



W. M. KECK FOUNDATION

Research Program

New Application Process

research@wmkeck.org

September 2026



About the Foundation



W. M. Keck founded Superior Oil Co. in 1921

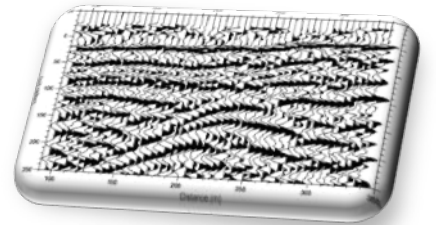
1930 First Directional Drilling in California

1933 First use of Reflection Seismography

1938 First Offshore Platform in Louisiana

1954 **W. M. Keck Foundation** chartered

1984 Superior Oil sold to Mobil, increasing Foundation endowment



<https://smkst-petro.com/directional-drilling-companies-for-oil-and-gas/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reflection_seismology

<https://alamy-ltd.ewrvdi.net/c/77643/748811/10905?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.alamy.com%2Foil-rig-at-sunset-time-image366560343.html>

What the Research Program funds

- Basic physical, life, and biomedical science
- Instruments and engineering built to answer a basic question
- Pioneering discovery in emerging areas
- High risk, high reward

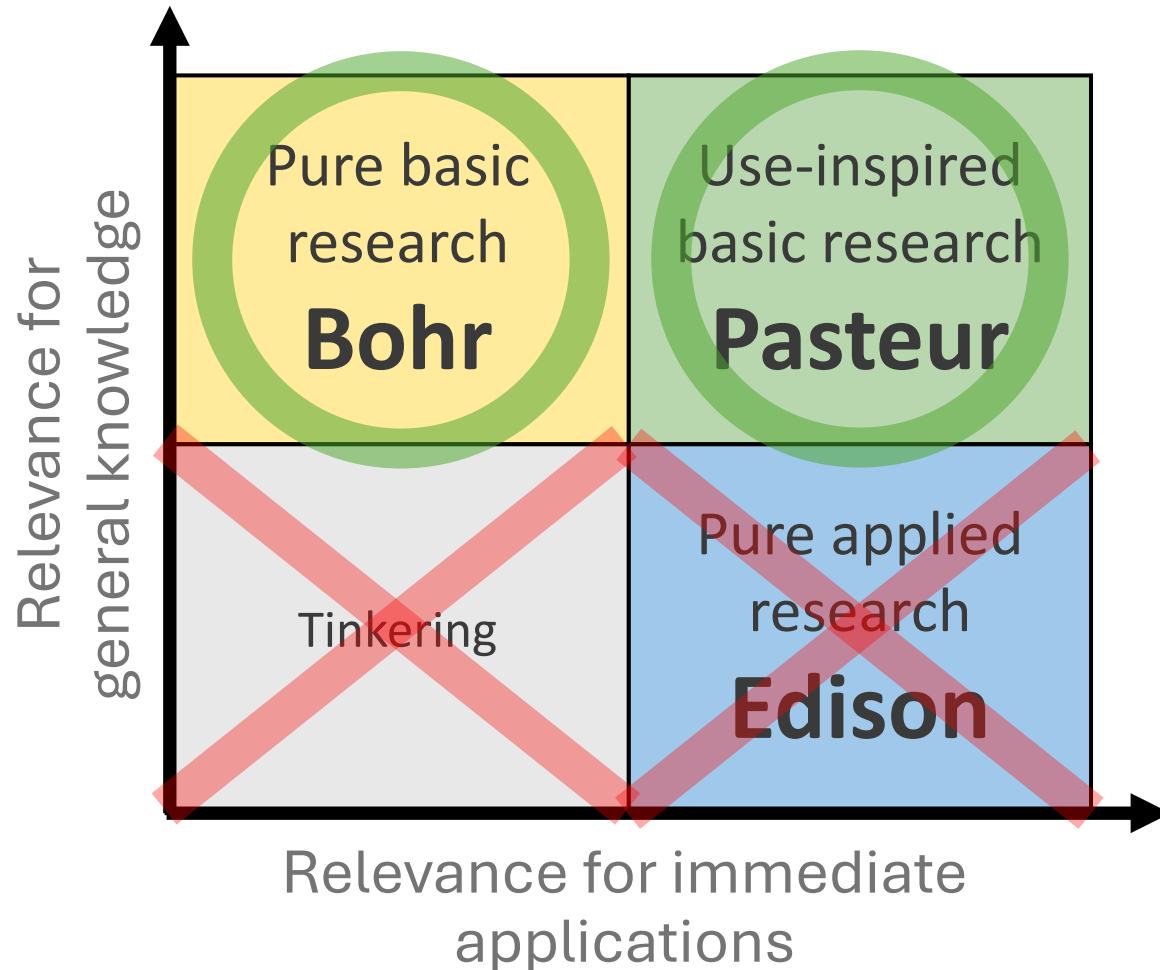


Source: © 963 Creation/Shutterstock

The Foundation welcomes work that may be too early, too speculative, or too far from the prevailing paradigm for other funders

- Preliminary data are not required
- Nor is evidence that a federal agency declined the work

WMKF on Pasteur's Quadrant



The Foundation funds basic research that:

- Expands fundamental knowledge
- Has clear potential for impact
- Ranges from use-inspired discovery to curiosity driven inquiry
- Applied research and development fall outside the scope for funding

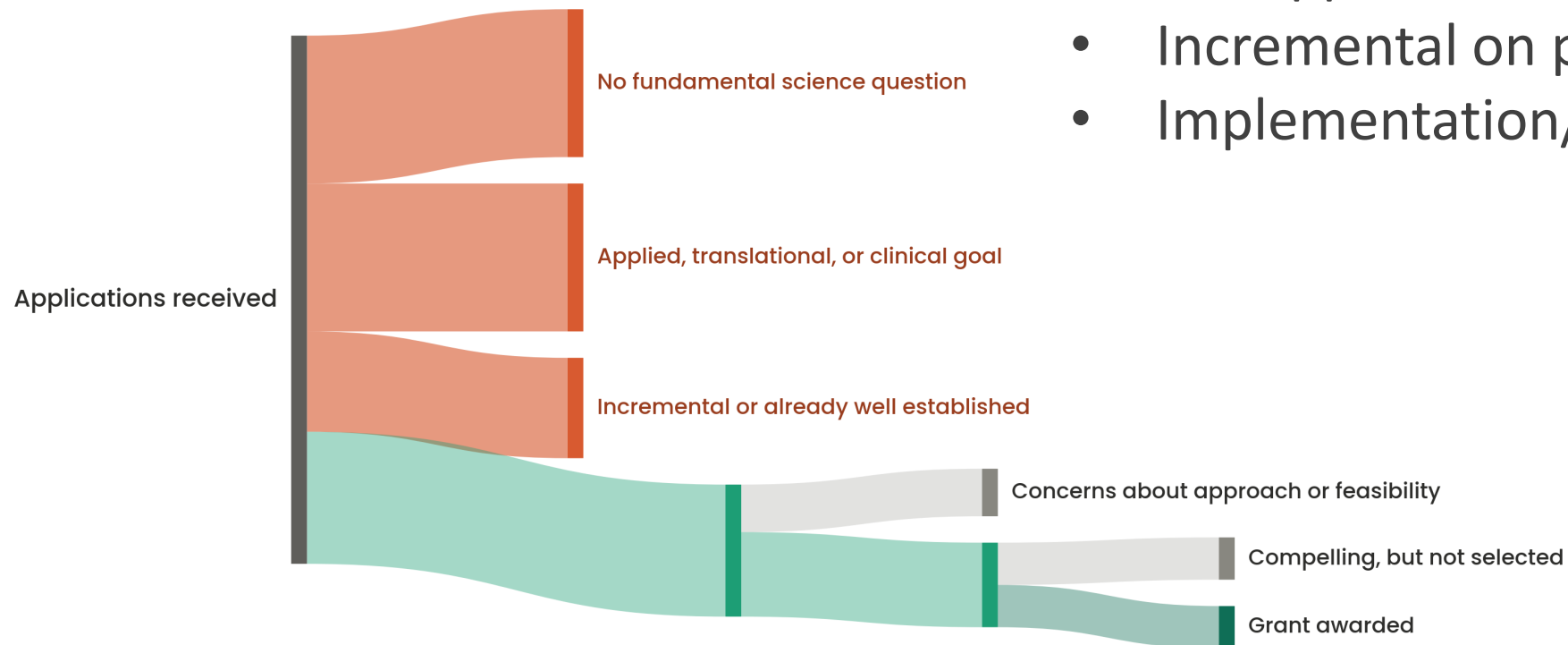
Keck does not fund

- Disease-specific research
- Medical devices or bench-to-bedside translational research
- Clinical trials, therapies, procedures
- Drug discovery, development, or delivery
- Disease biomarker screening
- Projects solely focused on engineering equipment, tools, or materials
- Engineering for efficiency, optimization, or cost reduction
- Incremental extension of established research directions or methods
- Digital twin implementations
- User facilities or equipment for shared facilities
- Supplements, renewals, follow-on funding, or resubmissions
- Conferences or science policy

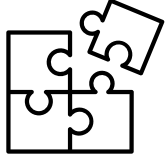


Why do projects get declined?

- Lacking a fundamental science question
- Too applied/translational
- Incremental on previous work
- Implementation/risk concerns



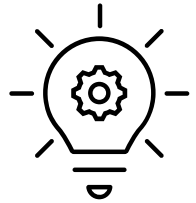
What Keck looks for during review



Scientific Question: Is there a clear and well stated question rooted in basic science?



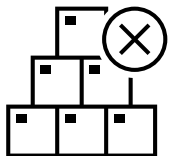
Approach: Is there a feasible pathway to answer that defined question? How do you get there?



Innovation: Is there novelty in the question or the approach? Will it create a new field? Will it unseat a popular idea?



Impact: If the project is successful, what changes? How will it affect the field or benefit humanity?



Risk: Does your project push the edge of what is feasible? Keck is comfortable with potential for failure as long as there is potential for great impact.

WMKF awards

- \$1M - \$1.3M grant awards
- All projects funded for 3 years
- Catalytic investment, with the full amount dispersed at award

Typical staged funding (other funders)



Keck research award



Grant awarded

Full amount received



New Application 2027

Now in effect

13 months → **6** months

Faster turnaround from initial submission to Keck funding

- First submission – full proposal
- Detailed budgets are invite only
- Up to 3 proposals per institution
- No restrictions on area of science
- December and June deadlines
- No concept consultations

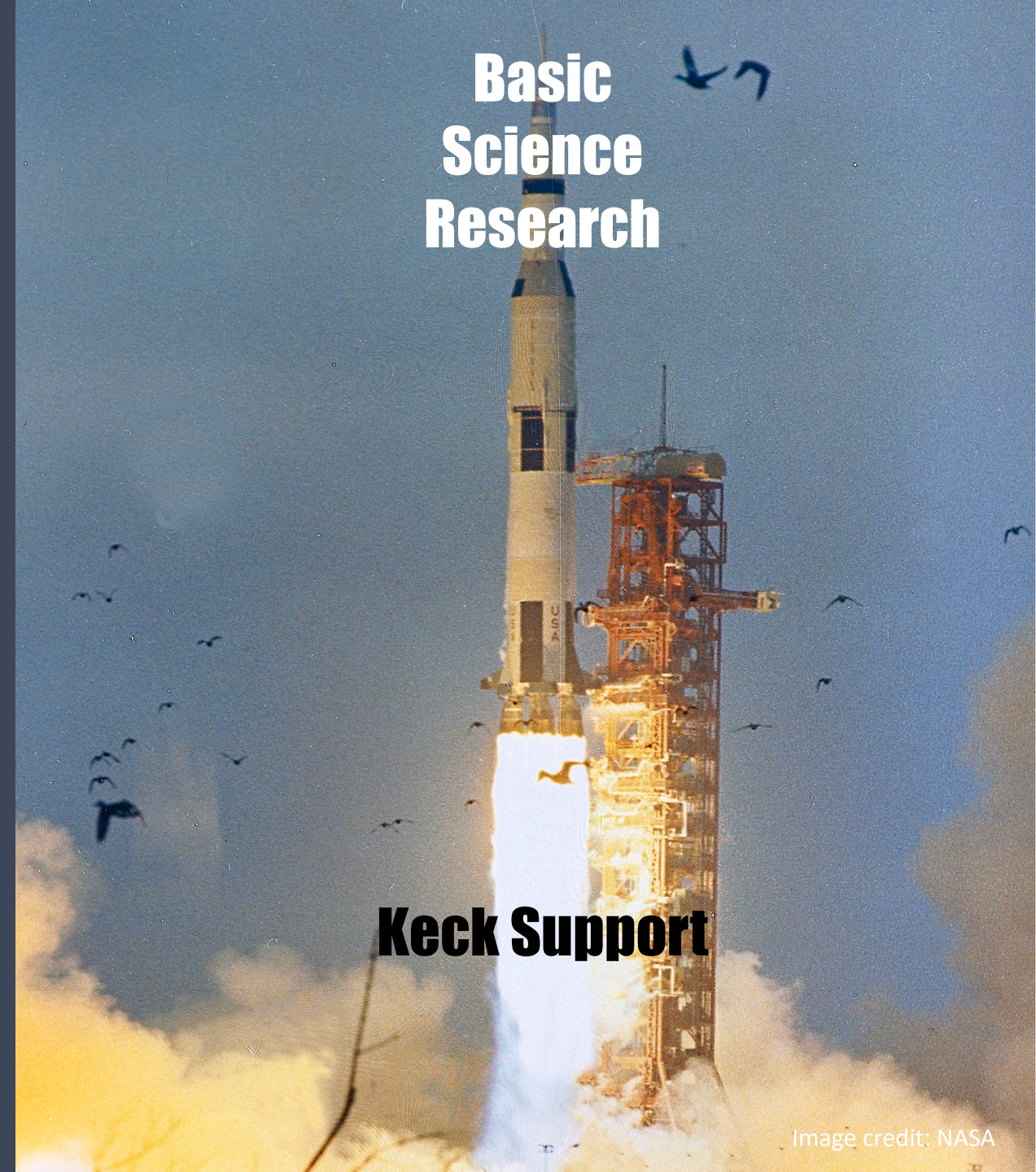


Image credit: NASA

New deadlines

Monday, December 7, 2026

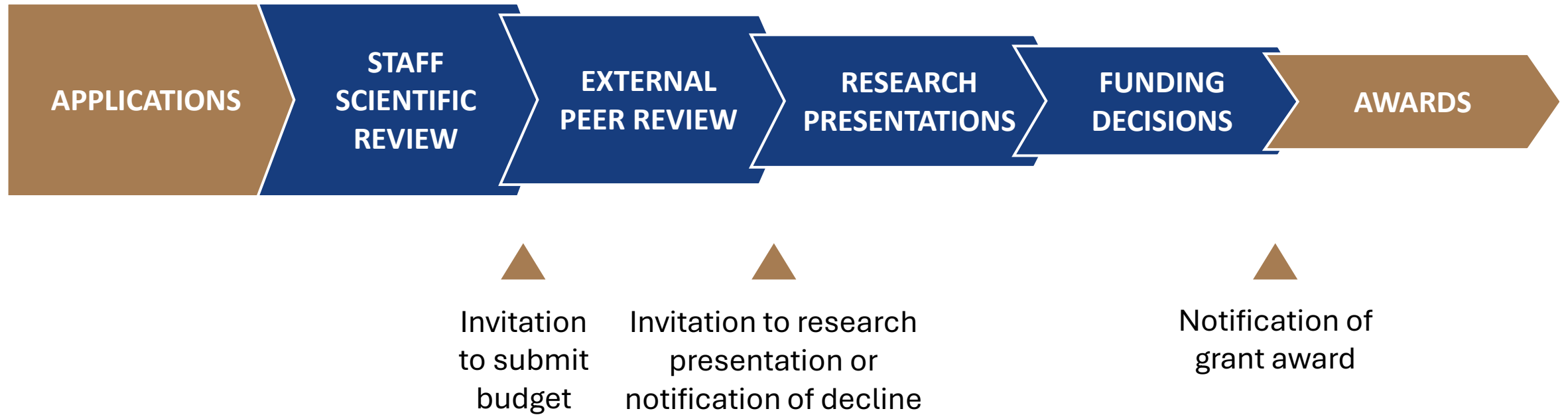
Second Monday after Thanksgiving

Monday, June 7, 2027

First Monday after Memorial Day

- The institution's designated liaison initiates and submits
- Application portal closes at 4:30 pm Pacific

From submission to award



Application changes

- **Summary** – Structured short answers
- **Project Narrative** – Now six pages
- **Key Personnel Required Details**
 - **Biographical Sketches** – SciENCv in NSF or NIH format with ORCID
 - **Other Support** – SciENCv in NSF or NIH format
- **Collaboration Letters** – Optional (not key personnel)
- **No Detailed Budget** – At time of application
 - A subset of applications will be invited to submit a budget several months after the deadline
- **No In-Person Presentations** – All research presentations hosted on Zoom

Graphical abstract

- Primarily for communicating your project to the Keck Board
- A visual elevator pitch
- The Board is composed of highly educated and accomplished professionals who are mostly not scientists
- Without additional context, a Board member must grasp your project's central idea, why it matters, and what makes it important
- If the project is funded, both the graphic and caption will appear on our website

Project narrative (6 pages)

1. State of the Field

- What is the knowledge or technology gap?

2. Approach

- What is the central hypothesis or questions?
- What are the specific aims?
- What does success or failure look like?

3. Feasibility

- Related results, theory, new capabilities
- Preliminary data are optional



Key personnel

- Key personnel must hold institutional PI status
- Key personnel commit effort to the project (paid or unpaid)
- Students, postdocs, staff, and collaborators are not key personnel
- Collaborators commit no effort and receive no financial support
- Each project must have one Lead PI at the applicant institution



Project personnel

- No limits on the number of Key Personnel on a project
 - The amount of personnel on a project does not affect the projects likelihood of funding
 - No preference between single PI and team proposals
- Multi-institution grants requiring subaward(s) are permitted
 - No preference between single or multi-institution proposals
- The research team must demonstrate expertise in each area required for the research
- No preference for PI career stage

Institutional support

- No minimums, caps, or ratios for institutional support
- The Keck board appreciates institutions committing support towards project success
- Keck defines institutional support as funds committed towards:
 - Personnel salary and benefits
 - Research expenses and equipment
 - Tuition match above the cap
 - Waived indirect costs

Institutional submission

Each institution can submit up to three applications from diverse areas of science

- Multiple applications in the same area from the same institution will not be accepted
- Due to the ever-changing nature of science, the Foundation cannot lock down a strict list of areas of science - some applicant discretion is necessary



Institutional submission - areas of science

- A place to start is with the diversity of departments at your institution, rather than by schools or colleges
- Consider the area of science the project is in, not the department or field it comes from
 - Distinct projects may come from within one department (e.g., astrophysics, quantum physics, or biophysics from a physics department)
 - Whereas similar projects may come from different departments (e.g., projects covering viruses or immunity might emerge from an immunology, bioengineering, molecular and cellular physiology, or structural biology department)

Eligibility

See the [eligibility page](#) of the Keck website for institutional requirements

- Institutions with active Keck awards are eligible
- PIs and Co-PIs working on active Keck awards are **not eligible**
- PIs and Co-PIs with closed Keck awards are eligible
- Projects previously declined for funding are **not eligible**
- PIs who have previously been declined are eligible with a new project that is substantively different from the declined project

No federal funding declines

The Foundation wants to fund risky cutting-edge science in its early stages

- The Foundation does not require projects to have been previously rejected by a federal funder
- Prior rejection from a federal funder does not advantage a proposal

Confidentiality and AI

- All applications are held in confidence
- The Foundation may use non-trainable AI to analyze proposals to assign keywords, draft summaries, and find reviewers
- External experts commit to the Foundation's confidentiality and AI-use policies
- **New:** Keck wants to know how AI was used in preparation of the proposal. Proposals are not judged on this answer.



Program Overview & Info



wmkeck.org/research-overview