

PRE-PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

Request for Pre-Proposals: Wildlife Health & Welfare

Established Investigator, First Award, Pilot Study Awards: Mammal focus

Fellowship Training Award: Open topic

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 funded by public support from individuals, corporations, clubs, 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, wildlife researchers, and communities.

PRE-PROPOSAL REQUEST OBJECTIVES

This request for pre-proposals is focused on Wildlife Health. Pre-proposals on other topics will not be accepted. Established Investigator, Pilot Study and First Award applications must focus on mammal health and welfare. Fellowship Training applications are open topic. Morris Animal Foundation is focused on advancing animal health and welfare; while the Foundation recognizes the importance of conservation to animal health, any conservation-focused proposals must be through an animal health lens. Animals in managed care settings can be a valuable proxy for wild counterparts, but all submitted proposals must have direct translational value to free-ranging wildlife populations. The value of your project for wildlife health must be clearly outlined in the Animal Health Impact section of your pre-proposal.

To ensure we fund only the most impactful research, successful pre-proposals will:

1. Identify a well-defined animal health need
2. Demonstrate collaboration with key stakeholders before, during, and after the project
3. Describe a clear strategy for achieving meaningful outcomes

Guidelines not marked otherwise apply to all four award categories (Established Investigator, First Award, Pilot Study, and Fellowship Training). Award-specific instructions appear in ***bold italics***. Please review all instructions carefully to ensure you are following the correct eligibility requirements, award criteria, budget limits, project duration, and page limits for your selected award.

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

APPLICANT QUALIFICATIONS

ONLY ONE APPLICATION PER PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR IS ALLOWED FOR THIS RFP. However, a PI on one study can be listed as a co-investigator on other proposals.

Applicants must demonstrate understanding of the health problem, relevant expertise, methodological strength, and thoughtful consideration of environmental and animal welfare impacts.

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 (not including a for-profit institution). 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. If invited to submit a full proposal, the applicant should clearly describe prior funding in their candidate letter of intent. Previous funding as a co-investigator is acceptable. If invited, the full proposal application will require supporting statements from one or more appropriately experienced mentors and Department Head.

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

Fellowship Training Applicants: Fellowship Training Grants are designed to assist new investigators in launching a successful research career at an academic or conservation organization by providing salary support in a quality mentoring environment. Applicants must either (1) hold a veterinary degree (such as DVM) or a PhD or (2) be enrolled in a PhD program and will have completed the first two years of their program by the expected start date of their research. Combined DVM/PhD students who are in the PhD portion of their program may apply. Awardees must devote at least 75% of their time to the research project at a university, accredited zoo, conservation organization, or a non-academic equivalent (not including a for profit institution). Clinical residents and those with clinical service requirements greater than 25% time are not eligible.



Fellowship Training applicants with a PhD must have earned the PhD within four years of the grant application date. Candidates who have held a PhD more than four years and other candidates in permanent salaried faculty/research positions at the time of application are not eligible for a Morris Animal Foundation Fellowship. These researchers may wish to pursue a non-Fellowship Grant under the First Award mechanism.

This application will require supporting statements from one or more appropriately experienced mentors and Department Head if invited to submit a full proposal.

AWARD DURATION AND BUDGET LIMITS

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 budget cannot exceed \$120,000.

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

Fellowship Training project duration must be 24 months, and the budget cannot exceed \$145,000.

MORRIS ANIMAL FOUNDATION POLICIES

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

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. Proposals describing studies deemed to include unethical treatment of animals, even if approved by the author's ethics or institutional animal care and use committee (IACUC), are not acceptable and subject to declination.

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 pre-proposals undergo administrative and scientific review.

- **During administrative review**, Foundation staff check for adherence to the pre-proposal guidelines.
- **During scientific review**, each pre-proposal is assigned two scientific reviewers and is **scored for Scientific Merit and Potential Impact using [this rubric](#)**. **Applicant information during the pre-proposal scientific review process is blinded**. Do not include identifying information in the pre-proposal template. However, we recognize some information (such as reference to previous studies or even subject matter) may suggest the applicant's identity. In a topically focused area of research this scenario may be unavoidable. Use your best judgment and any information that unintentionally reveals your identity will not be held against you by Foundation staff. Citing preliminary data will strengthen your pre-proposal, and we encourage you to include that data.

TIMELINE

- February 11, 2026: Pre-Proposals due; submit pre-proposal as a single document (PDF) via SmartSimple no later than 4:59pm ET (see submission instructions below).
- April 15, 2026: PI notifications sent. PIs with successful pre-proposals will be invited to submit a full proposal and will be provided full proposal guidelines and template.
- May 27, 2026: Full proposals due; submit proposal as a single PDF document via SmartSimple platform no later than 4:59pm ET. All full proposals will receive reviewer comments.
- September, 2026: PIs notified of final decision. 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. All proposals recommended for funding undergo subsequent Animal Welfare Review before contracting. **The Foundation will not accept contract revisions. To prevent funding from being reallocated, the contract must be signed within 60 days of receipt**. You can review sample contracts at these links. Contracts will not be finalized until after AWAB approval.
 - [Established Investigator, Pilot Study, and First Award Applicants Example Contract](#)
 - [Fellowship Training Applicants Example Contract](#)

PRE-PROPOSAL GUIDELINES AND FORMAT

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.

The Foundation's proposal format and submission process has changed. Applications must be submitted through the Foundation's new grants portal, [SmartSimple](#). Click the Funding Opportunities shortcut at the top of the welcome page to see a list of open grant calls. Find your call and select "start application". Complete the Eligibility Questions.

- All applicants must register to use SmartSimple. Your username is your email address. **Allow 2-3 business days to activate your account.**
- The user submitting the proposal should be the Applicant/PI.
- Give yourself time - you may need technical assistance to complete your submission.

APPLICATION COMPONENTS IN SMARTSIMPLE:

Application sections are independent tabs in the portal. The tab sections include Contacts, Overview, Project Information, and Other. Details for each SmartSimple tab are provided below.

SmartSimple User Tips:

- Click "SAVE DRAFT" at the bottom as many times as you need as you progress. The system does not auto-save.
- Use the < > arrows between the tab titles to navigate between tabs or the "< BACK" & "> NEXT" at the bottom of the portal webpage to navigate.
- Expand text boxes within SmartSimple by dragging the bottom right corner down.

Details for each tab within the SmartSimple Application:

Contacts Tab: Entered directly into SmartSimple.

- Review your Organization and Primary Contact information for accuracy. If you see any errors, navigate to your home portal and click either Organization Profile or My Profile to make changes.
- **Collaborator Information:** List mentors, collaborators, and institutional signers in the text box. We do not require letters of support or institutional approval for pre-proposals. If you are invited to submit a full proposal, you will be instructed how to invite mentors, collaborators and institutional contacts to submit letters and approvals.

- **OFAC Confirmation:** More information included in the Office of Foreign Assets (OFAC) Disclaimer section above.

Overview Tab: Entered directly into SmartSimple.

- **Project Title.** **200 character limit**
- **Lay and Technical Study Summaries:** **2,000 character limit each.** Summaries are aimed at different audiences:
 - a. 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. Include the following sections:
 1. Summary
 2. The Problem
 3. The Project
 4. Potential Impact
 - b. The technical summary is for review by the Scientific and Animal Welfare Advisory Boards and Foundation staff.
- **Project Duration** (months). Do not exceed the durations described above for each grant type.
- **Requested Amount** (total in US Dollars). Do not exceed the budget limits described above for each grant type. The Foundation's budget and funding support policies to consider are found [here](#).
- **Taxa Researched**
- **[Health Study Policy](#) Adherence**

Project Information Tab: Complete the [pre-proposal template](#) and upload it as a PDF file where prompted. If an Established Investigator and Fellowship Training collaborative project is proposed, each study should share a similar title, propose concrete stand-alone projects within the collaboration, outline the differing responsibilities and provide explanation where overlap may be perceived.

- **Study Proposal and Cited References Field:** Applicants must use the [provided pre-proposal template](#). The order of the research proposal must follow the order in the template. **Do not disclose research team member names or identify specific institutions.** When complete, convert to a PDF file for upload. Consider this well-written [example pre-proposal](#).

1. **Study Proposal:** **2-page limit** including all text, figures and tables.
 - a. **Hypothesis and Objectives:** Be precise and enumerate specific, testable hypotheses with realistic objectives to be achieved within the timeline and budget of the proposal.
 - b. **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. 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 local stakeholder groups.

- i. **Established Investigator, First Award and Fellowship Training 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.
 - ii. **Pilot Study applicants:** Include preliminary data if available and relevant, but it is not required.
- c. **Study Design and Methods:** Include the experimental design and methods for each objective. Data analysis methods must also be described.

2. **Animal Health Impact** [See the [example pre-proposal](#)]: **1-page limit.** Impact is vitally important to our donor-supported organization. We may decline proposals where impact is incompletely addressed, including that proposals with limited 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 half of the points available to impact and engagement. **Successful proposals will consider:**
 - i. Scientific impact, including impact beyond this research field.
 - ii. Non-academic impact, including stakeholders and beneficiaries.
 - iii. If applicable, connections with policy makers and / or knowledge exchange activities. Engagement beyond academic/scientific communities will substantially strengthen your proposal.
3. **Cited References:** Include complete citations referenced numerically in the body of the proposal. Use AMA style for citations.
 - i. **Established Investigator, First Award and Fellowship Training applicants:** 2-page limit
 - ii. **Pilot Study applicants:** 1-page limit

Applicant Checklist to complete days prior to Submission deadline:

- Complete all fields in SmartSimple. To ensure you do not lose any information, save your work often (click “SAVE DRAFT”). Your application does not auto-save.
- Complete the pre-proposal template in English and upload as a single PDF file in the Project Information tab.
- Click the “Application Summary” button to review the entire submission before submitting.
- Click the submit button to finalize your application. We do not require institutional approval for pre-proposals.
- You will receive an email confirming your submission. You can check the status of your submission by logging onto the [submission portal](#).