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About Our Granting Program

What areas does BrightFocus fund through its programs?

BrightFocus accepts investigator initiated proposals related to developing treatments, preventions, and cures for glaucoma, macular degeneration, and Alzheimer's disease. Funding is provided by donors to the specific disease program. BrightFocus currently supports three programs entitled, "National Glaucoma Research," "Macular Degeneration Research," and "Alzheimer's Disease Research."

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BrightFocus  **mandate** for funding proposals relevant to any of these fields. For a list of current and previous awards, [view the research we fund section](#).

BrightFocus Foundation awards grants for basic, translational, and clinically oriented research on the causes of, or treatments for, age-related and degenerative diseases. Grants are awarded on the basis of the scientific merit of the proposed research and the relevance of the research to understanding aspects of the disease that lead to improved treatments, prevention strategies, and diagnoses of the program disease.

The scientific plan should be well focused and able to stand alone. It is understood that more senior investigators will have other funding in related areas of research, but the application to BrightFocus should not be used to simply subsidize these other efforts or to compensate for grant cutbacks. Therefore, the applicant is advised to focus on a specific project that can be addressed in terms of a hypothesis and two or three specific aims. The proposed project should be distinct from other investigations and grant awards. Please keep this in mind when preparing the research plan section of this application.

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What projects are currently supported?

For a list of current and previous awards, view the [research we fund section](#).

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What type of grant support does BrightFocus provide?

BrightFocus supports U.S. domestic and international research proposals related to developing treatments, preventions, and cures for glaucoma, macular degeneration, and Alzheimer's disease.

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How much funding will BrightFocus provide for my proposal?

(On mobile devices, swipe left to see all of the table columns.)

The following maximum award values may be requested:

Award Name	Maximum Budget	Maximum Annual Request	Maximum Duration
Postdoctoral Fellowship	\$150,000	\$75,000/ year	2 years
Standard Award	\$200,000	\$100,000/ year	2 years

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Do you allow for Principal Investigator salary support?

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Salary and benefits may be requested for the PI and Co-PI(s). The Principal Investigator salary request must be the total grant request, or 25% of the individual's salary. Co-PI salaries are capped at

the lesser of 15% of the total grant request, or 15% of the individual's salary. Salary caps are imposed on the Principal Investigators and Co-Principal Investigators only. Postdoctoral Fellowship PIs are not restricted by this salary cap.

Postdocs applying for the NGR postdoctoral fellowship may request up to a maximum salary and benefits determined by their institutional salary and benefits multiplied by their percent effort on the proposal. For example, a Postdoctoral fellow with \$45,000 of salary and benefits who commits 75% effort to a proposal may request a maximum of \$33,750 in salary and benefits.

Salary caps are imposed on the Principal Investigators and Co-Principal Investigators only. Salary and Benefit support for other roles is not restricted to any further limitation. Budgeting for these personnel, however, should be justified in the application and should be proportional to the percentage of effort contributed by the individual personnel.

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Other than PI salaries, what categories of expenses are allowed, or disallowed?

The budget may not contain administrative overhead or indirect costs, and should be prepared in US dollars. BrightFocus budgets are divided into the following categories:

Personnel: The Principal investigator, CO-PI, key investigators, and any support personnel (usually postdoctoral fellows, graduate students, or technicians) actively involved in research may request salary and benefits. Such requests should be justified and include indications of the percentage of time the personnel will devote to the proposed project (percent effort).

Supplies: The amount of money requested for supplies should be divided into major research supply categories (e.g., cell biology reagents, test fees, etc.) If animals are to be involved, the justification should state how many are to be used, their unit purchase price, and their unit care cost.

Equipment: Any major item of equipment valued over US\$1,000, should be included in the budget. BrightFocus will not fund the purchase of large capital equipment. Requested equipment must be directly related to and enabling of the proposed research.

Contractual Services: The Budget should specify any costs for major support services required under the proposed research, such as preparation or laboratory testing of biological materials, or rental for surgical facilities. The justification should indicate the period of contractual service.

Travel: Travel must be relevant to the accomplishment of the project or dissemination of results of the supported research. The purpose of the travel and destination should be clearly indicated, justified, and may not include airfare, hotel, or other expenses (i.e., first class or other luxury travel).

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Other: Itemize any other expenses by category. This category is often used by investigators seeking funding to defray costs of publication or registration at conferences where the results of the proposed research are to be presented. Since [Molecular Neurodegeneration](#) is the official journal of BrightFocus Foundation, it is recommended that one option for a budget line item request would be to attend the biennial International Conference on Molecular Neurodegeneration.

Please note that tuition reimbursement for undergraduate and graduate students is an allowable budget item, but tuition remission is not an allowable budget item. If a procedure or technique is directly proposed to be undertaken in your proposal, line items such as rental of surgical rooms, etc., may be requested in this section.

NOTE ON BUDGET CUTS: When awards are offered, most budgets are approved as requested. However, in some cases BrightFocus may elect to make awards for only a portion of the requested budget. These decisions are made on the recommendations of peer reviewers and may manifest as an elimination of specific budget items, proposal aims, or percentage cuts off of the total award value.

NOTE ON OPEN ACCESS PUBLICATIONS: BrightFocus does not require publication in specific journals or attendance at specific conferences. However, as a publicly supported charity BrightFocus recognizes contribution of open-access model journals to the scientific community. BrightFocus grant applicants may request reasonable funds to allow publication in such journals.

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What are the deadlines for proposals?

FY22 Application Deadline: October 26, 2021, 05:00 PM EST

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How long does it take to receive notice of grant funding?

Applicants will be notified of the Board of Directors' decision concerning their application by mid-April. BrightFocus staff are not authorized to provide information on priority scores, ranking, or likelihood of funding of applications prior to written notification of applicants. Please do not write or telephone BrightFocus to request such information.

The first check is dated July 1st and is mailed once all contracts are agreed upon and signed. Funding is contingent upon receipt of signed contracts and, if required, demonstration of approval by the institution to initiate research involving human or vertebrate animals.

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How did you receive in the last round of funding?

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For the FY20 programs the following numbers of applications were received.

Program	Number of Applications	Number of Awards
National Glaucoma Research	87	17

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What are the Terms and Conditions and Intellectual Property Policies of the awards?

Please review the following documents.

- [Terms and Conditions](#)
- [Intellectual Property Policy](#)

Grant Eligibility

Who is eligible for a BrightFocus grant?

Postdoctoral Fellowship Award

Postdoctoral Fellowships are available to junior and senior postdoctoral fellows. Applicants with pending appointments are eligible to apply, but the appointment must be finalized by the start of the award. The proposal should be initiated by the postdoctoral fellow and not the supervisor. In the event that a senior postdoctoral fellow becomes an independent investigator during the duration of the award, the balance of the award may be transferred to the new position at the discretion of the BrightFocus Foundation. In this case, an assurance that the original specific aims would be addressed in the new position would be required.

BrightFocus accepts the NIH/NSF definition of a Postdoctoral Research Fellow emphasizing the mentored training component of the position.

"An individual who has received a doctoral degree (or equivalent) and is engaged in a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance the professional skills and research independence needed to pursue his or her chosen career path."

-Letter to Ms. Alyson Reed, National Postdoctoral Association from the Deputy Director of the NSF, and Deputy Director for Extramural Research of the NIH. January, 2007.

Standard Award

Traditionally, in order to be eligible for grant funding from the BrightFocus' National Glaucoma Research (NCR) Standard Award Program, the Principal Investigator (P.I.) must have held an academic rank equivalent or higher than an Assistant Professor.

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In recent years, many outstanding junior faculty have taken non-tenure track positions that in earlier years might have been developed as tenure-track positions. Though BrightFocus continues to encourage innovative proposals from all career stages, BrightFocus' guidelines have evolved with the field to extend eligibility to non-tenure-track applicants as well. Non-tenure-track positions are welcome to apply for funding if they are appropriately trained to lead an independent research study, and are permitted by their organizations to manage the grant and supervise any key personnel. Applicants should have completed their formal post-doctoral mentored research training, and must be the intellectual and creative leads for the proposed projects. Applicants with pending appointments are eligible to apply, but the appointment must be finalized by the start of the award.

The applicant should use the indicated space on the application forms to clarify any position that is not immediately recognizable as an independent research position.

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Who is not eligible for a BrightFocus grant? Are these rules flexible?

1. Investigators with a current award, or who are part of a laboratory with a current award, are ineligible for concurrent awards of the same type. Put another way, at any time, a lab may have AT MOST only 1 active award from each program: NGR Fellowship, and NGR standard award. This rule only covers laboratories of the Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator(s), it does not imply any restriction on collaborators or consultants
2. Investigators who will not possess independent research programs by the start of the award.
3. BrightFocus currently does not have any award program to support pre-doctoral fellowships or undergraduate students. Faculty members may request support for these students as budget items under BrightFocus' other award programs.
4. New proposals initiated by investigators who have received prior awards from BrightFocus, but who have failed to submit necessary reporting may be declined with out review.

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Are there any program preferences for types of research or investigators?

Although preliminary data is required for all awards, BrightFocus considers its awards as "pilot funding". BrightFocus prefers to fund innovative proposals for which there are few alternative sources of funding, and to support the ability of investigators to generate the data needed to receive governmental or other third-party funding after the expiration of the BrightFocus award.

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BrightFocus awards, therefore, are biased towards junior investigators with new laboratories and projects, or more established investigators with particularly innovative projects.

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If a proposal addresses a subject not already represented in the BrightFocus funding portfolio, or in the pool of reviewer expertise, BrightFocus will solicit additional ad-hoc reviewers from that field to review the proposal.

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How much preliminary data is required?

Although, in theory, no preliminary data is necessary for BrightFocus awards, the most competitive proposals have data serving to back the proposal. This data is used to evaluate the merit of the hypothesis and the competence of the investigators to perform and interpret the proposed experiments.

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Why does BrightFocus fund internationally as well as domestically?

The donors to BrightFocus have defined a research mandate to fund the best science that is of the greatest relevance to the disease program. BrightFocus believes that the nationality of the Principal Investigator or Institution is irrelevant to this mandate.

Prior to submission, Principal Investigators who believe their grant proposal would benefit from professional editing service have the option of paying an editorial service to help you refine your proposal. The costs of these services are typically no more than the cost of many laboratory reagents. If the use of an editor is the difference between an award and a denial, then the cost is certainly a worthwhile investment. Several such companies exist, and have services ranging from spelling and grammar checking to advanced scientific critique. Individual editors will have differing styles; request samples from several editors and pick one or two whose styles reflect the way you would like your research to be presented.

Application Review Process

How is the general review process structured?

BrightFocus awards grants for research on the causes of, and preventions or treatments for the diseases specified by each of its disease programs (i.e., Alzheimer's disease, Glaucoma, and Macular Degeneration). Grants are awarded on the basis of the scientific merit of the proposed research and the relevance of the research to improving our understanding of these diseases.

To ensure that BrightFocus is funding meritorious research proposals that have high potentials for success, the Board of Directors bases its final funding decisions on the results of a formal, rigorous, scientific peer-review process, taking program goals and the availability of funds into consideration.

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BrightFocus recruits and maintains a Scientific Review Committee (SRC) for each of the three research programs. These committees are comprised of established investigators with the appropriate expertise to provide constructive and equitable evaluations of grant applications. These individuals serve as volunteers but are provided with a small honorarium for the time and effort they put into the review process. Almost all serve on NIH study sections or review committees for other foundations.

The BrightFocus Scientific Affairs Department, in consultation with the Chair or Chair(s) of the each Scientific Review Committee, assigns each proposal to a primary and secondary reviewer based on the expertise of the reviewers and the research area(s) of the proposal. In some cases a tertiary reader is also assigned. All proposals are checked against the pool of available reviewers for real or potential conflicts of interest prior to assignment of the proposal to individual reviewers.

Reviewers are required to decline assigned applications for which they do not have the appropriate expertise and must decline to review applications in which they have a real or potential conflict of interest. These applications are reassigned to other reviewers.

Reviewers with Conflicts of Interest (e.g., applications from investigators at the same institution as the reviewer, applications from previous or current collaborators, or applications to support research in which the reviewer has a financial interest) may not participate on a committee in any review cycle in which they themselves have submitted a proposal for consideration.

Reviewers are required to keep the information presented in grant applications and the deliberations of the Scientific Review Committee strictly confidential. It is the responsibility of the BrightFocus Grants Department to communicate with applicants regarding the results of the review process and to serve as the intermediary between the Reviewers and the applicant.

Review Criteria and Priority Score Ranking

The BrightFocus Scientific Review Committee uses the National Institutes of Health’s 9-point scale to assess the overall impact score of each grant application, and to provide a priority score ranking recommending applications for funding to the BrightFocus Board of Directors. Ratings are in whole numbers only (no decimal ratings), where 5 is considered an average score.

(On mobile devices, swipe left to see all of the table columns.)

The National Institutes of Health’s 9-point scale to assess the overall impact score of each grant application

Overall Impact	Score	Descriptor	Additional Guidance on Strengths/Weaknesses
High	1	Exceptional	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
High	2	Outstanding	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
High	3	Excellent	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses

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Overall Impact	Score	Descriptor	Additional Guidance on Strengths/Weaknesses
	4	Very Good	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
Medium	5	Good	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
	6	Satisfactory	Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses
	7	Fair	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
Low	8	Marginal	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
	9	Poor	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

Reviewers are instructed to take the following criteria into consideration when reviewing grants:

- **Significance/Relevance to Alzheimer’s disease, macular degeneration, and/or glaucoma:**

Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress, and contribute significantly to current knowledge regarding the etiology, diagnosis, or treatment of Alzheimer’s disease, macular degeneration, and/or glaucoma? If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field?

- **Investigator(s)**

Are the PI(s), Co-PI(s), collaborators, and other researchers well suited to the project? If they are early-stage investigators, do they have appropriate experience and training? If established, have they demonstrated an ongoing record of accomplishments that have advanced their field(s)? If the project is collaborative or has Co-PI(s), do the investigators have complementary and integrated expertise; are their leadership approach, governance and organizational structure appropriate for the project?

- **Innovation**

Does the application challenge and seek to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms by using novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions? Are the concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions novel to one field of research or novel in a broad sense? Is a refinement, improvement, or new application of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions proposed?

- **Approach**

Does the investigator have a clear hypothesis and specific aims? Are the methods clearly explained and appropriate? Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented? If the project is in the early stages of development, will the strategy establish feasibility and will particularly risky aspects be managed? If the project involves clinical research, are the plans for 1) protection of human subjects from research risks, and 2) inclusion of minorities and members of both sexes/genders, as well as the inclusion of children, justified in terms of the scientific goals and research strategy proposed? Has the investigator satisfactorily addressed issues or concerns regarding appropriate care and treatment of laboratory animals? Can the research proposed be accomplished in the time period of the grant?

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- **Facilities and Environment**

Will the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Are the institutional support, equipment and other physical resources available to the investigators adequate for the project proposed? Will the project benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangements?

- **Budget and Period of Support**

Are the budget and the requested period of support fully justified and reasonable in relation to the proposed research?

Review Results

Applicants will be notified of the Board of Director's decision concerning their application by mid-April. BrightFocus staff are not authorized to provide information on priority scores, ranking, or likelihood of funding of applications prior to written notification of applicants. Please do not write or telephone BrightFocus to request such information.

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Triage procedures of specific programs.

As a consequence of high proposal volumes, BrightFocus may elect to initiate peer-review of proposals in multiple stages. The first stage is used to identify the top proposals considered to be competitive for final award offers.

If proposal volumes require triage, the NGR program will employ a two tiered review process in which all applications are submitted as full proposals.

If triage is employed, in stage I, a minimum of two reviewers assign a preliminary grade to each proposal based on the criteria described above. These preliminary grades are not accompanied by formal written critiques of the proposal, and are used solely as a triage process to identify those proposals that will be the most competitive in the final stage of review.

In consultation with the Chair of the NGR Scientific Review Committee, the BrightFocus Scientific Affairs Staff passes the most enthusiastically reviewed proposals to Stage II, where they are reviewed as noted above.

The cut-off line is based on number of received proposals and fluctuates each year.

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Who sits on your Scientific Review Committees (SRC)?

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In order to protect the anonymity of the reviewers, it is BrightFocus' policy to release the names of

reviewers who participated at least once in recent review cycles and may be considered as likely members or subsequent review cycles. Since many proposals require very specialized expertise for review,

this policy limits the risk that a reviewer on an individual proposal might be inferred from knowledge of the roster.

[View a list of experts who have served on the committee](#) within the preceding five years.

Multiple Applications

May I submit multiple applications in a single review cycle?

Due to high proposal volumes, we ask that you submit no more than one proposal to any BrightFocus program in a given review cycle. For example, it would not be permissible to submit two ADR proposals, but it would be permissible to submit one ADR and one MDR proposal in a given year.

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If I have a current award, may I submit a request for additional funding or award renewals?

One of the goals of BrightFocus awards is to give highly innovative research the opportunity to generate the preliminary data necessary to be competitive for larger governmental or industrial sponsorship. In light of this, BrightFocus does not have a mechanism to allow renewals of existing awards. If you are seeking continuing funding for an existing award, you will be required to submit a new proposal in the next review cycle. This proposal will be evaluated by the same criteria as all other proposals in the same review cycle.

Your current award must expire before any new award funds can be dispersed within a given program. This includes awards in No Cost Extension. Thus, you may not overlap two awards in a single disease program, but it is permissible to have two concurrent awards in separate disease programs (e.g., having concurrent awards through Alzheimer's Disease Research and National Glaucoma Research is possible, while having two concurrent ADR awards is not.)

You may apply for a new award prior to the expiration of a current award. However, funding will not be initiated on any new award until the current award or the current award of your laboratory is terminated.

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What are the reasons a proposal might be declined before review (administrative decline)?

If a proposal is received past the deadline, it will be declined before review.

If a proposal fails to adhere to the guidelines of the award, including page limitations or word counts, it will be administratively denied prior to review.

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BrightFocus may decline to review proposals received from previously funded investigators or institutions that have failed to submit final financial or progress reports on previous awards, been in breach of a contractual obligation, or if the research team's record of managing past and current awards demonstrates issues to be considered before proceeding with award.

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My proposal was declined and I would like to know my options/ can I resubmit?

BrightFocus maintains a strong Scientific Review Committee (SRC) that assesses the scientific merit of each proposal. BrightFocus must rely on the advice of its SRC and will not fund proposals that have not been recommended for funding by the SRC.

Resubmission of the proposal in the next review cycle is permissible. Applicants choosing the resubmit may submit an additional single page summary of responses to prior reviewer critiques (if any) and a description of any difference between the original submission and the resubmission.

While there is no limit to the number of resubmissions possible, applicants are advised to exercise restraint when considering submitting the same proposal over multiple years.

Regarding Appeals:

If an applicant has evidence that a reviewer has materially misunderstood an otherwise properly and logically presented proposal, that applicant may submit a one page appeal to BrightFocus by email. Appeals of peer evaluations must be delivered to the BrightFocus Vice President of Scientific Affairs (dbovenkamp@brightfocus.org) within two weeks of receiving reviewer critiques. Additional information may be requested by BrightFocus on a case by case basis.

The appeals process is designed to address only extraordinary situations in which the review process is believed to have been compromised in such a way as to prevent unbiased or competent review of a proposal. This process IS NOT intended for routine rebuttal of specific reviewer critiques or opinions, or to overcome the consequences of poor writing or grantsmanship. Routine rebuttal of reviewer critiques may be submitted as a revised proposal in a later review cycle.

If the appeal is found to merit further investigation, the Vice President of Scientific Affairs, in consultation with the chairs of the Board Grants Committee and appropriate Scientific Review Committee, shall determine an appropriate action on a case by case basis. Such actions may include re-evaluation of the proposal by the original reviewers for clarification of opinions, or evaluation by new reviewers who have not previously seen or discussed the proposal. If it is determined that the proposal was evaluated inappropriately, new priority scores will be solicited from the most recent reviewers, and the proposal will be ranked in its current review cycle using the most recent scoring.

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Note regarding proposals declined in Stage I (triage) review:

BrightFocus will not accept proposals that do not score or provide written critiques on those proposals considered by reviewers

to be the least competitive proposals in the current review cycle. This is an unfortunate necessity imposed by high proposal volumes. An appeal of a proposal declined in Stage I review (triage) will be considered only if the applicant can show reasonable evidence that members of the Scientific Review Committee have a significant conflict of interest related to the applicant's proposal. The BrightFocus Vice President of Scientific Affairs will then investigate whether any of these individual members were assigned as Stage I reviewers of the applicant's proposal. If it appears that an inappropriate Conflict of Interest exists, the Vice President of Scientific Affairs, in consultation with the chairs of the Board Grants Committee and appropriate Scientific Review Committee, may recommend the proposal for additional Stage I review in the current review cycle, or offer to pass the proposal directly to stage II review in a future review cycle.

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Can you give me general advice on grant writing?

Obtaining funding is a difficult, frustrating, and an increasingly competitive task. Organizations such as the NIH have put together significant online resources for advice in "grantsmanship." Once such website is available from the NIAID Institute of the NIH.

<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/apply-grant>

The most valuable advice you will receive will come from your peers. Have a colleague read your proposals and provide critique. By the time you have produced a readable draft, you will have lost much of your ability to effectively critique your own presentation. What seems intuitive to you will only seem intuitive because you have lived and breathed these words for the last few weeks. Your colleague will have a much easier time identifying vague wording or even spotting typographical and grammatical errors. Make sure you give your colleague your proposal with enough time for both review and for you to make any major changes based on your colleague's recommendations. With a week or two of preparation time you will get an honest critique from your colleague.

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Who can I talk to in order to gauge the competitiveness of my proposal?

You should call or write the Vice President for Scientific Affairs, Diane Bovenkamp, Ph.D. (dbovenkamp@brightfocus.org). If the Vice President for Scientific Affairs is unable to assess your proposal, it will be communicated to appropriate members of the Scientific Review Committee.

Since the majority of BrightFocus award programs are investigator initiated research, the competitiveness of any proposal is contingent on the quality of other proposals received in the same review cycle.

Although applicants are encouraged to review the 'current awards' section of the BrightFocus website, they should note that BrightFocus ultimately can only fund proposals that it receives and has the opportunity to evaluate. The composition of the BrightFocus award portfolio is reflective of the academic breadth of the proposals submitted to the organization.

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I know a member of Scientific Review Committee or BrightFocus staff or leadership. Should I talk with them about my proposal?

Any attempt to influence your reviewer will invalidate your application. SRC members and BrightFocus staff are required to report any correspondence with applicants regarding their application to the BrightFocus Vice President of Scientific Affairs for review. It is therefore inappropriate to discuss your pending proposal with any persons other than the BrightFocus Scientific Affairs Department staff.

About BrightFocus Foundation

How can I contact the BrightFocus Foundation?

Department of Scientific Affairs
BrightFocus Foundation
22512 Gateway Center Drive
Clarksburg, Maryland 20871
USA

Telephone: 1-800-437-2423
FAX: 301-948-4403

For email addresses please review the [Scientific Affairs Department](#) section of our website.

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What is the mission of the BrightFocus Foundation?

- [A description of our organization can be found by clicking this link.](#)

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I am a clinician and am interested in waiting room materials. Do you have disease specific literature available for waiting rooms?

Yes, free or nominally priced literature are available in our [publications section](#). In addition, fact sheets can be found in our [Facts and Data section](#).

E-mail: info@brightfocus.org

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