REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The Mind & Life Institute is seeking applications for the Mind and Life Francisco J. Varela Awards for Contemplative Research (Varela Awards). The Varela Awards are an integral component of Mind and Life’s support of the growing field of contemplative studies. Beginning in 2004 and named for one of Mind and Life’s co-founders, neuroscientist Francisco J. Varela (1946–2001), these grants of up to $15,000 are awarded annually to scholars who have recently attended the Summer Research Institute.

Francisco J. Varela believed that contemplative training offers cognitive science novel methods for investigating human experience. He also believed that the embodied, phenomenological perspective can best provide insight into the nature of the mind, reducing our tendency to dwell in the abstract with all of its habits and preconceptions. 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, contemplative practices are being used increasingly in clinical and educational settings, yet much remains to be learned regarding the relationship between the elements of contemplative practices comprising these interventions and desired outcomes. In all of these areas, contributions from the humanities can offer valuable contextual grounding for the study of these practices and their theoretical underpinnings.

The Varela Awards emphasize empirical examinations of contemplative techniques with the ultimate goal that findings derived from such investigations will provide greater insight into the mechanisms of contemplative practice and its application for reducing human suffering. Varela Awards applicants should therefore indicate how the proposed research on contemplative experience will address outstanding theoretical and empirical issues relating to the study of the mind in their respective fields of research.
Examples of possible research questions include, but are not limited to:

1. How can we begin to understand the impact of contextual factors—social, cultural, environmental, physiological, and developmental—on contemplative practice and its effects?
2. Does contemplative practice change the structure and/or function of the human brain, and do these changes relate to subjective or clinical benefits?
3. How can contemplative science contribute to debates surrounding the relationship of the mind and brain, for example regarding the nature of consciousness?
4. Does contemplative practice influence pro-social behavior such as altruism, forgiveness, hope, and generosity?
5. What new methods and conceptual frameworks can be developed to help us better understand the mind and brain, and/or the subjective experience of contemplative practice and its long-term effects?

Mind and Life views the Varela Awards as an essential feature of its overall strategy of building an interdisciplinary understanding of the mind. These awards are a key vehicle for increasing the number of first-rate scientists, scholars and clinicians involved in the emerging field of contemplative studies. Preference is given to proposals using rigorous experimental designs (e.g., active controls, longitudinal measures) that incorporate first-person contemplative methods (e.g., introspective investigation and reports on subjective experience) into traditional cognitive, behavioral, and clinical measures. This grant program also encourages the active collaboration of scientists with contemplative scholars/practitioners in all phases of research. The overall purpose of the Varela Awards is to promote the interdisciplinary study of the mind with the goal of relieving human suffering and positively impacting society.

AWARD INFORMATION

Grants of up to $15,000 (USD) are awarded annually through a competitive application and selection process. Applications are reviewed and selected based on five criteria: significance to the field, approach/design, innovation/novelty, quality of the applicant and likelihood of success, and strength of academic environment. Proposed research should be completed within a 2-year period, and annual progress reports are required for awardees to remain in good standing. It is expected that the completion of proposed research will result in the submission of findings to a peer-reviewed scientific journal and/or conference. **To be eligible for a Varela Award, the applicant must have attended the Mind and Life Summer Research Institute within the last five years** (i.e., for 2016 applications, one must have attended a Summer Research Institute in 2012 or later). This grant is intended as a career development award, 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 appointment**.

Varela award funds may not be used for indirect costs, institutional administrative fees, or overhead. Please see the FAQ at the bottom of the [Varela Awards webpage](http://www.mindandlife.org/varela-awards) for answers to common application questions.
To apply, please submit the following materials between September 2 and September 30, 2016 through the online application:

- Application Form
- Research Proposal (2-3 pages, single-spaced, 1200 words maximum), including:
  - Title
  - Brief Background and Significance
  - Methods
  - Expected Findings
  - References (not included in page limit)
- Abstract (200 words maximum)
- Applicant’s current CV (no specific style is required)
- Detailed budget (awards may only be used for research costs; they may not be used for salary, personnel, or indirect costs including overhead and administration – see FAQ at the bottom of the Varela Awards webpage for details)
- Two letters of recommendation, which can be emailed separately or submitted with the online application. Letters should speak to the ability of the applicant to perform the proposed research, and the potential of the applicant to contribute to the growing field of contemplative research.

*Proposals are accepted between September 2 and September 30, 2016 and awardees are announced in December 2016. For more details, please visit [www.mindandlife.org](http://www.mindandlife.org), or email VarelaAwards@mindandlife.org with specific questions.*