

*Character Virtue  
Development  
Strategic Plan*  
2020-2024



JOHN  
TEMPLETON  
FOUNDATION

The Character Virtue Development department at the John Templeton Foundation exists to advance the science and practice of good character. Ultimately, we seek a world in which every individual is inspired to develop habits of good character and is supported by multiple contexts (e.g., home, school, community) that encourage and facilitate this development. In talking about *character*, we are referencing a set of dispositions that produce specific emotions, inform motivation, and guide conduct.<sup>1</sup> These qualities can be categorized under the broader headings of moral character, intellectual character, performance character, and civic character,<sup>2</sup> all of which are candidate topics for support from our department. Specific character virtues of interest include, but are not limited to: generosity, honesty, curiosity, forgiveness, self-control, purpose, and humility. The term *character development* references the lifelong process of attaining virtuous feelings, thoughts, skills, and habits.<sup>3</sup>

1 Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. *A Framework for Character Education in Schools*. 2017. <https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Framework%20for%20Character%20Education.pdf>. Accessed 27 Oct. 2020.

2 Jason Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Anne Colby et al., *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); Scott Seider, *Character Compass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

3 Lerner, R. M. (2018). Character development among youth: Linking lives in time and place. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 42(2), 267–277.



GENEROSITY



HONESTY



CURIOSITY



FORGIVENESS



SELF-CONTROL



PURPOSE



HUMILITY

## CATEGORIES of CHARACTER



### MORAL CHARACTER

*Qualities that foster good relationships*

EXAMPLES:  
generosity & forgiveness



### INTELLECTUAL CHARACTER

*Qualities of a good learner and truth seeker*

EXAMPLES:  
intellectual humility & curiosity



### CIVIC CHARACTER

*Qualities that create good citizens*

EXAMPLES:  
justice & civility







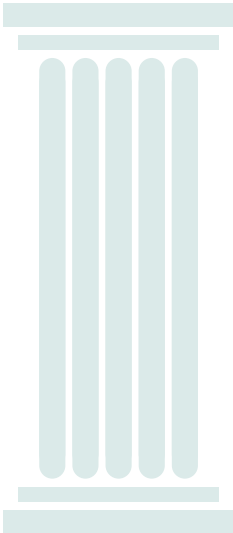
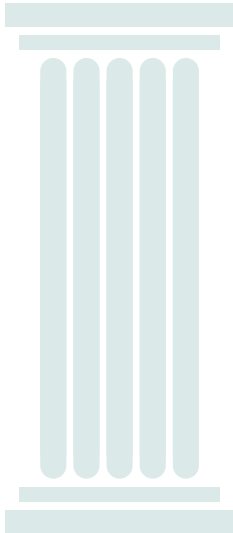
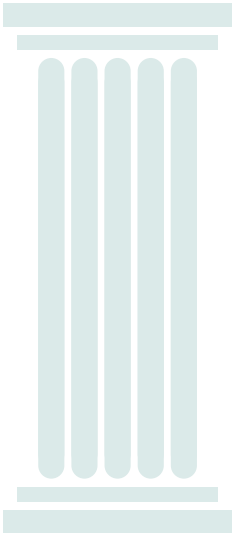
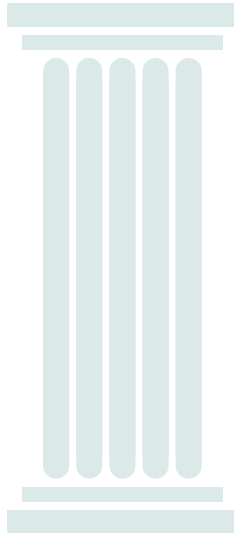
### PERFORMANCE CHARACTER

*Qualities that facilitate goal achievement*

EXAMPLES:  
self-control & perseverance

Notably, we seek to better know how different communities understand, discuss, and cultivate good character in youth. The motivation to pursue what is good for oneself and one’s community is something that can be found across all peoples, religions, and regions. In good times and in bad, good character provides the framework for individuals to pursue lives of meaning and to contribute to a better world. We therefore seek a portfolio of research and programming that reflects this perspective.

*To focus our efforts and increase the positive impact of our grant-supported projects, we will devote **\$50 million** in funding between 2020 and 2024 to the following four goals:*

			
Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4
Strengthen character development programs through communities of practice	Interested communities gain better access to the latest science of character	Catalyze research on character development and social norms	Increase the number of early career scientists who study character development
			



## Strengthen character development (CD) programs through communities of practice



Many philanthropic organizations are focused on scaling innovative solutions to complex social problems. Scaling programs is an important and often effective way to reach a larger number of individuals, and perhaps it is part of the long-term future for CD programs. At this point however, many CD programs would benefit from additional investments to strengthen their programs prior to major investments in scaling. In many cases, organizations could grow in one of the following four areas: their understanding of character development; evidence-informed programmatic content attending to motivation, skills, and content; strong communal norms that prioritize personal connections; and sufficient organizational capacity. As a result, nearly half of our funding commitment over the next five years will be devoted to strengthening programs before investing in major scaling efforts.

### OUR APPROACH

Our goal is to support at least 15 communities of practice. A community of practice is “a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”<sup>4</sup> These groups come together regularly to share knowledge, innovate, and solve problems. Given the constraints on our resources, we are most interested in supporting communities of practice that already exist; we do not anticipate building a new community of practice at this time. Importantly, candidate communities of practice do not need a formal structure or recognized status within their organization.

Applicants for this funding area should be connected to a pre-existing network (e.g., school or school network, summer camp network, out-of-school program network, faith-based network) and should be able to demonstrate interest in the subject matter. We are most interested in networks that already serve over 1,000 individuals.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, “Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation,” Cambridge University Press, 1991.



Each community of practice grant will focus on, and be given support for, the development of the following programmatic elements:



#### CHARACTER

*A thick definition and understanding of character*



#### CONTENT

*The program attends to motivation, skills and context*



#### COMMUNITY

*The program has strong norms, culture, and personal connections*

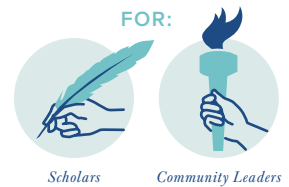


#### CAPACITY

*The program has sufficient organizational capacity*



## *Interested communities gain better access to the latest science of character*



A rich dialogue exists within the education and youth development communities regarding the importance of character development. Both communities have many advocates pushing forward the science and practice of character. Other communities, however, lack such a science-informed dialogue on character development. Often these communities face unique barriers that impede the emergence of a generative dialogue that integrates character development science. For instance, there is an extensive literature on the science and practice of parenting skills, but the emphasis of this conversation focuses on a child's success, health, and happiness, and tends to exclude topics like moral character development. To take another example, although faith communities often have social norms that place a high value on virtuous behavior, and although theologians have been theorizing about virtuous formation for millennia (e.g., Aquinas, Mussar movement, Al-Ghazali), many faith communities have not integrated recent scientific findings on character and child development into their practices. Our department sees challenges like these as opportunities for further community engagement.

### **OUR APPROACH**

We seek to identify key organizations, programs, and persons within each of four audiences: parents, schools, faith-based organizations, and the city of Philadelphia, that can serve as effective translators. Effective translators are those who (a) know and understand the practices, motivations, and limitations of their specific community or field, (b) understand and are passionate about the science of character development, (c) are deeply respected by their community, and (d) are excellent communicators.

**With a total of \$5 million in grant funding, we will work alongside up to five of these key organizations, programs, and individuals to improve specific mechanisms for integrating the science of character into their sphere of influence.**





## Catalyze research on character development and social norms



Social norms are “the informal rules that govern behavior in groups and societies.”<sup>5</sup> Scholars across a variety of fields, including psychology, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, typically distinguish between norms that describe what groups do (descriptive or empirical norms) and norms that provide some type of evaluation or judgment as to what groups should do (normative or injunctive norms).<sup>6</sup> Importantly, research has found that leveraging a group’s social norms yields significant changes in individual-level cognition and behavior.<sup>7</sup> Much of the research on social norm interventions in the past 20 years has focused on health-related behaviors (e.g., drinking, drug use, sexual activity), but social scientists are beginning to think more broadly about how this intervention can be used for social change.<sup>8</sup>

### OUR APPROACH

For this funding area, we will publicize—through our website and academic listservs—our interest in supporting research on social norm interventions. We are most interested in applied projects that seek to study the use of social norms in the context of a specific program, but we will also consider theoretical and empirical projects that do not directly engage with a particular program. Over the next five years, we seek to support at least 10 new projects, for a total of up to \$7 million, that will help us gain a greater understanding of (a) how groups utilize social norms as a means to strengthen good character among participants and (b) which social norms interventions that are more or less effective with adolescents.

5 Cristina Bicchieri et al., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: Social Norms, (Winter, 2018), <https://stanford.io/2P8ODIV>

6 Beniamino Cislighi and Lori Heise, “Theory and practice of social norm interventions: Eight common pitfalls,” *Globalization and Health* 14, 83 (2018) <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-018-0398-x>

7 Paschal Sheeran et al., “The Impact of Changing Attitudes, Norms, and Self-Efficacy on Health-Related Intentions and Behavior: A Meta-Analysis,” *Health Psychology* 35, 11 (2016): 1178-1188. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/hea0000387>.

8 Margaret E. Tankard and Elizabeth Levy Paluck, “Norm Perception as a Vehicle for Social Change,” *Social Policy Review* 10 (2016): 181-21.

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**10 new projects**, for a total of up to **\$7 million**

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## *Increase the number of early career scientists who study character development*



Scientific insights into the process of character development has significantly advanced over the past several decades. One reason for this advancement is the growing number of scholars who have chosen to conduct their research on character-related topics. Of course, it can be difficult to obtain funding as a postdoctoral fellow or pre-tenure professor. In an effort to support these early career scholars, we will publish calls for proposals that are intended for early career scientists. These calls will not be limited to a particular topical focus, but we are particularly interested in seeing applications for work on character virtues that have been relatively understudied broadly speaking or have been understudied in a particular community (region, religious community, or otherwise). We also encourage cross-disciplinary teams.

### **OUR APPROACH**

Over the next five years, our department will support up to 12 postdoctoral fellows and 15 early career scholars (i.e., Assistant or Associate Professor) on topics that fit within the broader mandate of the department. Awards will likely range between \$250,000 and \$750,000.

*Over the next five years, our department will support up to 12 postdoctoral fellows and 15 early career scholars*



## Resources

We encourage prospective applicants to visit the John Templeton Foundation's [website](#) to learn more about our organization, the Character Virtue Development department, and the grants we are currently funding. We also encourage you to take a look at a few of the resources created by our many wonderful grantees.

