



## FOUNDATION FIGHTING BLINDNESS CAREER DEVELOPMENT AWARD

### Career Development Awards in Support of Research into Inherited Orphan Retinal Degenerative Diseases and Non-Exudative Age-Related Macular Degeneration

**Application Deadline: March 25, 2021**

The Foundation Fighting Blindness (FFB) is soliciting applications for **Career Development Awards (CDA)** from clinical research scientists of superior dedication and talent. The award is for junior investigators to pursue vigorous research programs to drive the research to find the therapies and cures for **retinal degenerative diseases (RDDs)**, i.e., inherited orphan retinal degenerative diseases and non-exudative age-related macular degeneration. The goal of this Program is to facilitate advances in laboratory and clinical research, to elucidate the mechanisms for the etiology and pathogenesis of RDDs and to develop innovative strategies to prevent, treat and cure these diseases.

Since the purpose of the program is to “jump-start” the careers of highly qualified junior investigators, the candidates will undergo a careful selection process. Consideration for funding will be determined by the Executive Scientific Advisory Board (ESAB) of FFB and applications will be reviewed for scientific and technical merit. However, the ESAB will also take into consideration other factors such as programmatic needs, balance and the support from an applicant’s mentor(s) and institution. Selected applicants will be invited for an interview to discuss application materials and plans for the award and the future. The interview will occur by phone or in person at ARVO, schedule permitting.

#### **Eligibility**

Clinician-scientists possessing an **M.D., D.O.**, or recognized **equivalent foreign degree** and who are in their **first, second, or third year of a junior faculty** appointment are eligible to apply for a CDA. Applicants **do not** have to be U.S. citizens.

## **Award**

At least **two** awards are available. In general, each **five-year** award will be for a total of **\$375,000**, received as five annual payments of **\$75,000**.

Budgets can be tailored to address the situations of individual recipients.

Applicants funded from other sources are eligible to apply. The source and nature of this funding must be disclosed to FFB at the time of application.

The CDA may be used for partial support of the candidate's salary, postdoctoral and/or technical staff salaries and research supplies. **No indirect costs are paid.** Awardees may be invited to present a summary of their research at the annual post- ARVO FFB meeting.

## **The Mentor's Role**

A CDA recipient must be mentored by one or more senior clinician-scientist and the application must include a "Mentor's Proposal for Training" that details how the senior clinician-scientist will guide the junior investigator to advance his/her knowledge and career (see below). Scientists with an established research program can serve as a co-mentor with a senior clinician-scientist. The primary goal of the mentor program is to develop and retain talented clinical investigators devoted to directing future efforts toward discovering therapies and cures for RDDs. FFB, in concert with the identified mentor(s), will monitor the progress of the awardees toward achieving their specific goals throughout the award term and will encourage continued emphasis on clinical and basic research as they advance to leadership roles in their clinical and scientific careers. The mentor's role is to foster development of the applicant's knowledge, technical and analytical skills, and capacity for scientific inquiry in the field of human disease-oriented clinical and translational research.

## **Goals of Supported Research**

As indicated above, the goal of this award is to support the career development of **clinician-scientists** in the field of retinal degenerations. Recipients of these awards **must** be clinicians who currently care for patients with RDDs. In addition, they should develop independent research programs directed toward providing therapies for RDDs. Research programs can be clinical or laboratory-based and must address **one** (or **more**) of the **six** designated FFB Priority Research Program Areas that are listed and described below:

## Therapeutic Approaches

### 1. 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.

### 2. Regenerative Medicine (RM)

Develop strategies to rescue and, ultimately, replace dead retinal cells with cells capable of functional replacement (e.g., stem cells, retinal precursor cells), sufficient to restore lost vision.

### 3. Novel Medical Therapies (NMT)

Develop therapeutic molecules to retain retinal function and structure in retinal degenerative diseases; including the creation of improved animal models of human disease, better functional testing of drug efficacy and novel drug delivery systems.

## Basic Research

### 4. 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 preventions.

### 5. Cell and Molecular Mechanisms of Disease (CMM)

Improve 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.

## Clinical Research

### 6. Clinical: Structure and Function (CL)

Develop improved technology and standardized processes to establish relationships between clinical retina function and retina structure in retinal degenerative diseases and to enable early disease detection.

**N.B.: Applicants should select the appropriate therapeutic research category, e.g., RM, GT, NMT, for research proposals that focus on therapeutic intervention strategies**

## How to Apply

The Career Development Award application (and necessary forms) is located at: <http://www.fightingblindness.org>

**A complete application and supporting documentation must be submitted electronically** to the Science Department at [grants@fightingblindness.org](mailto:grants@fightingblindness.org) on or before **by 11:59 p.m. EST March 25, 2022**. The application and supporting documentation should be submitted as a text-accessible PDF file. FFB will confirm receipt by email.

**Use an Arial typeface and a font size of 11 points or larger.** (A Symbol font may be used to insert Greek letters or special characters; the font size requirement still applies.)

- Type density, including characters and spaces, must not exceed 15 characters per inch.
- Type may be no more than six lines per inch.
- Use standard letter size (8 ½" x 11") sheets of paper.
- Use at least one-half inch margins (top, bottom, left, and right) for all pages.
- All page limits specified refer to single-spaced format using the above formatting requirements.

The complete application should be assembled in the following order:

### **1. Application Cover Sheet-Face Page**

Please fill in all the required information on the provided forms and make sure all signatures are in place.

### **2. Nomination Letter From Institution**

A letter from the institution should: 1) identify the applicant as their nominee; 2) confirm the applicant's and mentor's academic appointments and address the applicant's status in securing a tenure-track position\*; 3) state the institution's willingness to support the applicant's research efforts and guarantee a significant amount of protected time for the applicant's research to fulfill the terms of the award; 4) address the institution's commitment to the development of the awardee as a clinical investigator; and, 5) detail the laboratory and office space allotted to the applicant.

*\* This appointment should not be contingent upon the applicant securing funding.*

### **3. Letter from Chair/Head of Department(s)**

A letter from the head/chair of the department(s) in which the applicant is appointed should confirm the department's willingness to support the candidate's research efforts and guarantee a significant amount of protected time for research required to fulfill the terms of the award.

### **4. Applicant's Letter**

The applicant's letter should outline the applicant's long-term vision and goals in the field of clinical career investigation and their future commitment to clinical/patient research.

### **5. Applicant's Curriculum Vitae**

This should include education and training information, research and professional experience, and a complete bibliography. The bibliography should be annotated to explain the applicant's role in the work reported in each paper. Comments should be limited to one sentence for each publication.

### **6. Applicant's Accomplishments**

The applicant should list and describe his/her three most important scientific/clinical accomplishments deemed most relevant to this award and its purpose.

### **7. Other Sources of Funding**

A list of all current and pending funding sources, including the specific aims of each grant and the degree of overlap with the applicant's proposal, should be provided.

Recipients of CDAs are not excluded from applying for the FFB-sponsored Individual Investigator Award and may act as Principal Investigators of new or existing modules of FFB Center Grants.

### **8. Mentor's Letter of Support**

The Mentor(s) should evaluate the applicant's qualifications for the proposed research project and assess their potential for successful independent research. The mentor(s) must guarantee that the awardee is under no obligation to any industrial ties or obligations the mentor may have.

### **9. Mentor's Biographical Sketch**

This should include a biographical sketch and bibliography of recent publications (not to exceed **two pages**). A list of pending and current funding should be included (not included in the page limit).

## **10. Research Proposal**

The research proposal must include two parts, as follows:

### **A. Mentor(s)' Proposal for Training (In Addition to Mentor's Letter)**

This should not exceed **five pages** of single spaced 11-point type or larger and must include a plan for how the mentor(s) will ensure the development of the candidate into an independent clinician-researcher. The mentor(s) must state the number of hours he/she will commit to the investigator's training each week. This part of the proposal should also describe any formal courses and training programs developed and offered by the sponsoring institution for the training of clinical investigators that would be included in the applicant's curriculum.

### **B. Applicant's Research Proposal**

The research proposal, including references, is **limited to ten pages of single spaced 11-point type** or larger and should concisely outline the aim(s) of the proposed research project(s), the significance of the research goals, the plan of research proposed and the experimental designs, strategies and methods to be used in the conduct of the research. This should also include, where applicable, biostatistical methods used for design and analysis.

The following items should be included in an Appendix:

1. Additional figures;
2. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals, if required (**do not include protocols**); and,
3. A biohazard/safety statement if applicable. The appendix is/is not included in the 10-page limit.

## **11. Letters of Reference**

**Three** letters of recommendation from qualified individuals best able to assess the applicant and their potential for conducting meaningful clinical research should be sent directly to FFB, by postal mail or a PDF copy via email, separate from the candidate's application package. These should include letters from qualified sources that can assess the applicant's professional experience in: medical school, residency program and/or fellowship training periods. The quality and depth of these letters will be pivotal in deciding the candidate's suitability.

---

### **KEY DATES:**

Application Receipt Date: **March 25, 2021**  
Earliest Anticipated Award Date: **August 2021**

### **FFB CONTACT FOR INQUIRIES**

Direct inquiries regarding the application and review process and required application components and forms to:

Amy M. Laster, Ph.D.  
Vice President Science & Awards Program  
The Foundation Fighting Blindness  
6990 Columbia Gateway Drive, Ste 250  
Columbia, Maryland 21046-3256 USA  
Tel: 410-423-0583, 1-800-683-5555  
Fax: 410-872-0574  
Email: [grants@fightingblindness.org](mailto:grants@fightingblindness.org)