



2026 AOPA | SGW Research Grant

Program Manual



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Program Overview

Prosthetic socket design and structural strength are fundamental to patient safety, comfort, mobility, and long-term clinical outcomes. Despite this central role, no industry-wide guidelines or standards exist for testing socket structural safety, including fatigue resistance, failure thresholds, or loading conditions. This lack of standardization has left clinicians, researchers, regulators, and manufacturers without established criteria or methods by which to assess the structural safety of sockets and patient outcomes.

In 2020, AOPA established the Socket Guidance Workgroup (SGW), a multidisciplinary, international team of experts dedicated to developing evidence-based best practices and standardized testing methods for prosthetic sockets. In its 2023 white paper¹, accompanying editorial², and ongoing consensus-building efforts, the SGW identified key gaps that limit progress toward validated and internationally recognized technical specifications for socket testing and standards. In support of this work, AOPA has allocated up to \$50,000 in funding to The O&P Foundation to offer a one-year grant program to advance research directly aligned with the SGW priority areas.

Program Purpose

The purpose of this grant program is to stimulate research that closes evidence gaps related to assessing the structural safety and quality management of prosthetic sockets. Funded studies will support a pathway toward a standardized testing protocol and future ISO alignment.

By advancing the evidence required to establish testing standards for the structural strength and safety of sockets, a standard will:

- Enable manufacturers to evaluate socket strength reliably and affordably
- Increase confidence among clinicians, prosthesis users, payers, and regulators
- Help insurers justify coverage for sockets tested under validated criteria
- Reduce overall system costs and improve patient outcomes

The program aims to fund one or more proposals that address evidence gaps related to the structural strength testing of transtibial prosthetic sockets.

Priority Research Areas



The program welcomes a range of proposals. Projects that address one or more of the following priority areas and research gaps are strongly encouraged:

1. Bench vs. Real-World Socket Loading

- Develop a method for measuring socket load profiles during everyday use.
- Compare and correlate real-world forces with bench test simulations.

2. Full-Socket Load Mapping

- Create techniques to quantify normal and shear forces across the entire socket surface.
- Address transient and multi-directional forces relevant to gait and daily activities.
- Promote accuracy, repeatability, and applicability in both bench and real-life scenarios.

3. Finite Element Analysis (FEA) Validation

- Generate evidence of FEA models for socket/residual limb interface stress identification.
- Establish methods to confirm socket pressure/force FEA predictions against empirical data."

1. Dickinson A, Nickel E, Fatone S, Gariboldi F, Cutti AG, Steer J, Erenstone J, Zahedi S & AOPA Socket Guidance Workgroup. (2023) Towards standardized methods for prosthetic socket mechanical testing [Editorial]. *Prosthetics and Orthotics International*, 47(1):1-2. PMID: 36752755.

2. Gariboldi F, Cutti AG, Fatone S, Nickel E, Dickinson A, Steer J, Erenstone J, Zahedi S & AOPA Socket Guidance Workgroup. (2023) Mechanical testing of transtibial prosthetic sockets: a discussion paper from the American Orthotic & Prosthetic Association Socket Guidance Workgroup. *Prosthetics and Orthotics International*, 47(1):3-12. PMID: 36763513.

Eligibility

Principal Investigator Requirements

- PI should have attained a doctoral degree or have equivalent research experience.
- Doctoral trainees may serve as PI only if they have formally advanced to PhD candidacy and have a designated faculty mentor who provides written verification and oversight.

Project Requirements

- The proposed research must include a certified prosthetist or orthotist/prosthetist to serve as co-investigator, collaborator, or engaged consultant.



- The host institution must be a not-for-profit located within the United States (US).
- The primary research site must be in the United States.
- The proposed research must be impactful to clinical practice based on The O&P Foundation [Clinical Relevance Criteria](#).
- The proposed research must address [The O&P Foundation Research Priorities](#).

Submission Requirements

The LOI should be uploaded to the online system as a PDF document (12 pt font, single spaced, 1" borders, 8.5" x 11" page size).

- Letter of Intent (LOI)**
 - Applications will not be reviewed without the submission of an LOI.
 - Feedback will not be provided in response to the LOI.
 - The LOI is used only to assemble a review committee with appropriate expertise.
 - The LOI must briefly describe the proposed research.
 - The LOI must include the names of all collaborators.
 - The LOI should be a maximum of two pages (12 pt font single spaced).

Proposal Sections

The proposal should be uploaded as a PDF document to the online system with a maximum of 10 pages (12 pt font, single spaced, 1" borders, 8.5" x 11" page size). This page limit only includes the sections with an asterisk (*).

- Application Cover Page**
 - The application cover page should be completed in The O&P Foundation application portal
 - While completing the application cover page, select the AOPA SGW Sponsored Grant
 - The [Application Cover Page](#) is also available for review/download on The [O&P Foundation website](#)
 - If a submission includes proprietary or confidential information, this should be noted on the cover page and relevant sections of the proposal.
- Abstract**
 - Up to 500 words



□ **Specific Aims***

- Provide a concise statement of the goals of the proposed research.
- List succinctly the specific objectives of the proposed research (e.g., to test a stated hypothesis, solve a specific clinical problem, challenge an existing paradigm, address clinical barriers, or develop new technology) Describe how these objectives address the [The O&P Foundation Research Priorities](#), and [Clinical Relevance Criteria](#)
- Describe in detail the potential for clinical impact to the field of prosthetics.
- If applicable, state testable hypotheses. If hypotheses are not applicable describe the expected outcomes.

□ **Background and Significance***

- Provide a rationale for the proposed research, relevant background/history, and the need for the research. Identify how this work is novel, unique, or original, and the knowledge gap that this research addresses.
- Indicate how the proposed research relates to current literature on the topic.
- Considering the priority research areas outlined by the SGW, explain the importance of the problem or critical barrier to progress that will be addressed by the proposed research.
- Address clinical impact by describing how the concepts, treatments, services, or interventions that drive O&P will be changed if the proposed aims are achieved.

□ **Previous Research (if applicable)***

- Describe previous research conducted and/or pilot data that supports the proposed study.

□ **Methodology***

- Describe the overall study design and research strategy that will be used to accomplish the specific aims of the proposed research.
- If the proposed study is human subjects research, describe the sample, including proposed sample size, eligibility criteria, and sampling processes.
- Clearly describe and justify outcome measures used in the study and describe how data will be collected.
- Clearly describe how data will be analyzed and interpreted to address the study aims. If applicable, describe any confounding variables and/or effect modifiers and how they will be accounted for in the analysis.



- Discuss potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success anticipated to achieve the aims.
- Project Timeline** (include milestones and deliverables)*
- Depict the project timeline with a graphic that shows the timing and duration of each aim and task within the proposed research. Include the funding start and end dates in your timeline.
 - Indicate when each milestone/deliverable is to be achieved.
- Anticipated Results***
- Summarize the expected outcome(s) of the proposed research
 - Describe the potential impact that the results of the proposed research will have on the prosthetics field and/or prosthetics clinical practice.
 - Demonstrate commitment to the impact of this work by describing future plans for this line of research and/or how findings will be disseminated to relevant stakeholders.
- References**
- Include a list of references used within the application to support the need, rationale, and approach for the proposed research.
 - Format your citations and references using an accepted citing/referencing style (e.g., AMA or Vancouver)
- Budget, Justifications, and Facilities Description**
- Provide a budget that itemizes the cost of each item to be paid for with the award. Present this information in table format.
 - A budget justification should accompany the budget and should provide a narrative description of the costs included in the research budget to include individual line items leading to the total cost of the project.
 - Provide a brief description of the facilities and resources that are available to the research team that will facilitate successful completion of the project.
- Current or Pending Support Requests**
- Indicate for the PI and each collaborator any current or pending funding support related to the proposed research.
 - Pending support refers to any applications for funding that have been submitted and for which the outcome is not yet known.
 - Indicate what overlap may exist with funding that has already been received or is pending for the proposed research.



□ **PI and Collaborators**

- Doctoral trainees may serve as PI only if they have formally advanced to PhD candidacy (i.e., completed coursework and passed qualifying/comprehensive exams) and have a designated faculty mentor. Applicants must provide documentation of candidacy or a signed mentor attestation verifying candidacy status and confirming the mentor's commitment to provide active oversight throughout the project period.
- Biosketch for the principal investigator. [Biosketch templates and samples.](#)
- List of collaborators (including a short biosketch for each)
- Provide a detailed description of the role, scope, and activities of the certified prosthetist or orthotist/prosthetist on the proposed project.

□ **Letters of Support**

- Include a letter or letters that indicate that the applicant's institution is aware that this application is being submitted and will support the research if funded;
- Include a letter or letters from external collaborators that have agreed to be involved in the proposed research if funded;
- Include a letter or letters that provide evidence that the PI has access to any additional resources or support needed to complete the proposed research.

Submission Instructions

- Applicant will create an account in The O&P Foundation [Application Portal](#).
- Once an account has been created in the portal, applicants can select the **Pilot/Early Career/AOPA SGW Grant Program** and follow the prompts for applications.
- While completing the application cover page, select the AOPA SGW Sponsored Grant.
- Applicants can invite collaborators to the application and can track completeness and status of their submission in the portal.
- Emails generated from The O&P Foundation portal may be routed to junk mail, [ensure you receive emails from our system.](#)

AOPA | SGW Program Funding Cycle



The following are key dates and deadlines for the program. Applicants are responsible for ensuring all materials are received by 5pm (CST) on the due dates.

Program Opens	March 2nd, 2026
LOI submissions	April 6th, 2026
Proposal submission deadline	May 4th 2026
Award notification*	July 2026

**Award notification date is approximate and based on anticipated number of submitted applications. A greater number of submissions than expected may delay notification. Applicants will be notified if delays occur.*

Grant Disbursement

- Grant funds will be paid directly to the award recipient's host institution.
 - A maximum indirect rate (i.e., facilities and administrative costs) of 10 percent of the total direct costs will be allowed under The O&P Foundation Pilot and Early Career Grant programs. (maximum direct and indirect costs are not to exceed \$30,000).
 - The grant period begins when the first disbursement of funds is made.

- Grant funds will be disbursed in two installments to the host institution.
 - The first installment of 50% of the total award will be disbursed upon commencement of the award and the second installment of 50% of the total award will be disbursed at approximately 6 months after commencement of the research.
 - Disbursement of the second installment is contingent upon a satisfactory progress report as evaluated by The O&P Foundation Research Committee Chair.
 - The grant period begins when the first disbursement of funds is made.

- If the proposed research involves human subjects or animals, award recipients must provide written confirmation of approval from the appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC/ACUC) prior to any disbursement of grant funds.
 - IRB/IACUC approval is not required at the time of application submission; however, approval documentation must meet the following conditions to be eligible for fund disbursement:
 - The approval must be issued by the award recipient's host institution.



- The approval date must be within six (6) months of the Award Letter date.
- Approval documentation must explicitly correspond to the funded project scope.
- Grant funds will not be released until acceptable IRB/IACUC approval documentation is received and verified by The O&P Foundation. Failure to obtain or submit qualifying approval within this timeframe may result in delayed disbursement, modification of the award timeline, or forfeiture of the award, at the discretion of The O&P Foundation.

Complimentary Funding/Support

- The O&P Foundation applicants are required to identify existing and/or pending funding related to the application.
- If complimentary funding is obtained by the investigator prior to award announcement or during the award period, award recipients are required to inform The O&P Foundation Research Committee Chair in writing.
- When contacting The O&P Foundation Research Committee Chair, investigators are encouraged to submit a modified budget that reflects the complimentary support obtained for the proposed research.
- The O&P Foundation reserves the right to modify the provided funding based upon the receipt of alternative support received by the investigator(s).
- Decisions regarding the modification of funding will require approval of The O&P Foundation Board of Directors.
- If a modification to the funding amount is made after disbursement of funds, The O&P Foundation reserves the right to request that funds be returned.

Grant Reporting

6 Month Progress Report

- Investigators must submit a 6-month progress report at least 6 months after the initial funds are received by the host institution.
- The principal investigator is responsible for the timely submission of the progress report.
- The report should be typed and single-spaced using 10–12-point font.



- The report should describe progress over the first 6 months of the award period and any challenges encountered.
- Legible figures may be included in the report.

□ **Final Report**

- Grant recipients must submit a 2–5-page final report no later than 30 days after the end of the grant period.
- The principal investigator is responsible for the timely submission of the progress report.
- The report should be typed and single spaced using 10–12-point font.
- Legible figures may be included in the report.
- The final report should detail the work performed during the study period, summarize the expenditure of the award budget, and include a list of any submitted and/or anticipated publications and further research directions, including additional grant opportunities that may result from funded research.

Conference Dissemination Fund

- The O&P Foundation maintains a fund to support recipients of this grant with an additional \$2,000 for the costs associated with broad dissemination of the results of the research conducted under this program.
- These expenses include but are not limited to: conference registration, travel, accommodations and/or publication fees.
- These funds are available by request and are for use by the PI for a period of up to three years following the initial receipt of the grant.

Review Process

- All of The O&P Foundation grant submissions will be reviewed by a Review Panel composed of O&P Foundation Research Committee members and ad-hoc members, as needed.
- Composition of the panel will be determined by the type and number of award submissions.
- Members of the AOPA SGW will be included in the Review Panel.
- The O&P Foundation Program Manager will serve as the Review Chair and serve as the point-of-contact for the award program.



Review Panel

- The function of the Review Panel is to evaluate applications, including the clinical relevance of the research topic, the merit of the research design, and the appropriateness of the personnel and environment.
- The Review Panel will score the applications using a standardized review form.

Review

- Complete applications will be assigned to two or more Review Panel members for review.
- Proposals will be evaluated and scored on scientific merit, clinical relevance and application, as well as impact on the O&P Foundation research priorities.
- All submissions will be given a numerical score by each reviewer, and a consensus score will be generated.
- Blinded consensus scores, summary comments, and written reviews will be provided to all applicants upon completion of the review process.

Conflict of Interest Procedures

- The Review Panel is required to maintain confidentiality regarding all aspects of the grant review process, the proposed research, and the identity of award applicants.
- The O&P Foundation will strive to review all submissions fairly and without bias.
- In cases where a proposal is submitted by (1) a member of the Review Panel; (2) a Review Panel member's organization; (3) a Review Panel member's student, resident, or mentee; or (4) a Review Panel member's colleague who lists the Review Panel member as having any responsibility or involvement in the research being reviewed or who collaborates or currently associates with the panel member in other capacities, which may or may not involve the application under consideration, the Review Panel member in question will be excused from review of the proposal.
- When this situation applies to the Chair of the Research Committee, the Chair will turn over management of the review of the application in question to another Research Committee member. That Committee member will be responsible for identifying suitable reviewers; receiving from reviewers The O&P Foundation Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality,



and Non-Disclosure Statement and Review Forms; and chairing the portion of the any review meeting during which the application in question is discussed. Furthermore, if the application in question is successfully funded, the Chair of the Research Committee will turn over management of the funded project to another member of the Research Committee. That Committee member will then be responsible for receiving and reviewing reports, confirming IRB approval (if applicable), and handling requests from the award recipient, as well as any issues that might arise with that grant.

- Reviewers for each application are required to complete The Foundation Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality, and Non-Disclosure Statement prior to review
- If a submission includes proprietary or confidential information, this should be noted on the cover sheet and relevant sections of the proposal.

Notification of Applicants

- All applicants will be notified of the status of their application following review.
- Notification will be sent to the designated applicant in the system and will include the blinded consensus scores, summary comments, and written reviews.
- For the successful applicant, notification will also include an *Award Letter, Terms and Conditions of Acceptance* and information about how and when funds will be made available.
- Disbursement of the second installment is dependent on submission of an adequate 6 month progress report to The O&P Foundation Research Committee Chair. In cases where revisions to the progress report are needed, notification may include instructions and a deadline for the appropriate revisions. In such cases, award status may be listed as pending until satisfactory responses to comments are received.

Ownership of Work

- Ownership of intellectual property arising from The O&P Foundation AOPA sponsored funding is vested in the award recipient, per the policies of the applicant's host institution.
- The O&P Foundation and AOPA reserves the right to publicize all materials received while funding a particular research project; (e.g., proposals, progress reports, final reports, etc.), except for materials marked "confidential" or "proprietary."



- Award recipients are required to acknowledge The O&P Foundation and AOPA | SGW sponsored funding in any publication or presentation of the funded research by including the following statement:

“This presentation/work was supported (or “supported in-part” if the project was also supported by other sources) through funding from The Orthotics and Prosthetics Foundation for Education and Research (The O&P Foundation) and the American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association (AOPA)”

No-Cost Extension

- A one year no-cost extension may be applied for by investigators who have been awarded this grant if their project requires additional time to complete.
- A written request for a no-cost extension must be submitted to the O&P Foundation Research Committee Chair one month prior to expiration of the current award.

Contact Information

Questions may be directed to info@oandpfoundation.org or to the Research Chair directly at research@oandpfoundation.org

