

# PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

## Request for Proposals: Feline Health Established Investigator, First Award & Pilot Study Awards

### PROGRAM SUMMARY

The mission of Morris Animal Foundation is to bridge science and resources to advance the health of animals. To achieve this mission, we fund hypothesis-driven, humane research projects with high scientific merit and the potential for significant impact. We are a nonprofit organization that is funded by public support from individuals, corporations, clubs and foundations, and earnings from our endowed funds. Our donors are interested in funding research that results in impactful animal health achievements and benefits both scientific and non-scientific stakeholders including veterinarians, feline caretakers and communities.

### PROPOSAL REQUEST OBJECTIVES

Proposals should advance the health and overall welfare of domesticated cats including community and pet cats (*Felis catus*). Projects involving other feline species are not included in this call.

- Academic and industry collaborative projects are encouraged to accelerate the translation of results into practice.

#### ATTENTION:

Many of the following guidelines apply to all categories of award (established investigator, first award, pilot study). **However, some instructions are award-type specific, and these instructions are in bold italic type.** Please read all instructions carefully to reference the correct eligibility and award criteria, budget maximum, project duration, and page limit for your award. The Fellowship Training award has a separate set of guidelines.

**FAILURE TO ADHERE TO PROPOSAL GUIDELINES MAY RESULT IN YOUR PROPOSAL BEING DECLINED.**

### APPLICANT QUALIFICATIONS

**A MAXIMUM OF ONE APPLICATION AS PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI) IN RESPONSE TO THIS RFP IS PERMITTED.**

All applicants must convince the scientific and animal welfare reviewers that they clearly understand the health problem, have sufficient expertise to conduct the study, are using a scientifically sound approach, and have appropriately considered the overall environmental and animal welfare impact of their research.

**Established Investigator:** Competitive applicants for this award will have a record of expertise demonstrated through peer-reviewed publications.

**First Award:** First Award grants are designed to assist early career researchers in establishing a successful research program by supporting their first award as an independent investigator. The applicant must have completed a PhD, DVSc, DVM, or equivalent degree and have a faculty or staff position in a university, accredited zoo, conservation organization, or a non-academic equivalent. Principal Investigators should have a history of research publication as a Co-PI or Co-Investigator. Individuals currently in a residency program are not eligible. Postdoctoral researchers should be completing their program and proposing research intended to be conducted in a guaranteed position. Applicants must not have received previous funding of more than \$25,000 for any single extramural award as a principal investigator leading independent research. Applicants are eligible to apply if they have received funding during training or education such as the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship Program or the Morris Animal Foundation's Fellowship Training grant. The applicant should clearly describe prior funding in the candidate's letter of intent. Previous funding as a co-investigator is acceptable. This application requires supporting statements from one or more appropriately experienced mentors.

**Pilot Study:** Pilot Study awards provide funding for proof-of-concept studies in animal health research.

## AWARD DURATION AND BUDGET LIMITS

- For awards allowing projects greater than 12 months, costs may be distributed through project duration as appropriate.
- Costs are not required to be evenly distributed across the project lifetime.
- Applicants are not required to use the maximum award duration.

**Established Investigator** maximum project duration is 36 months. There is no limit to the budget request, however we expect the average award to be approximately \$100,000.

**First Award** maximum project duration is 24 months and the total budget cannot exceed \$120,000.

**Pilot Study** maximum project duration is 12 months and the total budget cannot exceed \$20,000.

## MORRIS ANIMAL FOUNDATION POLICIES

**FAILURE TO ADHERE TO THE POLICIES BELOW MAY RESULT IN YOUR PROPOSAL BEING DECLINED.**

For questions about Morris Animal Foundation Policies that are not answered in the proposal guidelines or the [FAQ page](#), contact [grantapplications@morrisanimalfoundation.org](mailto:grantapplications@morrisanimalfoundation.org).

**Health Study Policy:** Projects must adhere to the Foundation's [Health Study Policy for Animals](#)

**Involved in Research.** Morris Animal Foundation will not fund projects that include euthanasia of animals for research purposes. All Foundation-funded research must demonstrate consideration of animal sentience and full regard to animals' physical and psychological needs and welfare in the study design. Proposals recommended for funding by scientific reviewers are reviewed separately and must be approved by animal welfare and ethics experts prior to funding.

**Office of Foreign Assets (OFAC) Disclaimer:** The Foundation is committed to full compliance with U.S. laws and regulations establishing trade and economic sanctions. The Foundation will not fund any proposal where individuals, activities, or financial transactions occur within Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Syria, or the Crimea Region of the Ukraine. In addition, all individuals and entities involved in the proposal must not be sanctioned under U.S. trade and economic laws or regulations. Learn more about sanctioned countries, entities, and individuals at [the US Department of the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control](#).

**Parachute Science:** Projects that include international collaborations should address international scientific engagement and benefits and **must** include a named Principal Investigator, Co-Investigator, or Mentor in the country where the research will occur. The Foundation endeavors to achieve impact through ethical pathways and with the clear intention of inclusivity, diversity, and the elimination of the practice of parachute/colonial science.

**Progress Reports:** Principal Investigators or Co-PIs on any active Morris Animal Foundation grant awards **must be current** on all progress reports and other contractual obligations.

## REVIEW PROCESS

**All proposals undergo administrative and 2-stage scientific review.**

- **During Stage 1:** Foundation staff perform administrative review for adherence to the proposal guidelines. Proposals adhering to the proposal guidelines are assigned two Scientific Advisory Board Reviewers to screen the [5-page study proposal and the animal health impact statement](#) for scientific merit and potential impact using [this rubric](#). Proposals passing stage 1 review move forward to stage 2.
- **During Stage 2:** Proposals in their entirety are reviewed, then deliberated and scored by the entire Scientific Advisory Board using all 3 categories in the same [rubric](#).
- **All projects recommended for funding** are then screened by our Animal Welfare Advisory Board (AWAB) for adherence to the Foundation's [Health Study Policy for Animals Involved in Research](#) prior to contracting. Any animal welfare questions or concerns must be addressed before a proposal is eligible for funding.

## TIMELINE

**Applicants will be notified of their funding status** approximately February 2026. All proposals recommended for funding undergo subsequent Animal Welfare Review before contracting. A [sample contract is available here for reference](#). The Foundation may accept limited changes to the contract on a case-by-case basis.

## PROPOSAL GUIDELINES, FORMAT AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

**CAREFULLY REVIEW AND ADHERE TO THESE PROPOSAL GUIDELINES, INCLUDING PAGE LENGTH. DEVIATIONS FROM THESE GUIDELINES MAY RESULT IN REJECTION OF YOUR PROPOSAL.**

Review our [Grant Writing Resource](#) document for more expert tips.

### American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) submission instructions:

Applications must be submitted through our portal at <https://morrisanimalfoundation.aibs-scores.org/>. All applicants must register to use the portal. Your username will be your email. The portal home page lists open grant calls, and you can begin your submission from there.

### Important Submission Points:

- The user submitting the proposal should be the Applicant/PI.
- Ensure that you do not lose any information - save your work often (click "SAVE ALL ANSWERS") and as many times as needed before submission.
- Give yourself time - you may need technical assistance to complete your submission.
- Click "FINALIZE" when ready to submit. **At this point your application still needs institutional approval. Do not leave this until the last moment as your administrator needs to sign off electronically before the deadline.**
- Mistakes happen. If you discover a mistake after submitting your proposal, you can correct your work. You must "un-submit" then revalidate to finalize and resubmit.
- NOTE: If you "un-submit" your proposal after your authorized institutional signer has signed, the proposal will require re-authorization from the institution. Once the deadline passes, no further changes are possible.
- **Your application must be received by 4:59 PM Eastern Time on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025.**
- You will receive an email confirming your approval. You can check the status of your submission by logging onto the submission portal.

### Submission Components:

The application comprises six sections: Title, Questions, People, Attachments, Approval, and Finalize. Each section must be completed. The main project proposal is completed in the Attachments section. All other sections are completed directly in the portal.

#### I. Title (max 200 characters).

#### II. Questions

##### Technical and Lay Summary Information:

- Both summaries have a 2,000-character limit but are aimed at different potential audiences.
  - The technical summary is for review by the Scientific and Animal Welfare Advisory Boards and Foundation staff.

- The lay summary information may be used in communications with the public or potential funders and should not duplicate the technical summary. Plain language should be used, reference this [Plain Language Science Writing](#) resource. A Flesch Reading Ease Score of 50-70 is required. Use this [free readability checker](#) to evaluate your lay language summary reading level.
- Click “SAVE ALL ANSWERS” at the bottom of this section to progress to part III.

### III. People

A “Person Record” is created for the PI, any other investigators, and your authorized institutional signer who is needed to submit your application. A named Co-Investigator and/or Mentor serving as the in-country collaborator is required when the PI is not located in the country where research will occur. **For First Award applicants, a person record for your mentor(s) and your Head of Department are also required.**

### IV. Attachments

For the attachments section, applicants must use the [provided proposal template](#) to organize their submission. The proposal template is sub-divided into 12 parts (sections A-M) and must be converted to a PDF for submission. In part M indicate the letters of support that will be added (i.e., one letter from my head of department, two from collaborators etc.), convert these to PDF format and combine with the template PDF for upload as a single file.

- A. Study Proposal
- B. Resubmission Summary (*if applicable*)
- C. Animal Health Impact
- D. Sample Size Calculation
- E. Animal Involvement Justification
- F. Recombinant DNA/Biohazards/Biosecurity Measures
- G. Facilities and Equipment
- H. Cited References
- I. Instructions for Budget. **The budget details are entered into a separate spreadsheet for upload.**
- J. Budget Justification and Timeline
- K. Current and Pending Support
- L. Biographical Data
- M. Letters of Support

**A. Study Proposal.** (5-page limit including figures, tables and sub-sections i. - iv. below). Organize your Study Proposal with the following sections:

- i. **Hypothesis and Objectives:** Be precise and enumerate specific, testable hypotheses with realistic objectives to be achieved within the timeline and budget of the proposal.
- ii. **Problem Description and Significance:** Include a brief literature summary and preliminary data (if applicable) that describes the current state of the problem and justifies the need

for the proposed study/proof-of-concept study. If the PI is conducting research outside of their country of institutional affiliation, they must clearly stipulate how the information gained from their study will be used by stakeholder groups locally.

**Established Investigator and First Award applicants:** Succinctly describe any preliminary data or previous results by the investigator supporting the proposed research. If this project is a continuation of a previous Morris Animal Foundation study, include grant ID number, title, and a brief summary of the final results.

**Pilot Study applicants:** Include preliminary data if available and relevant but it is not required.

- iii. **Study Design and Methods:** Include the experimental design and methods for each objective. Data analysis methods must also be described. If applicable, provide detailed information on any pharmaceutical trials or usage such as proof of concept, workgroup, dosage, bioinformatics and power calculations.
- iv. **Possible Risks and Mitigation Plans:** Identify and address the expected outcomes of the study, any potential shortcomings of the design and methods or any potential operational challenges.

**B. Resubmission Summary** (*if applicable*) (3-page limit excluding the original SAB review) Include a copy of the original proposal's SAB review and PI responses to reviewer comments. Answer questions thoroughly as resubmissions may be evaluated by different SAB reviewers than the original submission's reviewers.

**C. Animal Health Impact:** Impact is vitally important to our donor-supported organization. We may decline proposals where impact is incompletely addressed, particularly those lacking in impact beyond the scientific community. Scientifically robust studies in which non-academic and broader impact are integral to the study design will have the highest chance of success. Remember that the scoring rubric allocates a third of the points available to impact and engagement. Complete this section following the instructions in the template.

**D. Sample Size Calculation** (no page limit): Use the Sample Size Form in the [proposal template](#) if applicable.

**E. Animal Involvement Justification (AIJ) Form** (no page limit): Complete this section as instructed in the proposal template, regardless of live animal involvement. **This form is required.**

- **Client Consent Form:** If your study involves client owned animals, use these [Informed Client Consent Form guidelines](#) to develop your Client Consent Form. You may optionally use this [template](#). Attach your Client Consent Form following the Animal Involvement Justification form. If your study utilizes archived or surplus samples from client owned animals, please attach documentation of consent for use (previous client consent form or copy of hospital admission form showing consent to use surplus samples for research).



**F. Recombinant DNA/Biohazards/Biosecurity Measures** (no page limit): Applicants using recombinant DNA techniques must confirm that they have complied with [National Institutes of Health guidelines](#) and have approval from their institution's Biological Safety Committee to conduct the proposed research. Indicate any other potential biosafety concerns, including the use of radiation. Describe biosecurity measures that will be put in place to protect animals and people from transmissible disease and other biological agents.

**G. Facilities and Equipment** (1-page limit): Describe facilities and equipment available to conduct the proposed research. Include resources available at the PI's institution and sub-contracted or fee-for-service resources needed to complete the research.

**H. Cited References** (*2-page limit for Established Investigator and First Award proposals. 1-page limit for Pilot Awards*): Include complete citations referenced numerically in the body of the proposal. Use AMA style for citations.

**I. Instructions for Budget:** The budget is uploaded separately from the main proposal using the provided [Excel budget template](#). Do not exceed the budget limits and timescales described earlier in the "Award duration and budget limits" section. The Foundation allows a maximum of 8% indirect costs (if charged by your institution). Note that the budget total is the total of direct and indirect costs. All costs must be represented in US Dollars (\$).

- **Personnel:** You must document the salary and role of personnel in two places. (1) In the Excel budget template, include the requested information for all personnel regardless of whether you are requesting salary support. (2) In the budget justification section template, please provide justification for any salary requests **and** provide information about the personnel's time commitment and role regardless of whether salary support is requested.
- **Salary:** In the Excel budget template, include each person's name, role, and time spent on the project as "% project appointment" regardless of whether you are requesting salary support. If you are requesting salary support, include the amount in the year columns. Enter zero in the year columns if you are not requesting salary support. Also include the fringe benefit rate for each person for whom salary is requested. The Excel template will calculate total personnel costs.
  - a. **Key Personnel: The Principal Investigator and Co-Investigators must commit time to the research project.** Include each individual's % appointment to the project even if that individual's salary support is not requested. Clearly describe the nature of all positions. Salary requests for time spent on the project must be clearly defined in the budget justification section.
  - b. **Other personnel:** Salary requests for personnel involved in the project including but not limited to residents, fellows, technicians, assistants and students are permitted but must be clearly defined and include % time commitment. Clearly describe the nature of all positions.
  - c. **For Profit Institutions:** The Foundation does not fund salary support for staff of for-profit institutions.
- **Tuition:** Morris Animal Foundation does not pay for tuition.

- **Equipment:** Requests for equipment purchase may not exceed \$5,000 for the lifetime of the project. Equipment are long term assets as opposed to services or supplies which are consumable.
  - **Other Project Expenses:** Briefly categorize other project expenses e.g., laboratory or clinical consumables; reagents; non-equipment study supplies; and service fees for specimen analysis.
  - **Travel:** Requests for travel to scientific meetings and conferences must be well-justified in terms of scientific impact and should not exceed \$2,000 total. Travel needed to complete research objectives should be budgeted separately. Travel must be essential; resources or activities that provide alternatives are preferred. For international project teams, activities should be conducted wherever possible by teams and/or collaborators already in-country.
  - **Increasing Impact and Open Access Publications:** The Foundation encourages PIs to budget for strategies to optimize research impact including publishing findings in an open access journal. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) is currently waiving open access publication fees for scientific manuscripts resulting from Foundation funding. Strategies to optimize impact of the project should be described in the budget justification section.
  - **Indirect Costs:** Up to 8% of the budget's total direct costs can be applied to indirect costs if your institution charges for these costs. The addition of indirect costs should not result in the total exceeding the maximum allowable budget. If a subaward to another organization is proposed, the total indirect costs may not exceed 8% for the subaward. We encourage provision of indirect costs as in-kind from your institution whenever possible.
  - **Altering the Excel Budget Template:** The format of the Excel Budget Template is fixed to ensure consistency. You will not be able to add additional lines. If you need additional room, please combine similar items within the budget template and provide detailed information in the budget justification. For example, you can enter "consumables" in the Excel budget template and then include a detailed list in the budget justification section of the [proposal template](#).
- ✓ **Once completed, upload Excel budget spreadsheet into the AIBS portal.** This will be a separate upload from the rest of the proposal template.

**J. Budget Justification and Timeline Summary** (2-page limit): [\[Find additional details about the budget justification here.\]](#) Use the budget justification section in the proposal template to briefly describe and justify requested expenses and allocations. For all key personnel, include the % time allocated, a description of their role or nature of their position, and justify any salary requested in the budget, if applicable. Use the project timeline to demonstrate how the research objectives will be completed in the timeframe requested. Include data analysis time and manuscript preparation time.

**K. Current and Pending Support** (no page limit, or note "not applicable"): Identify all active or pending support for the PI and Co-Investigators. Where scientific or budgetary overlap may be perceived, please explain. Provide the following information for all current and pending support. **First Award Applicants:** *Clearly identify any Funded Awards greater than \$25,000 for any previous project as a principal investigator leading the research.* See the applicant eligibility section of this document for details.

- i) **Project ID, Funding Source, Start and End Date of Award**
- ii) **Project Title**
- iii) **Summary:** Summarize the project objectives and results to date.



- iv) **Overlap:** Summarize any potential overlap with the proposed project regarding the science, budget, or committed effort.

**L. Biographical Data** (2-page limit per individual): Include a bio-sketch for each PI and co-investigator. This might take the form of a resume/CV.

- i. **Name, Role on this Project**
- ii. **Current Position** (title, institutional affiliation, institutional address)
- iii. **Education and Training** (degrees, institution, year completed, areas of emphasis)
- iv. **Previous Positions, Honors, Awards, Committee Assignments**
- v. **Selected Peer-reviewed Publications** (include titles, all authors, and complete reference)

#### **M. Letters of Support:**

Include a letter of support from any collaborator, funding agency, policy maker or commercial partner whose contributions are required to achieve the research objectives or impact described in the proposal.

- i. **When the PI is not located in the country where the research or a portion of the research will occur,** a Letter of Support from the named Co-I or Mentor serving as the in-country collaborator is required.
- ii. **Other Letters of Support:** (2-page limit per letter): may include letters of support from collaborators or key suppliers of materials required for the project.
- iii. **First Award applicants:** Upload a candidate letter of intent and request 1) mentor(s) letter(s), and 2) a letter of support from your department head or equivalent.
  - a. **Candidate Letter of Intent:** (2-page limit): Address your educational background and training and research experience. Provide insight into your commitment and motivation for a career in animal health research. Describe your career vision and how this training award will assist in your progress toward becoming an independent investigator. Clearly describe any prior funding awarded.
  - b. **Mentor Letter(s):** (2-page limit per mentor) **This is requested by the applicant through the AIBS SCORES portal. The mentor submits the letter directly into AIBS SCORES.** The mentor's letter will address the candidate's accomplishments, strengths, and motivation. Describe formal and informal opportunities for research mentorship and the mentor's history of guiding other researchers. Include list of mentees and their current positions. Describe the role of the mentor and the candidate in preparing and writing this application. The mentor is expected to have reviewed the applicant's final proposal prior to submission.
  - c. **Department Head Letter:** (1-page limit) **This is requested by the applicant through the AIBS SCORES portal. The department head submits the letter directly into AIBS SCORES.** The department head's letter will demonstrate the department's approval of the research plan, confirm the applicant is a full-time permanent employee and confirm the applicant will be allowed adequate time to conduct the proposed research.

- ✓ Once completed, convert word files to a PDF and combine all documents into a single PDF for upload. *\*Excluding the Excel budget spreadsheet which will be uploaded separately.*



## V. APPROVAL

**An authorized institutional signer from your institution/place of work must approve your application.** This should be done after all required sections are complete and attachments uploaded.

To prepare for institutional approval and the submission process, click “select your approval invitee” and identify the individual responsible for signing off on your proposal from your designated person records that you created earlier. Approval will be completed after you finalize your submission.

## VI. FINALIZE YOUR SUBMISSION

Before you click “FINALIZE” you can review your entire submission by clicking on “Click here to preview your current submission content prior to finalizing it.” If you are missing any attachments, a message will prompt you to add the missing item. If all components are present/uploaded, the submission can be finalized. At this point content cannot be changed unless the authorized institutional signer declines approval.

Once you click “FINALIZE,” your authorized institutional signer will be notified by email and asked to review, validate, and officially submit your application. **THIS MUST BE DONE BEFORE THE DEADLINE. It is the applicant’s responsibility to make sure that their authorized institutional signer has sufficient time to approve the application before the deadline.** Your application is not considered to be fully submitted until approval is received. You will receive an email confirming approval. You also can check the status of your submission by logging onto the system, navigating to the proposal mechanism and clicking on your submission link.

## QUESTIONS REGARDING THE SUBMISSION PROCESS?

Please contact [morrisanimalfoundation@aibs.org](mailto:morrisanimalfoundation@aibs.org) for technical assistance.

## APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Ready to submit? Please review this Applicant Checklist to double check your grant proposal and maximize your chance of success prior to clicking 'Submit'. **This checklist should not be uploaded as part of your application.**

- ☐ Lay Language summary has a [Flesch Reading Ease Score](#) of 50-70
- ☐ Study Proposal length conforms to proposal guidelines allowable length
- ☐ Animal Health Impact Section completed and adequately addresses questions within the proposal guidelines
- ☐ Fully completed Animal Involvement Justification Form
- ☐ Client Consent form provided (*if applicable*)
- ☐ Permits (*if applicable*)
- ☐ Budget and budget category totals are in US Dollars (\$) and within allowable request, and the budget template provided is used (link to the template is provided in the guidelines and proposal template)
- ☐ Letters of support (*if applicable*)
- ☐ All proposal template sections are completed
- ☐ All documents provided in English
- ☐ Application submitted as 1 full proposal document in .pdf format + 1 budget spreadsheet in Excel format (2 files total)

For applicant questions not answered by the proposal guidelines or in the [Grants FAQ](#), please reach out to the Scientific Grants Program Team at [grantapplications@morrisanimalfoundation.org](mailto:grantapplications@morrisanimalfoundation.org)