



**Request for Proposals
The Pathways to Character Project
Fellowship Announcement**

We welcome proposals for the “Pathways to Character” funding initiative. This initiative aims to support young scholars working on the study of whether and how character growth is possible following adversity, challenge or failure. Such scholars often have new and interesting ideas but have not yet benefitted from traditional funding sources. Thus, we would give preference to proposals from PIs who are within ten years of receiving their Ph.D. However, more senior investigators can also be included on proposals as co-investigators or in other roles. We envision applicants from personality, social, clinical, and developmental psychology in particular (but possibly other subfields as well) who are specifically interested in the psychological nature of character growth following adversity, challenge or failure. Interdisciplinary teams of psychologists working with faculty in other disciplines, especially philosophy or theology, are encouraged (but such proposals are not required).

Request for Proposal Description

Project Leaders: Frank J. Infurna (Arizona State University) and Eranda Jayawickreme (Wake Forest University)

This \$2 million Request for Proposals (RFP) is aimed at empirical studies designed to focus on accurately conceptualizing and prospectively assessing growth in character strengths and virtues following adversity, challenge or failure. Proposals can request up to \$250,000 (or \$300,000 for multi-site projects) in total costs for projects not to exceed two years in duration. We expect to make 10 awards.

We invite proposals for innovative and conceptually relevant research projects that focus on the following Big Questions.

- Is character growth following adversity, challenge, or failure possible?
- Can we accurately conceptualize and prospectively assess character growth following adversity, challenge or failure and if so, how?

Background

A cultural narrative has emerged in the past five years that suggests exposure to adversity could – and in certain cases *should* – lead to personal growth. From Paul Tough’s popular New York Times magazine article, “What if the secret to success is failure?” to Jessica Lahey’s recent book “The gift of failure,” many people are now encouraged to embrace failure and the potential for positive downstream effects. This thinking is also reflected in Friedrich Nietzsche’s famous quote, “From life’s school of war: What does not kill me makes me stronger.” Embedded within these cultural narratives and statements is the notion that adversities that individuals encounter over the course of their lives can lead to the strengthening of character and virtue development. These narratives have found some support in recent research on the phenomenon of post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) Yet, despite the promise of adversity potentially leading to meaningful character growth, a significant limitation with this line of thinking is that it lacks robust empirical evidence of support (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014). An overwhelming number of the studies examining post-traumatic growth have been cross-sectional or used research designs with retrospective self-perceived assessment. Additionally, while research on the structure and development of character as well as specific character strengths and virtues has grown significantly in the last fifteen years (Fleeson et al., 2014), relatively little is still known about how specific character strengths and virtues may respond to and potentially grow in the wake of adversity, challenge or failure. We are particularly interested in funding research projects that will use prospective longitudinal research designs to examine whether individuals are capable of showing lasting improvements (i.e. growth) in specific character strengths and virtues following adversity, challenge, or failure.

In an effort to move what we believe to be a promising field forward, through the generous financial support from The John Templeton Foundation, the Pathways to Character Project, led by Frank J. Infurna and Eranda Jayawickreme, will award a total of \$2 million in grants to support the execution of 2-year research projects that focus on examining the extent to which growth in character strengths and virtues following adversity, challenge or failure is possible.

The current Request for Proposals is particularly interested in the promoting interest in the following research areas:

- 1) We are interested in the question of whether character growth is possible through the experience of adversity, challenge or failure among *adult* populations (that is, populations aged 18 and older). We do not anticipate funding proposals that focus on younger populations.
- 2) We speculate that altruism, humility, gratitude, relatedness/empathy, spirituality and open-mindedness may be key character strengths and virtues that are implicated in character growth through adversity, challenge or failure, and we are particularly interested in projects that focus on these virtues. We would be open to projects that explore other character strengths and virtues in relation to adversity, challenge and failure, but the researchers would have to justify their selection in their LOI and full proposal (if invited). Part of our interest in these specific character strengths and virtues is that while the last few years have seen an increased interest in the scientific assessment and exploration of

character strengths and virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; McGrath, 2015), little is known about the developmental trajectory of such strengths and virtues, and the possible role that adversity may have in acting as a catalyst for change. Conceptual work points to these character strengths and virtues being most likely to be sensitive to grow following the experience of adversity, challenge and failure (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2016; Tiberius, 2008). To ensure convergence across research projects, The Pathways to Character Project website, www.pathwaystocharacter.org, will list the recommended use of well-validated scales that should be incorporated into potential research projects. We acknowledge that applicants who are primarily focused on secondary data analysis in their projects may not be able to follow these recommendations, but they should then make a case for the scales they will be utilizing. We will not consider proposals that *primarily* focus on subjective well-being and mental health outcomes.

- 3) Given the current measurement challenges related to post-traumatic growth (Frazier et al., 2009; Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014), we are particularly interested in projects focusing on the *prospective* assessment of character growth following adversity, challenge or failure, as we noted earlier. For example, past research has not clearly distinguished between the constructs of post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014) and benefit finding (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998; Frazier, Tennen, & Meredith, 2016). Furthermore, previous research on post-traumatic growth has overwhelmingly relied on the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), a retrospective self-assessment that is frequently used in cross-sectional studies. Retrospective reports have numerous limitations, with the most notable being biasing one's ability to correctly recall whether growth indeed transpired across those domains (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014). Therefore, we are interested in research projects that use a prospective longitudinal research design to examine the extent to which character growth following adversity, challenge, or failure is possible. To provide another example, little research has focused on the role that life narratives may play in accurately capturing character change (Adler et al., 2015). We therefore expect LOIs and full proposals (if selected) to clearly define the constructs they intend to assess in their research project, as well as justify the research design through which the assessments will be used to test these constructs.
- 4) The research literature offers conflicting accounts of whether clinical trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) or acute-onset and lifetime stressors (Seery, Holman, & Silver, 2010) are more likely to result in character growth. We are therefore open to proposals that explore different types of adversities as defined in the literature, including daily stressors (e.g., challenges at home or work), adverse life events (e.g., bereavement, unemployment), chronic stressors (e.g., living with significant illness) and clinical trauma (e.g., being involved in a major accident). We ask that researchers defend their choice of "adversity" that they plan to examine in their proposal. Specifically, we expect LOIs and full proposals (if invited) to include an explanation of why they expect their target "adversity" to lead to an enduring change in an individual's life circumstance and character strengths and virtues.

We expect to award up to 10 research projects, with the maximum requested in total costs for each research project being \$250,000 for the length of two years. Multi-site proposals may apply for up to \$300,000. Examples of a multi-site proposal would be projects that involve data collection involving the coordination of research teams at different universities or studies involving multiple geographic sites with specific populations. We envision awarding two types of proposals. Smaller research projects with budgets up to \$120,000 in total costs that will be aimed at projects centered on secondary data analyses and conceptual development. Larger research projects that are close to the \$250,000 (or \$300,000 for multi-site projects) maximum in total costs are intended for new empirical data collection projects.

There is a two-stage process for submitting research proposals. Selection will result from the submission of letters of intent and narrowing an invitation only call for full proposals.

Letters of intent should be submitted online through the Pathways to Character Website, www.pathwaystocharacter.org. Letters of intent are due on April 15, 2017.

Invitations will be extended to up to 40 applicants by no later than June 1, 2017. Submission of full proposals is due no later than August 1, 2017. Final award decisions will be issued by September 30, 2017 for research activities to begin no later than December 1, 2017.

Letter of Intent Stage – Materials must be received by April 15, 2017

Applicants are required to submit:

1. A letter of intent that includes the central questions of the project, the background and significance of the questions, the way in which the project addresses the goals of this RFP, and a summary of the methodology. The letter should also include a simplified budget with accompanying narrative. The letter of intent should not exceed 1,200 words and should include contact information for the PI and a list of major collaborators (excluding references).
2. Curriculum vitae of all major team members.
3. All materials must be combined in a single PDF.

Full Proposal Stage (Invitation Only) – Materials must be received by August 1, 2017

Those applicants who are invited to submit full proposals must include:

1. A cover letter of no more than 1 page with the title, amount requested, duration of the project (not to exceed two years), and contact information for the PI and a list of major team members.
2. Curriculum vitae of all major team members.

3. A brief abstract of the proposed work of no more than 200 words.
4. A narrative description of the work to be carried out, not to exceed 5,000 words (excluding references). The description should explain the central questions of the project, the background and significance of the questions, the way in which the project addresses the goals of the RFP, the methodology, the researchers' qualifications to conduct the research, and plans for the dissemination of research outputs. If the project involves data collection, please also describe procedures for recruitment.
5. A project summary of up to 500 words which explains the project and its significance to non-academics, and which would be published on the Pathways to Character website and possibly in Templeton materials, and included in publicity materials if the proposal is funded.
6. A timeline for the proposed work.
7. A detailed budget with accompanying narrative explaining line items, not to exceed \$250,000 (or \$300,000 for multi-site projects) in direct (including both academic year and summer salary support) + indirect costs. Overhead is strictly limited to 15% and funds cannot be used for major equipment purchases.
8. Written approval of the department chair and university signing officials.
9. All materials (1 – 8 above) must be combined in a single PDF.

Grant Eligibility

The PI must have a Ph.D. and be in a contracted position at an accredited college or university or pre-approved non-profit research institution (write us for pre-approval) before August 1, 2017. We will give preference to proposals from PIs who are within ten years of receiving their Ph.D. at the time of submission. However, more senior investigators can also be included on proposals as co-investigators or in other roles. Applicants can have their name on only one proposal for this competition.

Funded projects must have their PI commit to the following:

- Submit interim and final research and financial reports. The interim and final reports should not exceed 5 pages, and should detail the outcomes of the funded project. Reports must be submitted at the end of Year 1 and at the conclusion of the project.
- Attend a two-day Initial Research Workshop (“Pathways to Character: Project Workshops”) in March 2018 at Arizona State University (expenses covered by the Project). The workshop will include award winners from this competition, along with the invited scholars and the Project Core Team. The purpose is to: (1) provide rich feedback to PI’s before beginning their projects; (2) infuse interdisciplinary considerations into the projects; (3) deepen connections between projects to enhance their coordinated impact on the field, and (4) create a network of young scholars working on this topic.

- Attend and present central results at the three-day Final Research Colloquia (“Pathways to Character: Preliminary Results”) in August 2019, at the Graylyn International Conference Center (www.graylyn.com) in Winston Salem, NC (expenses covered by the Project). PIs from all projects will present their preliminary findings and insights gained from their research project. The purpose is to: (1) provide feedback to the PIs on their preliminary findings, (2) suggest avenues for future research, (3) educate those in attendance about the findings of the research projects, and (4) disseminate the findings more broadly.
- Consent to have their presentation at the Initial Research Workshop and Final Research Colloquia be videotaped for Project website.
- Submit a chapter length version of their paper from the Final Research Colloquia by March 1, 2020 for publication in an edited book tentatively entitled *Pathways to Character: Innovative Perspectives on Posttraumatic Growth and Resilience*.
- Notify the Project at info@pathwaystocharacter.org of all conference presentations, papers, and books that arise from the funded research.
- Commit to writing one blog post each year based on the topic of their research project on the Pathways to Character website.
- Follow stipulations of grant award as communicated by JTF either to the Pathways to Character project or to the recipient directly, and as determined by the Pathways to Character Project.

Submission Instructions

LOIs and Full Proposals should be submitted through the Pathways to Character Project website, www.pathwaystocharacter.org, as a single PDF (and in the order listed above).

An acknowledgment email will be sent within seven days of receiving the proposal. All questions about the application process should be sent to: info@pathwaystocharacter.org