Individual Investigator Research Grant Awards – Targeted Call for New Proposals

The Foundation Fighting Blindness (FFB) expects to fund a limited number Individual Investigator Research Grants to be awarded June 2015. If you are interested in being considered for an award, please send a Letter of Intent (LOI) and short Curriculum Vitae (NIH Biosketch is acceptable) to FFB by November 30, 2014. The Letter of Intent (not to exceed two pages using Arial 11pt font) must include on page one of the LOI:

1. Title of the retinal research project
2. Specific FFB Research Priority Areas (RPA) (ONE ONLY, see below)
3. Inherited orphan retinal degenerative disease (or dry AMD) this research impacts and why this research is important to and will make a significant difference in achieving the Foundation’s mission.
4. Specific aims and rationale proposed for FFB Grant funding (it is recommended that the specific aims are listed and rationale stated. The remaining space allocation should be used to elaborate on the proposed research)

Description:
Individual Investigator Research Grant Awards are designed to concentrate research in areas that will have the greatest potential to move towards treatments and cures for the inherited orphan retinal degenerative diseases and dry age-related macular degeneration (dAMD). N.B.: FFB does not support research for neovascular AMD or diabetic retinopathy. The Foundation has identified Research Priority Areas (RPA) that align with its mission and this targeted open call for application is to address specific gaps identified in current retinal disease research. While applications addressing the areas of particular interest below will be given priority consideration, the FFB will also consider proposals for highly novel research that do not fit easily within these goals. The LOI for such proposals must clearly explain why the research is likely to lead to prevention, treatments or cures for the orphan inherited retinal degenerative diseases.

Individual research awards are available in the following Research Priority Areas:

RESEARCH PRIORITY AREAS (RPA)

Novel Medical Therapies (NMT)
Develop drug therapies that retain retinal function and structure in retinal degenerative diseases. This includes the creation and development of improved animal models of human disease, better functional testing of drug effectiveness, and novel drug delivery systems.

Applications that target the following areas are of particular interest:
- Develop pan-disease therapeutics
- Develop high throughput phenotypic drug screening tools (markers, target, etc) relevant to the human orphan inherited retinal degenerative diseases.

Gene Therapy (GT)
Develop and optimize viral and/or non-viral gene delivery systems for the treatment of dominant, recessive and X-linked retinal degenerative diseases. Demonstrate efficacy and safety using pre-clinical models in preparation for human clinical trials.

Applications that target the following areas are of particular interest:
• Develop methods of gene delivery that can:
  o Target specific retinal cells
  o Efficiently transduce all cells of a given type in the retina
  o Deliver large gene constructs that may contain large coding regions and/or large gene control elements
• Develop clinically relevant approaches for genome editing

Cell and Molecular Mechanisms of Retinal Disease (CMM)
Basic research that improves our understanding of the nature and cause of disease in inherited retinal degenerations so that improved therapies for the prevention of vision loss can be developed.

Applications that target the following areas are of particular interest:
• Delineate pathways that link mutations in multiple different genes to common disease mechanisms, with the goal of identifying pan-disease therapeutic targets.
• Develop and characterize cone-rich and/or non-rodent animal models for the RDD that are relevant to human RDD.

Genetics (GE)
Identify disease-causing mutations in inherited retinal disorders, in part by integrating comprehensive genetic testing into routine clinical care. Identify inherited risk factors for age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and the relative contributions of associated genetic and non-genetic factors (e.g. lifestyle), sufficient to incorporate into treatment and prevention.

Applications that target the following areas are of particular interest:
• Develop and validate faster, more accurate and less expensive methods to identify mutations in both known and unknown genes implicated in the orphan inherited retinal degenerative diseases
• Develop clinically relevant approaches for genome editing

Clinical-Structure and Function (CL)
Clinical research that develops improved technology and standardizes processes to establish relationships between clinical retina function and retina structure in retinal degenerative diseases and enables early disease detection.
N.B.: If a clinical application focuses on a therapeutic intervention, the application should identify and submit their application using the most relevant RPA for that therapy, such as GT, or NMT, instead of using CL.

Applications that target the following areas are of particular interest:
• Develop and validate diagnostic technology and endpoints for clinical trials, that include, but are not limited to:
  o Natural history studies that correlate genotype and phenotype
  o Biomarker identification
  o Improvements in retinal imaging

Regenerative Medicine (RM)
Develop strategies that provide functional rescue or replacement of degenerating or dead retinal cells that can lead to the slowing and prevention of vision loss, or the restoration of lost vision.
Eligibility:
Applicants must hold a Ph.D., M.D., D.M.D., D.V.M., D.O., or equivalent degree and have a faculty position or equivalent at a domestic or foreign: non-profit organization, or public or private institution, such as a university, college, medical school, hospital, research institute, or laboratory.

Award:
The award will be approximately $100,000 per year up to three years. The award may be used to support the salaries of research trainees (graduate students, postdoctoral or clinical fellows), technical staff and research supplies. Partial support for the Principal Investigator’s salary is permitted but is not to exceed 20% of the total annual award. The Foundation Fighting Blindness does not provide funds for equipment or indirect administrative costs.

Please e-mail in Word or PDF format the Letter of Intent and short CV (NIH biosketch is acceptable) to: grants@fightblindness.org by 11:59 PM EDT, November 30, 2014.

Letters of Intent received after November 30, 2014 will not be given consideration.

The Letters of Intent will be reviewed for scientific quality and relevance to FFB’s mission and current research priorities. Letters addressing the targeted area identified above and showing clear relevance to translational studies that can accelerate the path toward clinical trials will receive priority consideration. If your Letter of Intent is selected, the FFB will contact you to request a full application by January 31, 2015. Full applications will be due on April 1, 2015.

PLEASE USE YOUR OWN E-MAIL ADDRESS IF POSSIBLE WHEN SUBMITTING THE LETTER OF INTENT SO THAT WE CAN INFORM YOU IN A TIMELY FASHION IF YOUR APPLICATION HAS BEEN SELECTED FOR SUBMISSION OF A FULL PROPOSAL. IN ADDITION, PLEASE ADVISE US AS SOON AS POSSIBLE OF CHANGES IN E-MAIL ADDRESSES.