

The John Templeton Foundation: “The Science of Purpose” Initiative

Unrestricted funding opportunity

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Website: <https://www.templeton.org/internal-competiton-fund/purpose-initiative>
Submission Limitations: none
Foundation Deadline: Letters of Intent are due by **October 31, 2020**

Please contact Tiffany Worboy if you intend to submit.

Ancient philosophers such as Aristotle viewed living things as pursuing various ends or goals. Today, our mainstream biological sciences seldom use such concepts in their explanatory theories, though biologists often use descriptive language that imputes purposiveness to living systems and some scholars have expressed dissatisfaction with the neglect of goal-directed processes in an otherwise comprehensive theoretical framework. Life itself seems to make use of a variety of strategies that achieve its purposes, and a number of natural phenomena are puzzlingly difficult to describe or account for without the use of purposive language.

Is it time to resuscitate purposiveness in biology? In what ways might purpose-related concepts be useful or even necessary for scientific research into artificial intelligence, origin of life, development, macroevolution trends, ecology, and other areas? How might greater attentiveness to purposive categories such as goal-directedness, agency, and directionality, catalyze novel theory development and scientific discoveries?

The Foundation has allocated over \$20 million to the [Science of Purpose](#) funding priority over the next five years.

- **In this initiative, we seek to identify and fund the development of novel theoretical, philosophical, or scientific concepts useful for advancing the study of goal-directed, goal-seeking, or goal-suited phenomena in nature.**

The Foundation is interested in a range of topics and disciplinary fields from chemistry to the biological sciences. Potential applicants are encouraged to explore nine strands of research below. Each link opens a unique set of questions that are illustrative of the kinds of concepts or phenomena this funding priority seeks to support. Agency, commonalities, development, life, macroevolution, matter, mechanisms, models and organization.

[AGENCY](#)

[LIFE](#)

[MECHANISMS](#)

[COMMONALITIES](#)

[MACROEVOLUTION](#)

[MODELS](#)

[DEVELOPMENT](#)

[MATTER](#)

[ORGANIZATION](#)

Submission

The Science of Purpose Funding Initiative has a two-stage funding process, the first stage of which is submitting a preliminary application.

Each link above contains an application form with specific instructions for submission. We encourage applicants to submit as many project ideas as are of interest. Submissions will be reviewed by a panel of referees comprised of scientists and philosophers and Foundation staff.

All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their initial application by November 30th using the email address provided in the application. Successful applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal to the

Foundation no later than February 1, 2021. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their full proposal review and decisioning by June 21, 2021.

Eligibility

This funding competition is open to researchers worldwide who hold a doctoral-level degree or equivalent at the time of application. **We are giving special emphasis to young scholars at this stage of our funding.** This funding competition is unique from the Templeton Ideas Challenge, and previous entrants to the Ideas Challenge may apply for funding of their project idea through this initiative.