

**2021 CORE FUNDING PROGRAMS
TARGET ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM
AN EDMOND J. SAFRA CORE PROGRAM FOR PD RESEARCH**

BACKGROUND

Parkinson's disease (PD) affects nearly 1 million people in the US and over 6 million worldwide, and those numbers are expected to rise over the coming decades. PD is highly heterogeneous: individuals experience a wide array of motor and non-motor symptoms, many of which depend on disease severity and duration. Though our understanding of PD and its causes is growing, many questions remain. There are no drugs available for Parkinson's that alter the progression of the disease, and current symptomatic treatments provide limited relief but come with complications and side effects.

The Michael J. Fox Foundation (MJFF) funds research to better define, measure, and treat Parkinson's disease as well as critical tools and other resources to advance that research. The purpose of this Request for Applications (RFA) is to leverage and translate basic research to enable therapeutic development. To this end, MJFF believes that promoting early-stage target validation studies within academic and industry laboratories can bridge the critical gap between basic biology and therapeutic development.

DEADLINES & REVIEW SCHEDULE

- Pre-proposals Due: October 22nd, 2020, 5 p.m. US ET
- Full Proposal Invitations: December 21, 2020
- Full Proposals Due (by invite only): March 18, 2021, 5 p.m. US ET
- Anticipated Award Announcement: Week of May 31, 2021
- Anticipated Funding: July 2021

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

FUNDING AVAILABLE

Duration: 18 to 24 months

Award Amount: Up to \$150,000. Requested support should be commensurate with work proposed. These budgets include direct and 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 the [Application Guidelines](#) and [FAQ](#).

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Applications may be submitted by researchers or clinicians in:

- U.S. and non-U.S. biotechnology/pharmaceutical companies, or other publicly or privately held for-profit entities; and
- U.S. and non-U.S. public and private non-profit entities, such as universities, colleges, hospitals, laboratories, units of state and local governments and eligible agencies of the federal government.
- Post-doctoral fellows are eligible to apply as co-investigators with the designation of an administrative primary investigator who directs the laboratory in which the fellow will conduct research. The administrative co-PI will be responsible for assisting in providing all institutional documents required for the project and will be required to sign any award contract. Training or mentoring-only proposals will not be considered.

PROGRAM GOAL

The Target Advancement Program seeks to build conclusive evidence around early-stage biological targets in Parkinson's Disease (PD) to rationalize the initiation of future pre-clinical therapeutic programs focused on those targets. Funding will support projects to validate early-stage targets previously implicated in PD pathophysiology and/or symptomology but that have not yet been rigorously investigated for their ability to impact disease-relevant outcomes in PD model systems.

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Applications should focus on studies that achieve one or more of the following:

- Demonstrate that genetic/pharmacological modulation of target expression/activity in appropriate model systems (human cellular or *in vivo* mammalian) affects biological pathways relevant to PD pathogenesis and/or yields outcomes predictive of therapeutic efficacy.
- Confirm the relevance of an early-stage target by studying its altered expression, distribution, or pathological function in human PD tissues.
- Replicate or further validate recently published, high-impact findings in PD target validation biology that could increase confidence in starting new therapeutic translational programs.

When considering proposed targets submitted to this program, MJFF prioritizes those that:

- Have existing human genetic or clinical data linking the target to PD and/or that have preliminary data showing altered expression or function of the target in PD-relevant human tissue or biofluids.
- Emphasize use of established experimental model systems with high construct validity for human PD, such as exhibiting clear, measurable altered expression or function of the target and/or mechanism of interest.
- Propose use of robust methods (well established by the applicant) for genetic or pharmacological modulation of the target in experimental model systems, including demonstration that methods are specific and capable of engaging the target in the tissue of interest.

For this round, MJFF **will not consider** proposals focused on the following:

- Validation of well-known targets, including alpha-synuclein, LRRK2, GBA and Parkin/PINK1 given significant current investments MJFF is already making in these areas.
- Applications proposing discovery studies to identify new targets (e.g., large-scale screening or genomic/transcriptomic analyses).

BIOSPECIMEN REQUESTS

Applicants may propose studies designed to assess PD targets in pre-clinical models, human cellular models, and human tissue and fluids. Investigators are encouraged to leverage existing tissue and biosample resources if possible. Studies requesting access to biosamples available through MJFF-sponsored biospecimen and cell line collections are eligible to apply to this initiative. In these cases, access to samples will be reviewed in parallel to funding requests by the committees overseeing the biospecimen collection(s) requested. To review MJFF's available biospecimen collections, please consult the MJFF biorepository [website](#) and [biorepository inventory catalogue](#). Groups requesting access to samples only (without funding) should contact resources@michaeljfox.org.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Our [Application Guidelines](#) provide general guidance about applying for funding from MJFF, though the RFA always supersedes information contained in the Application Guidelines. Please note that MJFF updated our publication and indirect costs policies in early 2020. The new [open access publication policy](#) requires articles resulting from MJFF-funded work publish in a preprint repository then in an open access forum with free and immediate readership rights.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

In pursuit of our mission to accelerate the development of better treatments and a cure for Parkinson's disease, 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. Diversity may refer to characteristics including, but not limited to, race, religion, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic circumstance, nationality, geographic background, ability and disability, political ideology, and age. Parkinson's is a complex problem; the more angles from which we attack, the greater the chances of finding innovative scientific solutions to benefit everyone living with the disease. As such:

- The Foundation encourages applications from diverse investigators representing groups historically underrepresented in the research enterprise.
- Because research shows that diverse teams outperform homogeneous ones, we urge applicants to share information about the composition of the team that will carry out the funded work.

INFORMATIONAL WEBINAR

MJFF will host an informational webinar on September 3, 2020, at 12 p.m. ET to clarify and explain the goals of our funding opportunities and answer applicant questions. The webinar will be available to view on-demand after the live airdate. [Register now.](#)