

ORDE "KNOW YOUR AGENCY" SERIES: BRIGHTFOCUS FOUNDATION (BFF)

Agency Site: <http://www.brightfocus.org>

OVERVIEW

BrightFocus Foundation, formerly known as the American Health Assistance Foundation, was founded in 1973. Their mission is to "save mind and sight," which they do through patient/family education and sponsoring cutting edge research in Alzheimer's disease, macular degeneration, and glaucoma. To date, BrightFocus has provided approximately \$165 million in research funding to investigators at US and international universities and research institutes.

Approach

BrightFocus funds innovative basic (47%), clinical (15%) and translational (38%) research projects targeting treatment, prevention, and cures in three program areas: Alzheimer's, Macular Degeneration, and Glaucoma. The sponsor funds research at early stages, but expects that investigators will have preliminary data. Ultimately, the sponsor seeks to fund research that continues through additional support from industrial or government sponsors.

AGENCY ORGANIZATION

BrightFocus leadership includes a President/CEO and Vice Presidents in Development, Strategic Partnerships, Finance, Scientific Affairs, and Public Affairs. Their 15-member Board of Directors consists of medical professionals, elder care specialists, financial and legal experts, and laypeople. BrightFocus has over \$50 million in assets. The Foundation just announced a record amount of research grant funding for 2018 at \$13.3 million. (Source: BFF Annual Report, p. 2)

GRANTS INFORMATION

A separate research grants competition is held in each program area. Application due dates are in the fall with the exception of a required letter of intent for the Macular Degeneration Program that is due mid-summer.

The Alzheimer's Disease Research Program represents the largest investment for the Foundation, offering both

Standard Awards (\$300,000 over three years) and Postdoctoral Fellowships (\$200,000 over two years).

The Macular Degeneration Research Program offers Standard Grants (\$200,000 over two years) and uses a two-stage proposal process – required letters of intent are due in the summer and invited full proposals have a fall submission deadline.

The National Glaucoma Research Program offers Standard Grants (\$200,000 over 2 years).

All proposals are submitted via the Foundation's online electronic submission system. BrightFocus pays for costs associated directly with a research project. Note that salaries for principal and co-principal investigators are capped. Postdoctoral fellow salaries are allowable. Construction, large-scale equipment, facilities, and administrative (i.e., indirect) costs are not covered.

Eligibility

Eligible PIs are independent researchers (defined by BrightFocus as those who may submit proposals through their institutions, can oversee their own projects, and supervise all employees associated with their projects). PIs may have only one currently funded BrightFocus project at any time. The Foundation funds projects both domestically and internationally, and has no citizenship requirements for investigators. (Note that postdoctoral fellows funded through the Alzheimer's Disease Research Program may serve as PI; for the other two programs, fellows may serve as co-PIs.)

Success Rates

Application success rates vary by program – Alzheimer's (13%), Glaucoma (23%), and Macular Degeneration (35%) (2018 grant cycle). (Source: BrightFocus Frequently Asked Questions web page)

Contact with Agency Program Staff:

BrightFocus encourages PIs to discuss potential projects with the Foundation's Vice President of Scientific Affairs to help determine best fit with the sponsor's mission. PIs are cautioned to talk only with Scientific Affairs Department staff; no contact between PIs and either

BrightFocus leadership or Scientific Review Committee members is allowed.

Typical Agency Proposal Process:

- 1) PI determines suitability of proposed project to BrightFocus mission and specific program area(s)
- 2) PI contacts Vice President of Scientific Affairs to determine project applicability and ask questions
- 3) Proposal is submitted via sponsor's online system (note: the Macular Degeneration Research Program requires a letter of intent)
- 4) Proposals are reviewed by Scientific Review Committees (SRCs) in two stages
- 5) SRCs make funding recommendations to the BrightFocus Board of Directors
- 6) Board of Directors makes final selections based on SRC recommendations and funding availability
- 7) Successful PI receives award notice from agency

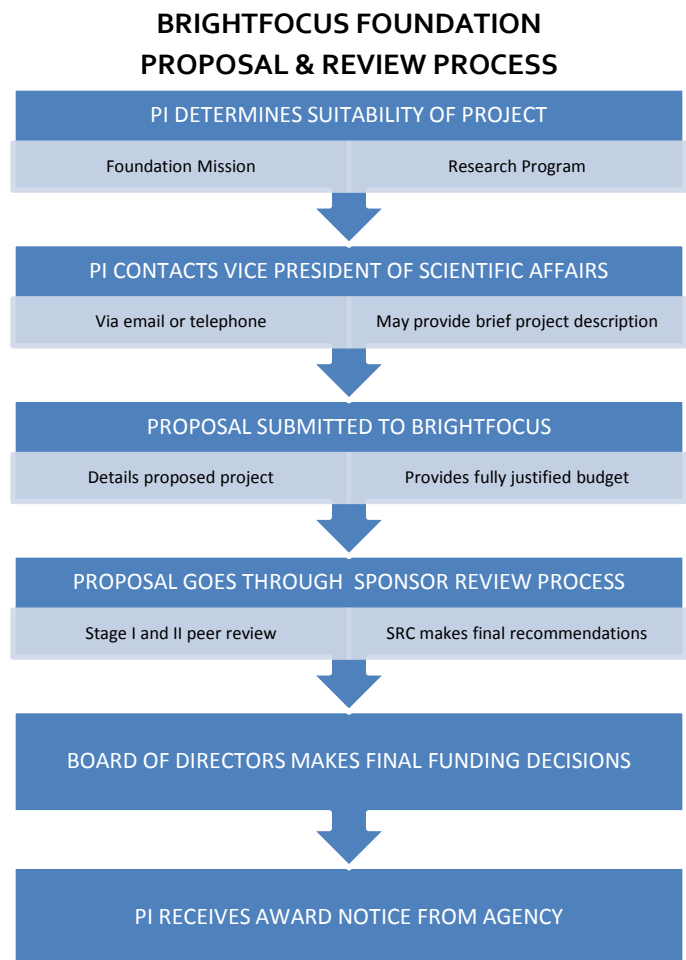
Proposal Review Process:

BrightFocus recruits peer reviewers to serve on three Scientific Review Committees (SRCs). All peer reviewers are established researchers within fields pertinent to the sponsor's interests. They are charged with proposal evaluation and scoring. The Scientific Affairs Department staff and the SRC chairs assign proposals to at least two peer reviewers. In general, a two-stage review process is used. In Stage I, peer reviewers assign preliminary scores for each application based on the standard review criteria. Proposals are then ranked and those determined to be most competitive move on to Stage II review. In Stage II, reviewers assign impact scores based on the NIH nine-point scale, and provide evaluation comments for agency and PI use. Reviewers then rank recommended applications for the Foundation's Board of Directors. Specific review procedures vary by program:

- Alzheimer's Disease Research – The two-stage review process described above is standard.
- National Glaucoma Research – Proposals submitted may undergo the two-stage review described above, depending on the number of proposals received.
- Macular Degeneration Research – The review process begins with letters of intent that allow identification of the most promising projects by 3-5 peer reviewers; those PIs are invited to submit full applications.

BrightFocus review criteria are significance/relevance, investigator, innovation, approach, facilities/environment,

and budget. Once Stage II review is complete, SRCs forward funding recommendations to the Board of Directors for final funding decisions.



What Happens Next?

Once the Board of Directors makes final funding decisions, the BrightFocus Scientific Affairs Department sends out award notices to successful PIs and begins the process of negotiating awards with their institutions. Award notices go out in April with a project start date of July 1st. PIs whose projects are triaged in Stage I peer review receive a notice indicating such. Those that reach Stage II peer review will also receive reviewer comments. There are no limits on the number of times a PI may resubmit a proposal for consideration as all proposals are classified as new in the sponsor's review process. However, proposal iterations should represent substantial change and incorporate reviewer comments as appropriate. PIs may include a one-page description of changes made as part of a resubmission.