



Medical Research Funding: Collaborative Model Design

The Steven and Michele Kirsch Foundation uses a proactive strategy for funding medical research that addresses basic issues critical to our mission. We identify and fund investigators in the form of multi-year, collaborative consortium grants. *We co-fund these initiatives with other foundations to leverage and increase the effectiveness of philanthropic resources.* Our goals are to encourage researchers to bring a fresh outlook to a specific topic and to provide them with a financial incentive, and a common focus, for their work with others.

As a relatively new foundation, we want to facilitate innovative and new collaborations among superb investigators who come from diverse fields. **This is the niche that the Foundation identified: Acting as initiators/catalysts of true, functional collaborative research.** We partner with the researchers and other foundations and we jointly support them both financially and as facilitators/conveners.

Key Components

- Researchers and research groups whose expertise is willingly shared so the collaboration can address issues more efficiently and effectively as a consortium than a researcher or group working in isolation.
- Strong planning, due diligence and oversight by the Foundation and other funding partners, in conjunction with a pre-selected, small advisory board, to ensure that the collaboration has adequate support and remains focused on the core issue(s).
- Strategic plan that focuses directly on the research questions developed and executed jointly by each consortium.
- Funding that, once allocated, is unrestricted, but requires active reporting of results and regular, open communication between the consortium members and the funding partnership.

Benefits

- **Proactive and Timely Funding:** We focus our limited resources on identifying cutting-edge research topics in our areas of interest that might significantly benefit from a time-sensitive investment.
- **Partnership Funding:** We partner with other foundations or philanthropic groups/individuals to co-fund projects and develop new initiatives or pilot programs to leverage our initial financial commitment, to bring other expertise to the project and, ultimately, to further leverage the partnership funding with additional, usually NIH, funding.

- **Faster Progress:** We expect that the consortia, through sharing information and research outcomes across related fields early and openly with each other, will be efficient in identifying promising new research routes and eliminating dead ends. This should lead to breakthroughs that result in cures and treatments and/or open new areas for investigation.

Implementation

- **Identify cutting-edge research areas** that could significantly benefit from a time-sensitive investment due to the status of research in the field, the scarcity of research funds for that field and/or the opening of new opportunities based on related discoveries in other fields.
- **Identify other organization(s) that might co-fund** a consortium based on their own mission(s) and develop a working partnership. Consistent with the Foundation's commitment to flexibility, we may occasionally use a slightly different funding mechanism. Regardless, we will still focus on collaboration, engaging researchers in a new field, and leveraging funding dollars.
- **Assemble a small scientific advisory board** specifically for the consortium consisting of up to four senior researchers, including one clinician. Members must be willing to commit their time and visionary thinking to select the participants for the research consortium, mentor the cross-fertilization and functional collaboration that needs to take place for the consortium to meet its goals, and review progress.
- **Identify and select the research labs** that will form the consortium and determine the funding necessary to support their efforts. **Critical to the model is that the research labs selected be *outside the mainstream* of the research topic, ensuring that new and valuable expertise is included in the effort.** They will be selected based upon their expertise and ability to work in a collaborative arena.
- **Convene the advisory board, the funders and members of the consortium** to plan and define the collaborative research agenda for the program, in effect creating a strategic plan that will form the basis of the annual review process and will be updated after each review to reflect progress and, if appropriate, changes in direction.
- **Provide a mechanism for the members of the consortium to remain in close contact** throughout the course of each year to share information and provide each other with assistance.
- **Convene the consortium annually** to review progress formally with the advisory board.