

Access Advocates for Clinical Research Participation

2026 Funding Program and Request for Applications Overview

BACKGROUND

Inclusion in Parkinson's disease (PD) research strengthens science and helps ensure new therapies benefit everyone. Yet people from communities historically underrepresented in PD research (racial and ethnic minorities¹ as well as individuals with less education or lower socioeconomic status²) remain less likely to be approached, enrolled, and retained, limiting the generalizability of findings and slowing progress toward equitable care.

The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research (MJFF) and its inclusive recruitment strategy has examined what barriers and motivators shape participation (e.g., FIRE-UP PD study³) as well as funded sites to pilot tactics that address those barriers (e.g., Black & African American Connections to Parkinson's Disease study⁴). Now we aim to scale and validate approaches that show early promise by investing more deeply and measuring impact across settings.

This program will fund advocates at clinical sites to build practical, relationship-based pathways to improving representative research enrollment and retention. These support staff will help patients and care partners navigate health system complexity and everyday needs that often determine whether research participation is feasible. They will help address barriers such as transportation, caregiving responsibilities, language needs, and insurance and financial strains by connecting people to resources, coordinating logistics and providing consistent follow-up. These advocates also should discuss research participation opportunities with patients and connect them to recruiting studies.

The model is grounded in the idea that research participation is more feasible when (i) foundational practical needs are addressed first and (ii) raised by a trusted health care partner. By helping to reduce practical barriers, advocates are expected to increase screenings, enrollment conversion and retention across key trial milestones. This program will test these hypotheses and further establish training, infrastructure needs and sustainability of such positions.

¹ Aamodt WW, Willis AW, Dahodwala N. Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Parkinson Disease: A Call to Action. *Neurol Clin Pract*. 2023 Apr;13(2):e200138. doi: 10.1212/CPJ.0000000000200138. Epub 2023 Mar 16. PMID: 37064587; PMCID: PMC10101714.

² Kim JY, Florez M, Botto E, Belgrave X, Grace C, Getz K. The influence of socioeconomic status on individual attitudes and experience with clinical trials. *Commun Med (Lond)*. 2024 Sep 5;4(1):172. doi: 10.1038/s43856-024-00586-9. PMID: 39237734; PMCID: PMC11377822.

³ Ison JM, Jackson JD, Hemley H, Willis A, Siddiqi B, Macklin EA, Ulysse C, Fitts MS, Pham TT, Afshari M, Agarwal P, Aminoff M, Bissonnette S, Fullard M, Khan TS, Larson DN, Wielinski C, Sanchez AV. Fostering Inclusivity in Research Engagement for Underrepresented Populations in Parkinson's Disease: The FIRE-UP PD study. *Contemp Clin Trials*. 2024 Sep;144:107619. doi: 10.1016/j.cct.2024.107619. Epub 2024 Jul 5. PMID: 38971301.

⁴ Chahine LM, Louie N, Solle J, Akçimen F, Ameri A, Augenbraun S, Avripas S, Breaux S, Causey C, Chandra S, Dean M, Disbrow EA, Fanty L, Fernandez J, Foster ER, Furr Stimming E, Hall D, Hinson V, Johnson-Turbes A, Jonas C, Kilbane C, Norris SA, Nguyen BT, Padmanaban M, Paquette K, Parry C, Pessoa Rocha N, Rawls A, Shamim EA, Shulman LM, Sipma R, Staisch J, Traurig R, von Coelln R, Wild Crea P, Xie T, Fang ZH, O'Grady A, Kopil CM, McGuire Kuhl M, Singleton A, Blauwendraat C, Bandres-Ciga S; BLAAC PD Study and the Global Parkinson's Genetics Program (GP2). The Black and African American Connections to Parkinson's Disease (BLAAC PD) study protocol. *BMC Neurol*. 2024 Oct 21;24(1):403. doi: 10.1186/s12883-024-03914-7. PMID: 39434044; PMCID: PMC11492614.

PROGRAM GOAL

This Request for Applications (RFA) will support implementation and evaluation of a PD-focused Access Advocate model designed to increase inclusive research participation. MJFF anticipates awarding up to six awards for two-year projects at sites supporting high research volume.

This program aims to:

- Support establishment of site-based Access Advocates to support potential participants and care partners across multiple active or planned PD studies.
- Evaluate needs and opportunities for onboarding and ongoing training for advocates in PD and clinical research fundamentals as well as site and local resources.
- Recommend repeatable workflows for identifying prospective participants, assessing barriers, connecting them to resources, coordinating logistics and supporting follow-up.
- Collect and report a core set of evaluation metrics across sites (reach, encounters, referrals, screened, enrolled, retained), including barrier tracking and resolution.
- Evaluate the impact of Access Advocates in recruiting and retaining underrepresented community individuals to/in Parkinson's studies.
- Evaluate the impact of Access Advocates on "health system value" indicators (e.g., appointment adherence/show rates, medication access/adherence proxies) that could support funding sustainability from other sources.
- Establish a cross-site learning community that enables funded sites to share lessons, refine the Access Advocate model and inform broader adoption beyond the funding period.

PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

When considering proposals submitted to this RFA, MJFF will prioritize approaches that are practical to implement, can be evaluated with clear metrics and are likely to be scalable across clinical research sites. Proposals will be reviewed by MJFF staff; investigators with expertise in inclusive recruitment, community engagement and equity-centered evaluation; and people with Parkinson's disease.

Competitive proposals should address:

- **Site study volume and referral readiness:** Throughout the grant period, sites should be recruiting for multiple PD studies including interventional clinical trials. Sites must demonstrate established processes for engaging study referrals from outside study investigators' practice.
- **Population reach and community connections:** Describe demographics of the site's geographic catchment area and the site's Parkinson's population as well as your site's referral networks and community partnerships to engage underrepresented populations.
- **Advocate hiring plan:** The advocate may be a new hire or an existing staff member whose responsibilities will be formally allocated to this role through the award. The role should be designed for someone with strong communication and trust-building skills and with reliable follow-up and documentation practices. Familiarity with the local catchment area is a strong asset; bilingual capacity is strongly preferred if relevant. Applicants should provide an estimated timeline for filling this role.
- **Advocate role description and training plan:** Provide the proposed advocate's position description and reporting structure. Describe how the advocate can implement strategies to reduce the

patient/participant burden and care/research barriers. Applicants should describe training content, who will deliver it, timing and how completion will be documented.

- **Participant referral workflow:** Describe how the advocate will (i) identify prospective participants; (ii) refer to recruiting studies; (iii) assess needs and barriers; (iv) connect participants with resources and document follow-up; and (v) escalate urgent issues. Advocate activities should be primarily clinic-connected; community-facing outreach may be included if feasible and justified but is not required.
- **Evaluation and collaboration:** Describe how the research team will track participation pipeline metrics as well as barrier tracking and resolution. (See details below.) MJFF will provide an evaluation template for regular progress reports. Sites must be willing to participate in cross-site convenings and contribute to the synthesis of lessons learned for field-facing recommendations. MJFF expects learnings from this program to be published in open-access journals.
- **Sustainability:** As this funding is limited to 24 months, we encourage data collection that could support future case making to other funding sources. List site-relevant value indicators and potential funders and local stakeholders (e.g., clinic leadership, operations, finance) to support continuation after the award period.

MJFF will NOT consider proposals from clinics:

- Outside of the US and Canada
- Without active or planned interventional PD clinical trials
- Proposing a model centered primarily on broad community outreach rather than clinic and trial connected access advocacy.

Measurement Expectations:

This program is an implementation and learning initiative. Sites should propose a feasible plan to report baseline (pre-award/historical) and during-award metrics. MJFF will use this data to monitor progress and compare patterns across sites.

- **Advocacy interactions:** number of advocate encounters, demographics of patients, how patients sourced, length and type (e.g., in-person, telephone call) of interactions
- **Advocate services:** barriers surfaced (e.g., transportation, time, financial constraints, caregiving, language, digital access) and whether/how they were resolved; impact on care and research participation
- **Research engagement:** study referrals, screens, enrollments and retention rates (with participant demographics) from Access Advocates
- **Site-relevant value indicators:** secondary outcomes from advocate services (e.g., reduced missed appointments, fewer emergency room visits)

While not required, some sites may choose to introduce a pre-/post-advocate services patient and care partner survey to assess perceptions and knowledge shift (e.g., confidence navigating care/research, information access, willingness to participate/continue in research).

FUNDING OVERVIEW

Award Amount: \$200,000

Grant Duration: 24 months

- MJFF will fund up to six clinics with \$200,000 each over a two-year period. Funds may be used for reasonable costs necessary to implement and evaluate the Access Advocate model, including advocate personnel costs (salary support and benefits), supervision/management, training and implementation activities, and evaluation and reporting activities (including travel costs for participation in MJFF cross-site learning activities).
- These funds may cover indirect costs. For academic and for-profit institutions, no more than 15% or 10%, respectively, may go to indirect costs. Additional details about MJFF's indirect cost policy can be found in our [Team and Budget Guidelines](#).
- Award funds are not intended to cover direct clinical care (billable medical services), equipment or activities unrelated to the aims of this program.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Research Team Grid:

- Allowable roles are Principal Investigator and Paid Collaborators.
- The Principal Investigator (PI) is the person who is applying for the grant on behalf of the clinic. They will be overseeing the project and should have the appropriate level of authority and responsibility to direct the grant, including the ability to sign a contract with MJFF should the proposal be selected for funding. The advocate's supervisor may serve as the PI; the advocate may not serve as the PI.
- Paid Collaborators may include the advocate's supervisor (if different than the PI), training staff and an evaluation/data collaborator (as needed).
- Collaborating and subaward institutions are not applicable to this RFA. The only institution on the application should be the primary institution that is applying.

MJFF aims to support a rigorous research agenda reflecting a wide and diverse range of perspectives on Parkinson's disease and carried out in diverse populations. As such, the Foundation encourages applications from diverse investigators representing groups historically underrepresented in the research enterprise.

Required Documents and Fields:

- We require a **full proposal using the MJFF template**, which can be found in the application in the grant portal.
- Please upload a **biosketch in NIH format for only the PI** on the Research Team Grid under the "Team Information" tab.
- Under the "Attachments" tab, you will see an "Upload" button next to your institution. The documents listed in the upload pop-up window are not required for this funding program, however you are welcome to upload a W8/ W9 and bank letter from your institution at this stage. Should your application

be selected to receive funding, we will require these documents so uploading them at this stage will expedite the process later.

- A **line-item budget is not required for this funding program**. If selected for funding, grantees will be asked to submit expense reports during and at the end of the grant period.
- Please upload a **Letter of Support from your institution** to the “Full Proposal Other Attachments” section under the “Project Proposal Template” tab.
- Please fill out the “Other Funding Sources” field under the “Project Proposal Template” tab.

DEADLINES & REVIEW SCHEDULE

This RFA will have a single submission and review stage:

- **Program Launch:** April 8, 2026
- **Full Proposals Due:** June 16, 2026, 5 p.m. E.T.
- **Anticipated Award Announcement:** Week of September 28, 2026

Applicants are encouraged to apply early to allow adequate time to correct errors found during the submission process.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The [Application Guidelines](#) provide general guidance on applying for funding from MJFF, though the RFA always supersedes information contained in the Application Guidelines.

MJFF has an [Open Science Policy](#) that governs research outputs (such as preprints, journal articles, data, code and software) resulting from MJFF-funded work. This policy includes specific rules, timing and format for the return of those research outputs and requires them to be shared openly, to be free to access, and with persistent identifiers.

Grantees are required to provide proof of compliance with this policy (i.e., providing a link to the data in an open repository no later than submission of the first journal manuscript based on the data), and future funding will be contingent upon adherence. Please refer to the link above for more detailed information or contact openscience@michaeljfox.org.

For questions about the adaptive application process or project suitability for this call for applications, please email grants@michaeljfox.org.

Thank you for your interest in collaborating with MJFF and your commitment to the Parkinson's community.