



MIND & LIFE
INSTITUTE

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Mind and Life Contemplative Studies Fellowship

The Mind & Life Institute, with funding from The John Templeton Foundation, invites Contemplative Studies Fellowship grant applications that propose to bring fresh perspectives from the humanities into contemplative neuroscience and contemplative clinical science, including but not limited to research on Buddhist contemplative practice. One-year grants will be awarded to successful applicants holding Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor (or equivalent) rank at their academic institution. Fellowship grants will be awarded in line with American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) guidelines based on academic Rank:

- \$60,000 for Full Professor and equivalent
- \$40,000 for Associate Professor and equivalent
- \$35,000 for Assistant Professor and equivalent

Additionally, successful applicants are expected to document their eligibility for matching funds from their respective institutions (e.g., through additional teaching release or sabbatical leave).

Mind and Life Contemplative Studies Fellowship (MLCSF) applicants are required to show how their research strategy and subject matter engage with neuroscientific or clinical studies of contemplative experience.

The MLCSF grant program will have **two complementary strands**:

Strand one will focus on encouraging new kinds of scholarly reviews and critical analyses of recent scientific work, with the goals of raising new questions, improving methods, and drawing out broader implications of the scientific work.

Strand two will focus on facilitating new kinds of active partnerships between humanistic scholars and laboratory scientists, with the goals of developing new interdisciplinary methods and a richer approach to the questions at hand.

Under each of these two headings, we seek applications to fund projects of three specific types:

Strand one:

Philosophical projects: These will be proposed projects that involve normative analyses of the methodological and conceptual assumptions of contemplative neuroscience and clinical science, with the goal of advancing the science. All successful proposals will be organized around specific

big questions. Examples of appropriate questions include:

1. To what extent do existing empirical paradigms used in the laboratory remain inadequate to account for the complexity and experiential richness of contemplative cognitive and affective states, and of contemplative practices?
2. In what ways do or can first-person reports of phenomenological states associated with contemplative states change, enhance, transform, or detract from the scientific study of these states?
3. In what ways does focusing on the neural correlates of contemplative states and practices lead researchers to overlook other important areas for research, such as the implications for these practices on somatic well being, social well-being, or on insights into the nature of Ultimate Reality.

Sociological/Anthropological projects: These will be projects that involve analysis of the contexts in which contemplative neuroscience and clinical science are currently unfolding, with the goal of advancing the ability of researchers to engage skillfully with the broader public and to advance their work within the academy. Examples of appropriate questions include:

1. What effects do media reporting have on the way in which the public understands the science of contemplative practice and what approaches by the media might optimize the role of science to question, test, and synthesize from verifiable data? How can this change the structure and consequences of these practices?
2. How might scientific research on contemplative practice change the ways in which both secular and religious communities promote their respective goals, such as personal spiritual development and/or the enhancement of others rather than self?
3. What are the legitimate bases for skepticism in the academy regarding “contemplative science” and to what degree can scientific objectivity contribute to greater credibility for contemplative science in an open-minded framework for individual participation?

Normative projects: These will be projects that involve normative analysis of issues raised by current contemplative neuroscience and clinical science, with the goal of ensuring the most beneficial impact of the scientific work. All successful proposals should be organized around specific concerns and aim to offer constructive interventions. Examples of appropriate questions include:

1. Does an over- emphasis on the brain-basis of contemplative experience lead to a limiting of the potential horizons of the cognitive and experiential states that are distinctive of contemplative experience including enlarging latent potentialities for creativity and discovery?
2. Does the current focus on the health benefits of contemplative practice risk distorting the spiritual dimensions of complete practices?

Strand two:

Field-based projects: These will be projects in which field-based empirical methods from the social sciences are used to test, build on, or develop counter-hypotheses to specific claims being made in the laboratory. Focus will be on projects whose results are most likely to be of interest

to laboratory scientists as well as other social scientists and humanists, and to advance collective knowledge about the nature and effects of contemplative practice. Questions might include:

1. How do or can objective field-based tests complement, enhance, or potentially raise new questions regarding laboratory-based findings?
2. Can field-based projects involving models targeting self and/or others do a better job at understanding the nature, effects, and religious implications of contemplative practice on specific populations and in specific settings?

Laboratory-based projects: These will be projects in which humanists work closely with scientists in developing new kinds of laboratory protocols that reflect a deep cultural understanding of the tradition being studied. Such projects might address the following questions:

1. Can knowledge from the religious textual traditions be tested in the laboratory?
2. How can a particular practice as understood and used by people in the real world be translated into laboratory protocols that are more ecologically effective in blunting or eliminating surrounding distractions?

Interdisciplinary team-based projects: These will be projects in which small teams of humanists and psychologists or other behavioral scientists are developing methodologically innovative ways to address specific big questions raised by contemplative training and practice. Examples of appropriate questions include:

1. How can contemplative mental training and practice contribute to our understanding free will and agency?
2. What is the relevance of contemplative experience for understanding both the nature of the self and personal identity and/or the self in relation to a wide spectrum of “others”?

MLCSF recipients will be required to attend the Mind & Life Summer Research Institute (MLSRI), and recipients at more advanced stages of their research may be invited to deliver MLSRI plenary lectures or lead break-out workshops and discussion groups based on their research. Likewise, MLCSF recipients will form a pool of scholars who can serve as plenary speakers at other MLI events that are intended to generate further interest and investment in Contemplative Studies (e.g., The International Symposia for Contemplative Studies, presently being planned for the spring of 2012 and intended as a recurring major conference). MLCSF recipients will be expected to publish the results of their work in peer-reviewed books and/or journal articles, and to make presentations at scholarly conferences in their relevant fields. It is also expected that these Fellowships will lead to applications for follow-on funding from other sources following completion of the fellowship work. MLCSF recipients will be required to provide annual reports detailing publications, presentations, other products that disseminate their research findings, and follow-on grant proposals, for a period of three years following MLCSF awards.