

About the Research Program

The W. M. Keck Foundation Research Program supports early-stage, high-risk basic science with the potential to open new fields or rewrite textbooks. We are not a funder of disease-specific research, translational or applied work, optimization of existing techniques, or incremental extensions of established research directions or methods. We welcome work that other funders consider too early, too speculative, or too far from the prevailing paradigm. We do not require preliminary data or evidence that a federal agency has declined funding for the proposed work.

An institution may submit up to three applications per cycle. The Foundation will not fund more than one project in the same field from one institution in a single cycle; for example, two neuroscience applications from the same institution will compete against each other. Projects considered overlapping with [recently funded Keck projects](#) will be held to a higher standard of review. The Foundation does not accept resubmissions of previously declined applications. For more information on the Foundation's funding priorities, please see our [website](#).

Application Overview

Applications must be initiated and submitted by the liaison. Before beginning the online application, the liaison should review your organization's contacts in the portal for accuracy.

Component	Format
Project Info	Portal fields
Summary	Portal short-answer fields
Project Narrative	6-page PDF with three sections – see format instructions
Bibliography	PDF – see format instructions
Biographical Sketches	PDF from SciENcv in NSF or NIH format
Other Support	PDF from SciENcv in NSF or NIH format
Collaboration Letters	PDF (optional)
Suggested Reviewers	Portal fields

A budget is not required for this submission. Applicants selected for further review will submit budget details and a financial narrative through the portal.

1. Project Info

Entered directly into fields in the portal by the liaison. Responses must be consistent with the Project Narrative. Character limits include spaces.

- a. **Project Title:** Up to 200 characters.
- b. **Estimated WMKF Request:** The estimated funds requested from the Foundation. The request should total between \$1M and \$1.3M as a multiple of \$100k.
- c. **Project Duration:** All projects are funded for 3 years (prefilled field). The Foundation uses the first of the month following the grant award as the start date (typically January 1 or July 1).
- d. **Key Personnel:** Provide the full name, email, title, department, institutional affiliation, ORCID, and project role (up to 150 characters per field per role) for the PI and any Co-PIs. Key personnel are limited to investigators with institutional PI status, such as tenured or tenure-track faculty. Exclude technical staff, students, postdocs, and trainees.
- e. **Project Abstract:** Write for a general audience with no scientific training. Define any terms that would not appear in a general-interest newspaper. Note that this abstract will be published on the Foundation website if an award is made, so do not include any information you do not want shared publicly. Up to 1800 characters.
- f. **Graphical Abstract:** Upload a graphic (JPEG or PNG, 1500 × 1500 pixels minimum) that communicates the project at the same general audience level as the abstract. The graphical abstract is presented to the WMKF Board and is not for scientific review. We may post graphical abstracts to our website.
- g. **Graphical Abstract Caption:** Write a brief description of the graphical abstract for the same audience as the abstract. Up to 300 characters.
- h. **Animal Models:** Does the project use animal models requiring IACUC approval? If so, state the models being used. Proof of IACUC approval is not required at submission.
- i. **Publications:** Provide titles and DOIs for up to 5 total publications from the team that are most relevant to this project (e.g., 10.1000/abc123). For each, provide one sentence describing its relationship to and difference from the proposed project. Up to 300 characters each.

2. Summary

Entered directly into the Foundation portal by the liaison. Where citations are needed, paste DOIs inline (e.g., 10.1000/abc123); no formal bibliography is required for the summary. Responses must be consistent with the Project Narrative. Character limits include spaces.

- a. **Scientific Question:** State the scientific question motivating this work in terms accessible to a scientist outside your field. Do not include methods, instruments, or field-specific frameworks. Up to 300 characters.

- b. **Potential Impact:** If the scientific question is answered, what changes? Provide two distinct downstream consequences. Up to 600 characters each.
- c. **Risks:** Highlight potential risks to project success. Address how you will mitigate them in the Project Narrative. Up to 300 characters.
- d. **Enabling Advances:** Identify any novel advances or elements that make this research possible or timely. Up to 300 characters.
- e. **New Area:** If the project represents a new research area for your team, how is it distinct from your team's prior work? Up to 600 characters.
- f. **Peer Groups:** List 2 to 4 peer groups and describe what they do and how this proposal differs. Up to 300 characters each.
- g. **Prior Support:** If preliminary data or results are included, briefly describe all prior funding used to generate them. Up to 600 characters.
- h. **AI Use:** If applicable, describe how generative AI was used in preparing this proposal. Up to 300 characters. Applications will not be evaluated on this answer.

3. Project Narrative

Upload as a single PDF, maximum six pages. Write with sufficient detail for peer reviewers but keep the narrative accessible to scientists outside your immediate subfield. Define all jargon and abbreviations. Figures are encouraged.

- Narrative Formatting Requirements
 - Single spaced on 8.5" × 11" paper
 - Minimum 11-point sans-serif font, Arial or Helvetica preferred
 - Margins no less than 0.75"
 - Numbered pages
 - Embedded figures inline; figure text and captions minimum 9-point type
 - Do not include footnotes or links to external supporting material (videos, websites).
 - In-text citations: Arabic numerals in order of first citation [1], [2], [3]. Provide full references with DOI in the separately uploaded Bibliography.
- Required Sections in this order, using these exact bold headers
 - **State of the Field and the Gap:** Describe the current state of understanding in the field. What dominant paradigm, prevailing model, or standard assumption does this work test, extend or break. What is currently impossible or unknown? Why has the gap persisted?
 - **Approach:** Open with one sentence stating how the proposed work would answer the scientific question stated in your Summary. State the central hypothesis or idea. Identify the specific goals or aims of the work. For each aim: What will be done? How? What does success or failure look like? Identify the methodological,

theoretical, or instrumental advances that distinguish this approach from existing work.

- **Feasibility:** Evidence supporting the feasibility of the proposed work. For early-stage proposals, articulate the feasibility argument from related results, team capability, or theoretical grounding. Absence of preliminary data is not disqualifying.

4. Supporting Documents

Upload a separate PDF for each of the following.

- **Bibliography:** No page limit
 - References numbered with Arabic numerals in the order of citations in the Project Narrative
 - List up to 10 authors per reference; include titles and DOIs
 - Acceptable citation formats: American Chemical Society or Cell Press
 - DOI links to articles or preprints are permitted; other external links are not
- **Biographical Sketches:** One Biosketch per key person, combined into a single PDF. Only SciENcv Biosketches in NSF or NIH format and including an ORCID are accepted. SciENcv formatted Biosketches can be created [here](#). The NIH supplemental section is not required. The PDF does not need to be signed.
- **Other Support:** One Other Support document per key person, combined into a single PDF. Only SciENcv Other Support documents in NSF or NIH format are accepted. SciENcv formatted Other Support documents can be created [here](#). The PDF does not need to be signed.
- **Collaboration Letters:** (optional) If the project refers to support from collaborators not listed as key personnel, include letters of support endorsing their participation, expertise, and role in the project. Single PDF.

5. Suggested Reviewers

List five knowledgeable experts in the field who can review the request and provide opinions regarding the potential value of the project and ability of the applicant to successfully complete it. For each, provide:

- Name
- Title
- Institutional Affiliation
- Email
- Area of Expertise

Provide the names of reviewers you would like to exclude and why.

6. Organization Info

Verify your organization's information in the portal. Your Applicant Institution must be the organization where the research will take place, not a fundraising foundation or related entity. If a grant would be paid to an organization other than your Applicant Institution, provide your Payee Organization's information where requested. Note that WMKF [eligibility requirements](#) apply to the Payee Organization.

- **Declaration of Status:** If your organization is under a group exemption or defined as a government unit by Section 170(b)(1)(A)(v) and (c)(1), provide a Declaration of Status as described on the Foundation [website](#). This will not apply to most applicants.

7. Submission

Applications must be submitted through the portal by the institution's designated liaison.

Submissions are due at 4:30pm Pacific Time on the deadline date. Deadlines for our two funding cycles are the first Monday after Memorial Day and the second Monday after Thanksgiving. Early submissions are encouraged. Late applications will not be accepted.

The Foundation will ask a subset of applicants to submit budget details and a financial narrative through the portal. Notification of selection will come approximately six weeks after the deadline. Applicants should be prepared to submit their budget within two weeks of notification. No additional scientific materials will be collected.

A subset of those applications will be invited for a research presentation. Notification will come approximately four months after the deadline and invite applicants to reserve a presentation slot, confirm institutional acceptance of the Grant Agreement, and provide payment information. Final funding decisions will be sent approximately six months after the deadline.

An institution may withdraw an application at any stage without prejudice to future requests.

If you have questions, contact the Foundation via your liaison.

Proposal Confidentiality and the Use of AI Tools

The W. M. Keck Foundation is committed to keeping the information in your application in confidence. During the review process, the Foundation may consult external experts who have committed to our confidentiality and artificial intelligence (AI) policies. The Foundation may use AI tools to analyze proposals, extract keywords for tracking purposes, generate project summaries, identify potential reviewers, and for other business purposes. The Foundation has strict guidelines regarding the responsible use of AI. WMKF employees, reviewers, and consultants are prohibited from sharing your data with AI tools that harvest data for algorithmic, large language model, or other training purposes.