REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The Mind & Life Institute is seeking applications for the Mind & Life Francisco J. Varela Grants for Contemplative Sciences Research (Varela Grants). The Varela Grants are an integral component of Mind & Life’s support of contemplative sciences—a growing field that aims to investigate contemplative practices through research in diverse disciplines ranging from basic and clinical sciences to social sciences and the humanities. Beginning in 2004 and named for one of Mind & Life’s co-founders, neuroscientist Francisco J. Varela (1946–2001), these grants of up to $15,000 are awarded annually to developing scientists and scholars who have recently attended the Mind & Life Summer Research Institute.

Francisco J. Varela believed that contemplative training offers us novel methods for investigating human experience. He also believed that the embodied, phenomenological perspective can best provide insight into the nature of the human mind. In his vision, contemplative training not only provides a new domain for scientific study, but more importantly offers resources for advancing scientific theories and models of consciousness, emotion and cognitive processing. For example, empirical examinations of contemplative techniques can be applied to emotion regulation, attention, working memory, and associated neural plasticity; such research can greatly contribute to our understanding of the neural substrates underlying these processes and their development. Furthermore, while contemplative practices are being used increasingly in mainstream real-world settings, much remains to be learned regarding the physiological and subjective correlates of these practices, the relationship between the elements of contemplative interventions and desired outcomes, and differences in outcomes across populations and contexts. In all of these areas, contributions from the humanities and social sciences are invaluable in providing contextual grounding for the study of these practices.

The Varela Grants fund rigorous examinations of contemplative techniques with the ultimate goal that findings derived from such investigations will provide greater insight into contemplative practices and their application for reducing human suffering and promoting flourishing. Mind & Life views the Varela Grants as an essential feature of its overall strategy of building an interdisciplinary understanding of the mind and human behavior. These grants are a key vehicle for increasing the number of exemplary scientists, scholars and clinicians involved in contemplative sciences. Strong proposals will meet the highest standards of rigor in the applicant’s field of expertise. Furthermore, preference will be given to interdisciplinary studies that
incorporate first-person contemplative methods (e.g., introspective investigation and reports on subjective experience) into traditional cognitive, behavioral, physiological, clinical, or socio-cultural research. This grants program also encourages the active collaboration of researchers with contemplative scholars/practitioners in all phases of investigation.

GRANT INFORMATION

Grants of up to $15,000 (USD) are awarded annually through a competitive application and selection process. Proposed research should be completed within a 2-year period, and annual progress reports are required for grantees to remain in good standing. It is expected that the completion of proposed research will result in a peer-reviewed publication (scientific journal article or book/book chapter) and scholarly presentation at professional conference.

Applications are reviewed and selected based on the following criteria:

- **Significance and Impact**: project addresses an important issue related to mechanisms, outcomes, or assessment of contemplative practices, and has potential to lead to advancement in the field of contemplative research
- **Innovation/Novelty**: project offers something new or challenges existing paradigms, either conceptually or methodologically or both
- **Methodological Approach/Design**: design, methods, and analyses are adequately developed, rigorous, well-integrated, and appropriate to the aims of the project
- **Investigator(s)**: principal investigator(s) appropriately trained and capable of coordinating and managing the proposed research, with high likelihood of success and future contribution to the field, appropriate research team with complementary expertise
- **Research Environment**: sufficient access to resources to carry out the research questions, project will be supported and advanced by institutional research community

Transparency and Openness Promotion (TOP)

Published in *Science in 2015*, the TOP guidelines outline best practices in scholarly research to promote transparency and openness. Mind & Life is committed to supporting these goals for the projects we fund. The guidelines here (https://www.mindandlife.org/grants-overview/top-guidelines) represent the policies of the Mind & Life Institute for the various topics listed. Please read these policies carefully and consider how you will integrate them into your proposed work. All Mind & Life Institute grantees are expected to follow these guidelines in their funded research projects.

Eligibility

To be eligible for a Varela Grant, the applicant must have attended the Mind & Life Summer Research Institute within the last five years (i.e., for 2017 applications, one must have attended a Summer Research Institute in 2013 or later). This program is intended as a career development grant, and is open to graduate students and post-doctoral fellows currently affiliated with a research institution, and junior faculty up to their third year of university appointment.
Applicants may not be actively funded through any Mind & Life research grant. Current Mind & Life grantees must submit a final report and budget reconciliation for existing grants before applying for a new grant. This policy applies both within and across Mind & Life research grant programs (Think Tanks do not apply). Note that we do not allow two separate proposals for the same program in a given cycle from the same applicant, or from different applicants for two aspects of the same project.

Application Information

Varela Grant funds may not be used for PI (or Co-PI) salary/indirect costs or institutional administrative fees. Please see the FAQ at the bottom of the Varela Grants webpage for answers to common application questions. To apply, please submit the following materials by September 30, 2017 through the online application:

- Research Proposal, including:
  - Title
  - Lay Summary (200 words maximum)
  - Aims and Objectives (250 words maximum)
  - Background and Significance (500 words maximum)
  - Design and Methods (1000 words maximum)
  - Expected Findings/Hypotheses (150 words maximum)
  - References
- Other project information, including short statements on:
  - IRB approval status
  - TOP Guidelines information (statements on data sharing and preregistration)
  - Project Timeline
  - Output (manuscript(s), book, etc.)
  - Relevance to goals of the grants program
  - Impact to field of contemplative sciences
  - Novelty
  - Potential of PI
  - Research Environment/Resources
- Research team (optional)
- Applicant’s and study team members’ biosketches (NIH biosketch style preferred, click here for sample)
- Detailed budget (funds may only be used for direct research costs; they may not be used for salary support or indirect costs including overhead and administration – see FAQ at bottom of Varela Grants webpage for details)
- Two letters of recommendation. Letters should speak to the ability of the applicant to perform the proposed research, and the potential of the applicant to contribute to the field of contemplative science.

Grantees are publicly announced every December. For more details, please visit www.mindandlife.org/varela-grants, or email VarelaGrants@mindandlife.org with specific questions.