations. We expect competitive proposals will leverage existing field and neurobiological baseline data to reveal fundamental adaptation principles, employ innovative technology, use rigorous experimental methodology and analytical tools, and integrate expertise in fields including but not limited to control theory, engineering, and computation. Preference will be given to approaches that chart a course for others and shed light on the adaptive capacity of neural systems writ large.

Projects are encouraged to embrace complexity while strategically utilizing reductionist models. Less preference will be given to projects that focus on species in isolation, or that rely disproportionately on classical neurobiological or ecological approaches without significant integration. It is unlikely for this initiative to support projects with the primary goal of establishing a new model organism.

### **Program Goals**

The Allen Discovery Centers are leadership-driven, compass-guided research centers, often created in partnership with major research organizations and universities. Ideally, a Center should be comprised of a highly functional, integrated, and creative team with productivity greater than the sum of its parts. A Center should seek to be a leader in the field, pioneering efforts that engage and drive the larger research community.

The Allen Discovery Center program offers a unique funding level and mechanism, allowing for a larger-scale impact on the field. The Centers embody our commitment to launching and fostering development of entire new fields in biology—with infinite potential to impact human knowledge and health. These Centers are long-term investments, typically providing \$10 million for the first four years. The Centers may be evaluated for a potential second four-year funding phase based on research progress, future research plans, and attainment of \$10 million in “matched” or leveraged funding (for a potential total scope of activity of \$30 million over eight years). The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and The Paul G. Allen Frontiers Group have a 0% indirect cost policy.

The program seeks to have a lasting impact on the direction of research, aiming to serve as a catalyst upon which future research is founded. This program seeks to enable scientists to take risks with new ideas and approaches, and strongly believes in interdisciplinary approaches that allow scientists to look beyond their own disciplines, and to explore approaches with colleagues in other disciplines in order to bring new perspectives to challenging problems where traditional approaches within a discipline may be ‘stuck.’ The program is especially interested in approaches that are unlikely to receive funding from traditional government sources, including methodological and technological advances that are often necessary complements to scientific advance and often difficult to fund through traditional sources. This program encourages and supports researchers including novel methodological, theoretical, and technological elements in their proposals.

### Eligibility Requirements

US or international scientists associated with nonprofit research organizations are eligible to apply. Leaders must possess at least seven years of independent research experience (*e.g.*, level of associate professor or similar positions). Current Allen Institute employees or advisors are not eligible to apply during their tenure at the Allen Institute. Eligible research organizations are nonprofit institutions with current 501(c)(3) Public Charity status from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), non-federal government entities, IRS-recognized tribes, and other organizations that conduct charitable activities. Applicants may not be private foundations as defined in Section 509(a) of the Internal Revenue Code.

We ask that the leader of an Allen Discovery Center commit 50% effort to the Center leadership and research activities. If the Center organizational structure has shared leadership, the expectation would be a commitment of 40% effort for the primary and a minimum of 25–30% effort for the other leaders given that acceptable descriptions of the shared leadership roles and an articulation of how such an organizational structure would work in practice are provided. If other organizational structures are being considered, please contact the Frontiers Group for further discussion.

We believe that diverse perspectives are vital to science. We encourage researchers who are members of underrepresented groups and/or have followed less-traditional career paths as well as teams that include members from across career stages to apply.

### LOI Format

Submissions consist of the following information:

- a) Contact information
- b) Project description and leadership statement
- c) Career narrative (for each leader and co-leader)

We recommend that submitters use our template when preparing their LOI. Answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) and the template are available on our [website](#).

Contact information includes names of Center leader(s), potential collaborators, and institutions, and is also collected via the submission portal (see LOI Submission below).

The project description should provide an overview of the project that you are submitting for consideration. No specific information is required. We recommend that you include information such as the relevance or timeliness of your proposed project; the potential impact of your project; and how your approach is particularly suited to complete your proposed project. A leadership statement is required as part of the project description. The leadership statement should describe how the Center will seek to engage and drive the larger research community as well as the Center leader(s)'s leadership experience, philosophy, and plan for the proposed center (recommended length for the leadership statement is 300–500 words). The page limit for project description, including leadership statement, is two and a half pages.

A career narrative should be included for each leader. No specific information is required. We recommend that you provide a holistic description of your scientific activities to-date. The narrative may include your career milestones; key scientific discoveries; awards; teaching, mentoring and outreach activities; community building and inclusivity efforts; significant moments in your career growth; career challenges; and/or other information about why you are particularly suited to undertake your proposed project. The page limit for the career narrative is one page per leader.

We request that all LOIs be in English on 8 ½ x 11-inch paper size, using Arial, 11-point font, single spaced, with 1-inch margins top, bottom, left, and right. Up to 10 references are allowed; references are not included in the page limits. Up to two figures are permitted and not included in the page limits. Please place references and figures, if any, following the project description and leadership statement. See the template provided and FAQs for more information on how to prepare your LOI.

### LOI Submission

LOIs are due by **12 noon Pacific Time on September 20, 2023**, and should be submitted through the submission portal accessible on our [website](#). Submitters will be asked to provide contact information and upload their LOI.

The LOI must be submitted as a **single PDF** with a filename that indicates the primary leader.

### Questions

Please submit questions to [frontiers@alleninstitute.org](mailto:frontiers@alleninstitute.org). Subject: 2024 ADC Question.

LOI questions must be submitted by **midnight Pacific Time on September 17, 2023**. Questions received after this date may not be answered.

### Application Key Dates

Letter of Intent Due	September 20, 2023
Notification of Full Application Invite	by December 6, 2023*
Full Application Deadline	January 24, 2024*
Finalist Interviews	May 2024*

Notification of Award  
Award Start

by July 2024\*  
October 2024\*

\*Tentative date

### **Selection Process**

Up to 10 LOIs will be invited to submit full proposals for consideration. Up to three of the submitted proposals will be selected for finalist interviews. Up to one award will be made.

LOIs and proposals are confidentially reviewed by a panel of experts tailored for the topic, and this panel will make recommendations to The Paul G. Allen Frontiers Group, a division of the Allen Institute, which acts as the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation's agent and subject matter expert, provides counsel, and supports the administration of the awards. The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation has the final decision on the award.

Members of the panel of experts and any advisors serve anonymously. Their identities as well as correspondence, evaluations and deliberations are kept confidential. This policy enables advisors and evaluators to provide their honest impressions independent of outside influence. Past awardees may be asked to act as future evaluators and advisors.

### **Post-award Activities**

The Frontiers Group announces awards and releases biographies of Center leaders along with summary descriptions of their projects to the press and on the Frontiers Group website and other communication channels.

The Frontiers Group believes post-award engagement is important and seeks to build a relationship with investigators. We strive to promote interaction among awardees to stimulate idea exchange around the broad scientific question asked of the team. Recipients may be required to participate in an annual symposium.

### **Reporting Requirements**

Recipients are required to provide annual reports describing progress towards milestones and anticipated outcomes as well as any barriers encountered since the last report and how they are being addressed.

The Frontiers Group will conduct site visits of current awardees to gain first-hand understanding of the research progress, team engagement, and institutional support.

A final report must be submitted at the end of the grant period describing the results of the project, including successes, barriers encountered and anticipated next steps. The final report should also include a discussion of how the outcomes attained advanced the field.

We require recipients to provide annually updated budget information as well as identify and explain any major deviations (>15%) from previously reported budgets.