

A Brief Overview of Funding in the Field of Consciousness

Summary Report
Sherry Consulting
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I. Introduction

This report is the culmination of a multi-month research process investigating the funder landscape in the field of consciousness. While not providing a comprehensive look at the field, we sought to identify some of the leading funders, trends, challenges and gaps in this very broad and diffuse funding field. This public summary of our report was created to share some of our key findings and recommendations with those we interviewed. In addition to this summary report, we include an appendix as well as a two-page executive summary of our findings.

II. Methodology & Interview Process

The initial consultancy ranged over a 12-week period commencing in December 2019, including 10 weeks of research and interviews and two weeks of synthesis and analysis. During that time, we conducted research on 44 people and 32 institutions, centers, and other relevant organizations, as well as 20 in-depth interviews.¹ We completed initial work in February 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic became widespread in the United States after the completion of the initial draft report. In the wake of the pandemic, our limited follow up interviews and summary included inquiries into how the pandemic may begin to change this field. Given the rapidly changing nature of our current reality, we present our observations with regard to COVID-19's impact on the field as a snapshot of a moment in time.

This report is not a comprehensive review of the field of consciousness, individual leaders in the space, or schools of thought. Rather, it is an attempt to make sense of the current funding landscape, its history, present, and key successes and challenges as well as some leading centers and other trends. We also offer some takeaways and recommendations gleaned from our interviews. This summary report focuses narrowly on a small group of funders and organizations we profiled and interviewed in depth; many more organizations and individuals are profiled in the lengthy attached appendix, and even more did not fall directly within the scope of this scan, but deserve further attention.

¹ Due to the broad range of the field and the limited time horizon of this scan, we prioritized profiling and interviewing funders and people who work with funders in order to get a sense of both the history of consciousness funding and potential future opportunities. We conducted extensive profiles of other key individuals, although we recognize even then that this combination is not a comprehensive encyclopedia of the field. There are many other critical people in this space that we did not have the opportunity to interview either due to time constraints or an inability to secure interviews with them. Additionally, we focused almost exclusively on funders in the U.S., though we recognize that there are many relevant groups internationally that may be subjects of interest in the future.

III. Definition of Consciousness

“The proposition, I am, I exist, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.” - Rene Descartes

“There's nothing we know about more directly [than consciousness] but at the same time, it's the most mysterious phenomenon in the universe.” - David Chalmers

“We’re all hallucinating all the time, including right now. It’s just that when we agree about our hallucinations, we call that reality.” - Anil Seth

Consciousness is an umbrella term, covering a wide variety of mental phenomena, used with a diversity of meanings, with no single shared definition and much debate still as to what it is, what it is not, and even why it matters. For centuries, philosophers and scientists have grappled with the mysterious and vexing nature of consciousness. Up until the 17th century, there was no linguistic distinction between consciousness and conscience, when Rene Descartes proposed a distinction between ‘mind stuff’ and ‘matter stuff,’ marking the beginning of the modern philosophical debate around consciousness.

Today, consciousness is broadly understood as synonymous with some internal level of awareness, and at times the term connotes experience, cognition, feeling, or perception. Much of the current scientific research into consciousness is led by neuroscientists, but it remains an interdisciplinary area of study bringing together philosophers, theologians, clinicians, and many more. Beyond this – and even then – more questions than answers remain, from identification of the essential properties of consciousness and the types of beings or things that possess consciousness to the physical systems that give rise to consciousness and why physical processes in the human brain lead to subjective experience in the first place.

Notably, some in the field choose not to use the term because it seems too vague, because it is susceptible to critique as oblique or lacking a coherent theory, or because the theories or work of some practitioners are considered fringe or deeply outside the mainstream. Across the board, there are numerous, often opposing, approaches to defining consciousness. Ultimately, different theories of consciousness and why it matters inform deeply different approaches to the topic by funders, practitioners, and academics.

IV. The Funding Landscape

The Foundation and Private Philanthropy Landscape

We have found no existing landscape scans of the funder field in this space. This may be because there are no recognized established affinity groups of institutional and private philanthropists, despite the existence of small informal networks. Indeed, Dawid Potgieter of the Templeton World Charity Foundation described the field as “like herding cats.” He also speculated that the most over enthusiasm for funding for pure consciousness inquiry comes from private foundations, and that “even rigorous scientists get money from the National Institutes of Health

(NIH) to study something else.” Alternatively, large funders like the ERC or NIH may be spending huge amounts that are not widely publicized or may be written in a way that does not emphasize consciousness. There are a limited number of major institutional foundations that have operated in the space for decades, a number of newer foundations which have emerged in recent years, and many individual funders and groups of private philanthropists who are investing in the field. We describe a number of those we interviewed in turn below and many more are in the appendix.

Legacy Foundations

The Fetzer Institute and Fetzer Memorial Trust’s Fetzer Franklin Fund are distinct yet interconnected private foundations that have funded work in the field of consciousness for over four decades and have made substantial contributions at the intersection of science and spirituality.

[The Fetzer Institute](#) (the “Institute”) was founded by John E. Fetzer in the 1969. It is guided by the mission of helping build the spiritual foundation for a loving world. [The Fetzer Memorial Trust](#) (the “Memorial Trust”) works to preserve the legacy of John E. Fetzer’s work through documenting his life and spiritual journey, ensure John E. Fetzer’s interest in frontier science and spirituality remains a central focus of ongoing Fetzer philanthropic contributions, and fund work at the intersection of science and spirituality in collaboration with the Fetzer Institute. The Memorial Trust houses the [Fetzer Franklin Fund](#), which funds fundamental scientific research in physics, biology, and consciousness, as well as metascience and the foundations and methodology of science. The Fetzer Franklin Fund’s philosophy is to support basic research by the best minds who are identifying the core questions to be addressed in the area of consciousness and spirituality. The fundamental worldview informing their work is that consciousness is far more than a physical or chemical phenomenon and that there are critical issues that need to be understood about the spirit, different from pure biological mechanisms. In terms of scale, the combined Fetzer entities invest about \$20 million per year in organizations that advance their mission, with the Memorial Trust giving \$5-10 million per year.²

Fetzer’s primary focus area has evolved along with the field over the last four decades. In the 1990s, the Institute influenced the development of the field of mind-body health by supporting programming such as the Emmy award-winning PBS Series, *Healing and the Mind* with Bill Moyers, and Jon Kabat-Zinn’s pioneering work on mindfulness-based stress reduction at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

The Institute’s subsequent focus on the integration of the inner life of mind and spirit with the outer life of service and action included support for Daniel Goleman’s seminal work on emotional intelligence and the establishment of the field of social and emotional learning; and helped establish Parker Palmer’s Center for Courage and Renewal.

For more than a decade after 9/11, the Institute anchored its efforts in fostering awareness of the power of love and forgiveness, investing in national media campaigns and contributing to a now-

² The Memorial Trust is currently in the process of winding down, and some of its operations will be folded into the Institute.

burgeoning field of forgiveness research. During this time, the Institute also helped the World Health Organization develop culturally relevant quality-of-life measures that included spirituality.

Throughout its history, a hallmark of the Institute is the work it convenes at Seasons, its on-campus retreat center. With its pristine beauty, Seasons offers opportunities for inward reflection and outward engagement, allowing participants to find the shared meaning critical to the Institute's community and work. Seasons has hosted Nobel Laureates, Pulitzer Prize winners, and Supreme Court nominees, as well as thousands of accomplished teachers; healers; scientists; scholars; agents of cultural change; and leaders of public life from government, business, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors.

More recently, the Institute adopted its current mission statement, a bold new Theory of Change, and a long-term goal: to help catalyze and support a broad-scale, spiritually grounded transformation from an ego-centered way of being grounded in separation and fear to an all-centered way of being grounded in wholeness and love. With investments and collaborators in areas such as democracy, faith and spirituality, education, and media, the Institute supports work that will enable a critical mass of persons around the world to embrace love as the guiding principle and animating force for living in sacred relationship with Spirit, self, others, and the natural world. Examples of investments include a \$3.5 million investment (2019) in *On Being*, a media platform created by Krista Tippett, which explores what it calls the, "animating questions at the center of human life: What does it mean to be human, and how do we want to live?" Tippett's guests include the 14th Dalai Lama, Maya Angelou, Thich Nhat Hanh, Wangari Maathai, Elie Wiesel, and many others. *On Being* reaches ~1.5 million listeners a month. With a \$1.3 million investment, Fetzer has also partnered with the Harvard Divinity School for research on emerging forms of spiritual community within and outside religious institutions, and George Washington University (\$500,000 in 2017) to create a global curriculum integrating spirituality, to be advanced in partnership with the World Health Organization.

In our conversations with Bruce Fetzer, President of the Fetzer Memorial Trust, he highlighted the importance of creating a well-defined and long-term strategy in this field. He believes that the primary role of an effective funder in this space is to create an environment that fosters innovation. Funders should think of their work as a holistic portfolio, where they use a variety of tactics to try to achieve their broader goal. Every project Fetzer funds is part of their broader strategy, he says, but they are flexible on the point of entry and willing to invest in communications, marketing, and publishing to create interest and attention for a topic, in addition to funding the science itself. Fetzer believes that investment in long-term research and open, collaborative science is key to de-risking other investments.³

One example of a long-term strategy in which The Fetzer Institute and the Fetzer Memorial Trust have supported is a relational science program at Chapman University. Chapman had begun a relational science program but was struggling to get traction and funding. The Fetzer investment

³ The Fetzer Franklin Fund collaborated with the Center for Open Science on the MetaScience 2019 symposium to discuss questions about the science of science, including how scientists generate ideas, how scientific practices affect the ability to identify robust findings, the impact and value of replication, the culture and norms of science, and how to best further scientific research.

provided pilot funding, which led to one of the professors being invited to speak at a large conference, which brought Chapman's work a level of recognition, and in turn allowed them to raise more funding and assemble a high-level team of physicists. Ultimately, Jeff Tollaksen, Co-Director of the Institute for Quantum Studies at Chapman, and a team of scientists published a study that introduced a new quantum phenomenon suggesting that time moves backwards as well as forwards at the quantum level and won the 2016 Cozzarelli Prize given by PNAS (the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America).

Another example is their work on The Shamatha Project. In 1992, Clifford Saron received funding from the Institute to study Buddhist monks in Dharamshala with Alan Wallace and other researchers. Years later, in 2007, with sponsorship from Shambhala Mountain Center, the Mind and Life Institute, the Fetzer Institute, the Shamatha Project began researching the psychological and physiological processes underlying the mental and physical health benefits of meditation through a randomized, controlled study. The research showed increased attention, improved emotions and well-being, and improved health-related biomarkers as a result of increased meditation.

The Templeton World Charity Foundation (TWCF), one of three charitable entities established by Sir John Templeton, was established in 1996 to focus specifically on funding scientific research related to the "Big Questions" of life and the universe, spanning science, theology, philosophy, and human society. TWCF is pursuing three primary aims as part of a \$20 million portfolio called Accelerating Research on Consciousness: (1) to launch a pioneering grant-development mechanism that uses best-practices in open science to facilitate adversarial collaboration⁴; (2) to identify the most pressing empirical questions about consciousness and support innovative experiments to generate answers; and (3) to promote rigorous empirical engagement with deeper questions regarding consciousness, as a core aspect of human nature, among the wider scientific community. TWCF has an active grant portfolio totaling over \$100 million and has committed \$20 million to consciousness over five years, with the possibility for expansion.

TWCF views consciousness, broadly defined as subjective experience, as something to more deeply understand in service of tangibly improving the world and our lives, with potential solutions for a range of societal needs from mental health disorders to pain management. In order to achieve this broad aim, Dawid Potgieter, Director of Programs in Discovery Science at TWCF, articulates a pathway of steps.

First, TWCF has identified the need to identify a handful of strong, robust, testable theories of consciousness agreed upon by the field for future research and investment. Right now, there are simply too many ideas and theories, too much data to sift through, and too many non-testable claims still garnering attention and resources, and TWCF believes that reducing some of the current theories of consciousness could result in significant progress in the field of consciousness. Notably, Potgieter believes that to get to the right prioritized list of theories, we must first identify theories that are actually testable, noting that claims that are not testable are unlikely to be broadly useful for the field. In service of this goal, TWCF has developed a specific

⁴ Adversarial collaboration is a form of scientific collaboration popularized by Nobel-winning psychologist and economist Daniel Kahneman, where scientists with opposing hypotheses work together, often with the goal of resolving the debate.

Structured Adversarial Collaboration model, a six-stage grant-development mechanism to facilitate adversarial collaboration and broad sharing of experimental findings.

Beyond adversarial collaboration, Potgieter believes there are a few other steps that can be taken to identify strong, robust, testable theories of consciousness, with the potential for field-wide implications. One step is to focus on conceptual clarity and rigor. Conceptual rigor is critical from testing to theory application to the development of interventions, in part because consciousness is such a conceptual conundrum. Another step is to invest in community development, to ensure researchers and funders are aware of each other's work and learnings and are working together, either through adversarial collaboration or more traditional forms of collaboration. TWCF has explored collaborations with other funders including the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR) on community building projects, including winter and summer schools that bring together senior leaders and young investigators for intensive one-on-one and small group discussions.⁵ A third step is to build infrastructure for better collaboration, including tools for equipment and data reconciliation, ensuring that labs are actually able to share large datasets. Potgieter notes that while the infrastructure challenge may sound prosaic, solving it is actually quite critical to enable better collaboration amongst researchers.

Potgieter generally advocates for developing clear, achievable, and targeted philanthropic goals, and then investing in early stage academics and researchers who work well collaboratively. Looking ahead, Potgieter warns newer funders in the field to be mindful of rhetoric, saying, "it's easy in this field to have a conversation about consciousness, use the word five different times, and have it mean five different things." He believes that the best people in the field to fund are those that understand the philosophy, the science, and how to collaborate well with others. In addition to CIFAR, Potgieter cited the Center for Open Science as an important organization facilitating collaboration, with a primary mission of increasing openness, integrity, and reproducibility of research. The Center encourages community action and collaborative metascience research for more efficient interventions, and recently received three multi-year grants from TWCF and the John Templeton Foundation to foster continued collaboration.

[The John Templeton Foundation](#), one of three charitable entities established by Sir John Templeton, has made almost 4,000 grants totaling \$1.5 billion since 1987. The primary funding areas include science & the big questions, character virtue development, individual freedom & free markets, exceptional cognitive talent & genius, genetics, and voluntary family planning. John Templeton also established the Templeton Prize in 1972 to identify "entrepreneurs of the spirit," those outstanding individuals who have devoted their talents to expanding our vision of human purpose and ultimate reality. The Prize honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works.⁶ Templeton also provided a \$6.2 million seed grant for the Foundational Questions Institute (FQXi), which catalyzes, supports, and disseminates research on questions at the foundations of physics and cosmology, particularly new frontiers and ideas

⁵ More information on CIFAR is included in Section V on Institutes and Academic Centers.

⁶ Templeton Prize winners receive £1,100,000 sterling. The most recent winner of the prize is Marcelo Gleiser. His collection of work has presented science as a spiritual quest to understand the origins of the universe and life on earth. Other recent winners include King Abdullah II of Jordan (2018), Alvin Plantinga (2017), Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (2016), and Jena Vanier (2015). The appendix provides additional detail on the work of Templeton.

unlikely to be supported by conventional funding sources. FQXi provides both large and small grants to researchers and FQXi members, respectively. The large grants have provided \$7.4 million as research grants to theorists and experimenters. Recently, FQXi and the Fetzer Franklin Fund announced the 2020 large grant RFP as “Consciousness in the Physical World”.

Newer Entrants to the Field

[Tiny Blue Dot](#), founded by Elizabeth Koch and Alexander Bystritsky in 2015, is working to advance human understanding of the nature of consciousness by “developing and validating theoretically-motivated and clinically useful measures of consciousness.” Executive Director and co-founder Alexander Bystritsky is considered to be a leading expert in anxiety disorders and brain stimulation in the United States and currently serves as Professor Emeritus and Director Emeritus of the UCLA Anxiety Disorders Program. Co-founder Elizabeth Koch is also the co-founder & CEO of Catapult, a publishing company focused on telling stories that foster empathy, and the founder of Unlikely Collaborators, which creates interactive experiences, including conferences, designed to illuminate biases and unconscious beliefs and pave the way for deeper human connection.

Tiny Blue Dot has four primary aims: (1) develop a system to measure both the presence of and an amount of consciousness, (2) understand which brain regions play a critical role in consciousness, (3) “estimate states of consciousness from the ‘connectome’ of the human brain” and infer for animals and computers, and (4) build a community of those debating, testing, and evaluating these ideas, academically, scientifically, and medically. The foundation currently works with a team of researchers from The Allen Institute, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Massachusetts General Hospital, UCLA, Medical University of South Carolina, the University of Milan, and the Institute for Advanced Consciousness Studies.

In our conversation with Nicco Reggente, Project Officer at Tiny Blue Dot, he explained that success for Tiny Blue Dot is defined by several different metrics. They’re seeking experimentally valid ways to test clinically motivated measures of consciousness – measures that have the potential to bring the elusive concept of consciousness into something that is both quantifiable and also potentially malleable. Their general approach is to research problems of consciousness in an inherently collaborative way, staying impartial to specific theories of consciousness and reducing the risk of creating echo chambers.⁷ They are explicitly *not* interested in building proprietary knowledge, but rather in trying to build understanding through collaboration and expand broader awareness.

In service of their first three aims, Tiny Blue Dot funds research projects led by their teams of researchers, including equipment, laboratory space, and experimental costs. For each new project, researchers propose a budget for the first year of research; experiments are subsequently evaluated on a yearly basis to review progress, identify needs for ongoing support, and determine the cost of continuing the experiment through completion. Tiny Blue Dot also provides a stipend for up to two scholars a year to work on a project of their choosing. Scholars are nominated by

⁷ For instance, while members of their scientific advisory board are proponents of Integrated Information Theory and Tiny Blue Dot invests in research into IIT, they also invest in research into different, competing theories.

members of Tiny Blue Dot’s scientific advisory board, and they specifically seek individuals in different fields, such as physics and philosophy.⁸

Publicly sharing their findings and continuing to build a community of scholars in service of their fourth aim will be an increasingly large focus for Tiny Blue Dot in the coming years. They are actively seeking to bring in different perspectives to their work. They plan to launch a blog, likely in 2021, that will share their research findings for a broad audience through infographics and explainer videos, in ways that are designed to be digestible and interesting. They also recently funded, in collaboration with the Institute for Advanced Consciousness Studies, an app *My Consciousness* that aims to help people quantify their conscious experiences.⁹

Five years into their work, Reggente highlighted a few studies that show promise for making a direct, immediate impact on humanity today:

- Work led by Marcello Massimini at the University of Milan focuses on understanding changes in cortical networks when consciousness fades and recovers, such as during sleep/awakening. Their work thus far has been successful in demonstrating that consciousness can be detected in individuals based on their brain’s capacity to integrate information. Massimini and Melanie Boly, an Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin, have previously collaborated on projects related to “perturbational complexity index”, which operationalizes the theory-driven notion of measuring information integration within the brain.
- Work led by Christof Koch at the Allen Institute for Brain Science, who in collaboration with Giulio Tononi co-developed the Integrated Information Theory of consciousness, has been researching the claustrum, the brain region that seems to have a conductor-like role in the brain.
- Work led by Martin Monti at UCLA has been leveraging low intensity focused ultrasound pulsation targeted at the thalamus to reignite wakefulness in individuals in minimally conscious and vegetative states.

When discussing overall gaps and needs in the field, Reggente started by emphasizing the importance of remembering neuroscience (specifically cognitive neuroscience) is still very much in its infancy. He said, “The field of studying the neural correlates of consciousness is almost embryonic – it’s hard to even speculate on where the gaps and the needs are because we are still building the foundation.” He believes that any funder entering the space needs to take a holistic approach to their work because consciousness permeates every orifice of our lives, and it needs to be approached the same way when being studied. At the same time, he suggested finding an area of focus and setting boundaries. For Tiny Blue Dot, for instance, all of their experiments fall into one of their four aims, which keeps them focused and clear on their priorities. In this field, he noted, it can be easy to get quickly carried away with a theory or some very fringe experiments because everything is interesting and very little is known. He believes the greatest way to make an impact is to take a more scientific, rudimentary approach, focusing on one niche, and resisting the urge to jump to conclusions with limited information. He also notes that funders

⁸ Their current scholar Matthew Owen is an American philosopher researching philosophy of mind, philosophy of neuroscience, and analytic theology; they have not announced the second scholar.

⁹ The app works by helping people who, for example, just meditated or went on a run or took an intravenous ketamine injection, understand what dimensions of their consciousness are affected by those actions.

would be prudent to assess their own goals – commercial, educational, scope, etc. – as they think about funding approaches because of the nature of IP ownership.

Due to COVID-19, Tiny Blue Dot postponed their advanced seminar course which was scheduled to happen in June 2020 in Venice, Italy. The course’s theme was set to be altered states of consciousness, and they had been planning the course for two years, with individuals from organizations like MAPS and research institutes studying clinical applications of psychedelics or mind expansions all set to join. They will look to reschedule for June 2021. For the research teams that they fund, researchers are now generally operating remotely and have shifted their focus from running experiments to analysis of data and manuscript preparation, with some teams facing complex issues regarding ongoing maintenance and funding.

Jason Yotopoulos and David Dominik are the principals behind the [Emerald Gate Foundation](#), launched in 2015 and “focused on the improvement of the human condition and expansion of the conscious mind.” The primary focus is on the “science and applications arising from the understanding of the mechanisms by which human consciousness interacts with various forms of subtle energy and biology to promote healing and wellbeing in humans.” The Foundation aims to foster human transformation by understanding consciousness at the intersection of physics and biological systems. In our conversation with Yotopoulos, he emphasized that he and David, having funded frontier scientists in this area for years, are now starting to truly scale the foundation’s work. Emerald Gate is currently orchestrating and implementing a multi-year, comprehensive scientific research agenda, and funding this research at the intersection of consciousness, physics, and biology across Tier 1 research institutions globally. They also find potential practical applications of this scientific research work interesting.

Emerald Gate, along with The Walker Family Foundation, Tom Dingleline, and several other collaborators recently completed a systems mapping and synthesis of the field of energy healing and biofield science. Their findings, detailed in the *Subtle Energy and Biofield Healing: Evidence, Practice and Future Directions*, include an estimated \$2 billion market, over 250 subtle energy technologies, hundreds of researchers, and thousands of publications. Overall, the report has identified the key levers of change that will help foster greater scientific understanding and practical uptake of biofield healing therapies.¹⁰ The team is now in the midst of rolling out the action plan with a collective of interested philanthropists across a variety of areas including research, technology, practitioners, government policy, education, and communication.

“Funders who have been investing philanthropically in this field for some time, including Bruce Fetzer and Dawid Potgieter, almost uniformly underscore the importance of clear focus, long-term investment horizons, identifying promising ideas and researchers that need dedicated funding to advance their work, investing in those who are deeply committed and inherently collaborative and bringing the fruits of their research into the mainstream through investing in communication and media. This vision is echoed by more recent funders as well, including Jeff Walker, Jason Yotopoulos, and Tiny Blue Dot.”

[Evolve](#) is the umbrella organization for Evolve Foundation, which makes philanthropic grants and pursues direct philanthropic initiatives, and Evolve Ventures, which invests in for-profit

¹⁰ More information & the report can be found on the Consciousness and Healing Initiative [website](#).

companies with social mission. Evolve’s primary mission is to facilitate the evolution of human consciousness, and it operates globally with a particular focus on the United States and China. Evolve’s work is rooted in a belief that there is a significant amount of internal suffering, and alleviation of internal suffering leads to other positive changes in people’s consciousness that, in turn, help with external suffering. Evolve also believes that inner work can help consciousness evolve to release internal suffering, leaving human beings to live lives full of love, joy, peace, and freedom.

Evolve is led by Bo Shao and Oleg Gorelik.

Portfolio companies of Evolve Ventures include Parent Lab, Fabriq, Insight Timer, 10% Happier, TruLuv and others. Evolve Ventures aims to be different from a venture capital fund in several ways. First, its primary goal is to maximize social good, not investment returns. Second, there are no external investors, which means that there will be no pressure to return capital in a fixed amount of time. And third, Evolve is particularly interested in unique companies that may not be able to get that capital from other sources.

Evolve Foundation supports organizations like Strong Minds, Ridhwan Foundation, Center for Humane Technology, Kedumah Institute, GRIP Training Institute and others.

Evolve has a strong interest in working with other funders to share information, due diligence and insights, much like the Big Bang Philanthropy group does in the poverty alleviation space.¹¹

The 1440 Foundation was founded in 2011 by Scott and Joanie Kriens to support people and programs aimed at creating hope for living well each day. The inspiration for the name 1440 came from the fact that there are 1440 minutes in each day – 1440 opportunities for everyone to be more aware and mindful of how they are spending their time. The 1440 Foundation focuses on inner well-being, community building, and fostering a pancreatic cancer collaboration. It has granted more than \$20 million to more than 150 nonprofit organizations. In addition to the financial support the Foundation provides, grantees receive additional strategic resources such as organizational consulting and networking support. Grantees include ClinWiki, Reciprocity Foundation, The Center for Mind-Body Medicine, among several others.

In addition to the Foundation itself, 1440 Multiversity is a Santa Cruz, California-based learning destination and wellness retreat center, currently closed due to COVID-19. 1440 Multiversity fosters social, emotional, and relational learning through faculty-led programs, signature classes such as True North Leadership, as well as retreats and other events.

There are many other funding organizations and individual donors operating in or adjacent to this field, or outside the United States, that we were not able to interview. We have profiled some of these other funders in detail in the appendix, including the Mind Science Foundation, the Mind & Life Institute, the Garrison Institute, the Simons Foundation, the Tianqiao and Chrissy Chen

¹¹ Big Bang Philanthropy is a group of funders broadly working to ameliorate the effects of poverty who share investment leads, insights, networks, and due-diligence processes. More information on Bing Bang can be found [here](#).

Institute, the Weill Family Foundation and Neurohub, Falkora, and the Ekskäret Foundation, as well as a number of others.

Funder Collaboratives, Collectives, and Other Funder Trends

The [Synergos](#) Global Philanthropists Circle (GPC) was founded in 2001 by Peggy Dulany and her father David Rockefeller to foster collaboration amongst philanthropists and increase the impact of philanthropic giving. GPC affinity groups provide a forum for members to deep dive into specific topic areas with support from Synergos. One of these groups, the **Spiritual Civilization Affinity Group**, was born out of a belief shared amongst certain GPC members in the importance of increasing awareness of the ideals of a society that drive individuals to both help each other and work collectively towards a greater good. “The ideals of love, compassion, purpose, altruism, ethics and creativity were named as core to this and their own work, and the question was raised as to whether these ideals could be promoted more broadly to create what they term spiritual civilization.” The idea for the GPC Spiritual Affinity Group was discussed initially in 2012, and the group was officially created in 2015. Today, the group has over 100 members.

The Spiritual Affinity Group plans to deepen and grow a five-year long project on spiritual civilization in partnership with John Templeton Foundation, Fetzer Institute and the Lunt Foundation, aimed at understanding how funders can best promote the ideals of consciousness, altruism, and mindfulness in society, through their specific funding, their mindset about what and why they fund, and their own personal practices. The group is conducting an ongoing evaluation of the impact of the group on individuals, including creating a learning and evaluation framework, collecting baseline quantitative data on group members and continuing to survey over time, tracking shifts in outcomes, enabling conditions, and make recommendations. Data collected from 2015-2019 shows that the Spiritual Civilization group has helped its members “increase their self-awareness, deepen their spiritual practices, and co-create platforms/projects that spread the ideals of spiritual civilization.”

The group has hosted a number of gatherings over the last few years, including a 2017 gathering of primarily American funders, a gathering for European funders in 2019, and a planned gathering for Asian funders in 2020. With COVID-19, Senior Director Melissa Durda shared that Synergos adapted to the reality that any gatherings would need to be virtual and has already hosted four online gatherings. Synergos set up the Synergos Online Community, powered by WeChangers, is a member of Conveners.org and continues to explore different platforms that allow for and support different types of online gatherings.

[The Bridge Builders Collaborative](#) is a group of funders investing in social entrepreneurs who have scalable business models for applications, practices, products, and tools for contemplative practices, discoveries about inner-self, outer-meaning, and action. BBC started as the vision of Scott Kriens, Jeff Walker, and Austin Hearst, who were involved in the Mind and Life Institute and came together to discuss both the science and the potential for technology and investment. The original vision was to support entrepreneurship around meditation and mind-training, at the time a much less mainstream idea than it has become today.

Bridge Builders has thus far invested primarily in meditation apps and other companies with a meditation and mindfulness component; a number of these companies, such as Headspace, have had significant commercial success. The collaborative is involved with 15 companies, from wellness tools to brain-sensing technologies to e-learning technologies.¹² Operating Partner Charlie Hartwell is responsible for identifying investment opportunities and running the day-to-day of the collaborative, which is small and operates informally. There is no baseline commitment for either participation or investment amount. When three or more in the group decide to invest, it qualifies as a Bridge Builders Collaborative investment; when two of the group decide to invest, the group will keep an eye on the investment, but it won't fall under the collaborative umbrella.

Hartwell shared that the collective is at somewhat of an inflection point, reflecting on the journey to date, lessons learned, and goals going forward. Bridge Builders believes that the evolution of technology and humanity is not keeping up with consciousness - he noted that meditating 10 minutes a day, as Headspace has popularized, can be highly effective for relieving stress, but is unlikely to have as much impact on the underlying drivers of deeper pain, such as trauma or poor health. Today, they are particularly interested in solutions that can “go deeper” into these root causes, positively impacting higher numbers of people in more profound ways. Charlie cited Insight Timer as a great example of “going deeper” – with 30,000 free meditations from 5,000 spiritual leaders, it lets users delve deeper into consciousness and different forms of meditations.

In the wake of COVID-19, Hartwell believes “the universe just provided maybe the largest opportunity in the history of mankind to actually ‘go deeper’... this time of great suffering is also an opening to provide invitations for people to consider things they haven't previously considered and change their behaviors.” Hartwell believes this shift may allow certain companies in the space to scale faster and wider than before. He sees significant opportunities for companies like Insight Timer that support the teacher community in going online.¹³ With a deluge of free offers for online mindfulness and meditation programs right now, however, he believes the field will eventually face a question about when and how that will convert to paid users. He also expects to see a fair amount of consolidation and M&A activity in the field, from buy-out offers from insurers and broker networks looking to acquire mindfulness services as part of an integrated strategy. Hartwell anticipates legislative shifts in healthcare that will significantly impact the field, such as legalization of health care practitioners working across state lines and changed regulatory environments for digital therapeutics. He also highlighted the uncertainty of the future of remote work – if, for instance, there's more of a permanent shift away from offices for certain types of workers, those people will have additional time that might be spent in reflection or meditation.

¹² One of their portfolio companies, InteraXon, created Muse, a brain-sensing headband that detects and measures brain activity so users can understand and improve their minds over time.

¹³ Hartwell mentioned two specific tech-based tools for managing emotions as well. [Happify](#) provides games and activities on phones, tablets, and computers, claiming to help frequent users become happier within two months. [eMindful](#) “helps individuals and teams become more resilient through live online classes that support greater wellness.” The online platform provides new daily topics, real-time coaching from over 100 different instructors, and on-demand content and has partnered with large organizations like Humana.

As Bridge Builders begins to go deeper, they are looking at making investments in several new areas, including psychedelics, social wellness, and subtle energy. As part of their work in psychedelics, they plan to sign the North Star Ethics Pledge created by The Aurn Project.¹⁴ Additionally, Bridge Builders is expanding their investment considerations to non-profit investments that can enhance scaling in different fields.

The Neurohacker Collective was founded in 2015 with the mission of advancing human quality of life, guided by the belief that fully optimized human beings help create a better world. The Collective is a group of scientists, medical practitioners, biohackers, and health conscious creators sharing knowledge and techniques. They aim to both expand the collaborative nature of research for the benefit of all and create supplements to improve peak performance. The company began with a focus on psycho-affective products with the launch of their Qualia nootropic line.¹⁵ In addition to their products, the Collective also maintains a blog, publishes a monthly podcast, and publishes other media related to their mission, including a foundational guide to neurohacking.

While donors within these different collaboratives and groups have levels of awareness around each other's work, barriers to true collaboration and field-wide information sharing persist. Notably, **Mina Lee**, with support from Joe Hudson and the DBJ Foundation, conducted research into individual funders in the field of consciousness in late 2017 and 2018, speaking with ~45 individuals primarily based in the United States, with a handful in Europe and Asia. The research was presented at a gathering at 1440 Multiversity. A full version of their report is available online; here we note some of Lee's key takeaways.¹⁶

75% of the funders Lee spoke to were investing on projects that reflected their own personal spiritual journey, rather than taking a structured, systems-based approach or strategy - she found that this work is tremendously personal for most donors, who also have different levels of comfort sharing publicly about their work in this field. Most of these donors struggled to quantitatively measure the impact of their work or articulate a larger strategic vision for their portfolio, though they agreed that both were important. These donors were very interested in gatherings to connect with like-minded individuals, speak openly about their experiences and passion, and hopefully commit to further action together. She believes that community building and strengthening will be critical in building towards work that can have systems-wide impact. She offered three recommendations for potential next steps, including building an online resource hub, a learning network, and/or an action network.

In our conversation with Lee, she also highlighted a few broad challenges she observed in the field. First, identifying leaders who both identify with the spiritual values of an organization and possess business acumen and leadership skills to run an organization isn't easy. Second, there is a critical need to share success stories as well as data and information. While there are many learnings and institutional knowledge in the field, few of them have been shared as case studies or in other formats that allow for shared learning.

¹⁴ The North Star Pledge and The Aurn Project are further discussed in the psychedelics section.

¹⁵ Nootropics are a group of drugs, supplements, and other substances that may improve cognitive function, particularly executive functions, memory, creativity, or motivation in healthy individuals

¹⁶ The full report can be found at <https://www.minajlee.com/insights>

V. Academic Centers, Associations, and Journal

There are numerous academic centers across the United States focusing on various aspects of neuroscience, consciousness, mental well-being, and other specific areas within the field of consciousness. The academic landscape is quite broad yet incredibly important for foundational research. These centers, their directors, and associated professors are instrumental for the creation and development of much of the seminal research that drives this field forward. Additionally, many we spoke with acknowledged that the field desperately needs further exchange of ideas across researchers and disciplines. These academic centers, many of which focus on vastly different theories and research techniques, provide a unique opportunity to foster more interdisciplinary dialogue. Some newer academic programs like Stanford's Flourishing Initiative, led by Aneel Chima, focus on the concept of flourishing. What follows is a brief overview of some of the larger or more established centers we heard about with some regularity; more are profiled in the appendix.

The [Center for Consciousness Studies \(CCS\)](#) at the University of Arizona aims to “bring together the perspectives of philosophy, the cognitive sciences, neuroscience, social sciences, medicine, the physical sciences, and the arts and humanities to move toward an integrated understanding of human consciousness.” The CCS was formed in 1998 with a seed grant from the Fetzer Institute, and currently, its primary function is to organize biennial conferences. In addition to the conferences, the Center has supported research in consciousness studies, established a lecture series, hosts discussion forums and panels, and more.

The Center's regular conference, The Science of Consciousness (TSC), is an interdisciplinary conference addressing questions regarding consciousness, the brain, reality, and existence. Each conference brings together 700+ scientists, philosophers, educators, students, meditators, artists, and interested public from 50 countries. The University of Arizona is also home to the Laboratory for Advances in Consciousness and Health (LACH), which conducts research testing the hypothesis that a person's consciousness, personality, or identity survives that person's physical death. Gary Schwartz is the Director of LACH as well as a Professor of Psychology, Medicine, Neurology, Psychiatry, and Surgery at the University of Arizona. His research interests encompass “the overlapping areas of energy psychology and spiritual psychology for the purpose of increasing health and wellness and advancing the evolution of post-materialist psychology and science.”

[The Contemplative Sciences Center \(CSC\)](#) at the University of Virginia aims “to advance the study and application of human flourishing at all levels of education – K-12, undergraduate, graduate, professional and lifelong.” The CSC believes in practical engagement at all social and institutional levels that is inclusive, equitable, and scale-appropriate as well as contemplation as a key to promoting flourishing. The Center was launched in 2012 by a \$12 million gift from Paul Tudor Jones and Sonia Klein to foster collaboration among the College, School of Medicine, School of Nursing, and the Curry School of Education.

The CSC has many active projects. The Compassionate Schools Project aims to facilitate integrated development of mind and body, impacting academic performance, physical education,

and character development for children in Louisville, Kentucky public schools. The project is a partnership between the University of Virginia and Jefferson County Public Schools, with support from Louisville Metro Government and philanthropic giving. The Dalai Lama Fellows program “cultivates and supports a global movement of next generation leaders integrating contemplative work with social innovation to solve global challenges in locally adapted ways to promote human flourishing.” The Student Flourishing Initiative aims to “help students flourish by empowering them with knowledge and practices for navigating their lives in college and beyond,” and the initiative is bringing together teachers, scientists, and scholars from the Pennsylvania State University, the University of Virginia, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Additionally, the center hosts events, classes, workshops, and retreats and offers resources and community connections. David Germano is the current Executive Director of the CSC, and he co-leads the Student Flourishing Initiative.

[The Center for Healthy Minds](#) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison focuses on advancing breakthrough research, developing tools aimed at cultivating well-being, telling the story that well-being can be learned, and relieving suffering through a scientific study of the mind. Founded by neuroscientist Richard Davidson, the Center undertakes research revolutionizing our understanding of the mind, emotions, and how to nurture well-being for everyone. Davidson’s research focuses broadly on the neural bases of emotions and emotional style, as well human flourishing and contemplative practices.

The Center supports three main well-being programs. First, the kindness curriculum is a free tool for educators and parents to use to promote prosocial qualities in young children. Second, the Healthy Minds program guides users through the four pillars of mind-training science - awareness, connection, insight, and purpose. Lastly, the Center conducted research on a publicly available compassion training tool, which showed that practicing compassion meditation consistently changed the brain’s responses to human suffering.

The [Canadian Institute for Advanced Research \(CIFAR\)](#) is a “global charitable organization that convenes extraordinary minds to address the most important questions facing science and humanity.” Since its founding in 1982, CIFAR has supported 27 research programs, has worked with more than 400 researchers from over 130 institutions across 22 countries and has a current annual budget of \$41M. CIFAR strongly promotes interdisciplinary collaboration among grantees and other related organizations, in part through a fellowship program for innovative researchers working on high-impact projects in their respective fields. The Institute has worked on several initiatives including summer/winter schools for leaders in the consciousness field.

The **CIFAR Azrieli Brain, Mind & Consciousness** program, founded in 2014, it works to develop “a framework to help fellows from across disciplines understand how our brains give rise to consciousness and our unique perspective on the world around us.” The program is supported by several foundations as well as its notable co-directors, Anil Seth and Adrian Owen. The program currently has 18 fellows and eight global scholars.

The [Center for Consciousness Studies](#) at the University of Southern California (USC) primarily aims to map the brain’s complex neural architecture to better understand perception, the formation of concepts, and the unified character of conscious experience. Current projects

include exploring the role of feelings in the construction of subjectivity, investigating the neural basis of perspective as a contributor to subjectivity, attempting to construct conscious artifacts, and understanding the role of sensory integration in the construction of conscious experiences.

Antonio and Hanna Damasio are the current directors of The Center for Consciousness Studies, which is part of the larger Brain and Creativity Institute. The Institute's research projects focus broadly on the effects of music processing on the developing brain, studies on how the brain organizes narratives, and the investigation of feeling and consciousness in humans and machines. "Results from the Institute's ongoing work have applications in the diagnosis and treatment of neurological and psychiatric disorders, child development, and education. They are all relevant to the elucidation of the human condition."

The Institute for Interdisciplinary Brain and Behavioral Sciences at Chapman University, known as [The Brain Institute](#), was announced in March 2019 and created with funding from The Templeton Foundation, The Fetzer Institute, and the Fetzer Memorial Trust. The Chapman Brain Institute "comprises a network of interdisciplinary researchers and specialists spanning the fields of psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience, neurology, anesthesiology, neurobiology, behavioral economics, computation and information processing in the brain, engineering, physics, anthropology, and cognitive science." The Institute aims to unify research in the behavioral and brain sciences at the systems level, focusing on clinical applications, innovations with artificial intelligence, insights from neuropsychology, and philosophy of mind. It will also serve as the central hub for an interdisciplinary set of research efforts at 17 universities globally, bringing together neuroscientists and philosophers to work collaboratively on questions of consciousness and free will. Amir Raz, Professor of Psychological and Brain Sciences, is the founding Director of the Brain Institute.

Though our research has focused on the United States, the [Sackler Centre for Consciousness Science](#) provides a relevant example of the many centers outside the United States. The Sackler Centre was founded in 2010 by a donation from The Dr. Mortimer and Theresa Sackler Foundation and is located directly on the University of Sussex campus in Brighton, UK. Currently co-directed by Anil Seth and Hugo Critchley, the Centre aims to bring together many scientific approaches to understand the neural basis of conscious experience. Research at the center follows two main strands – basic science and clinical application. For the former, the research develops and tests new theories and models of neural mechanisms that actually account for fundamental properties of consciousness. The latter focuses on translating insights about the mechanisms of consciousness to the clinical domain, while clinical studies help stimulate new developments in basic science.

Although it is not specifically an academic center, the [Association for the Scientific Study of Consciousness \(ASSC\)](#) is an important academic society in the consciousness landscape. Founded in 1994, the ASSC is an academic society that, "promotes rigorous research and coordinates annual conferences directed toward understanding the nature, function, and underlying mechanisms of consciousness... [it] includes members working in the fields of cognitive science, medicine, neuroscience, philosophy, and other relevant disciplines in the sciences and humanities." The ASSC hosts well-regarded annual conferences around the world.

Lastly, the [Journal of Consciousness Studies](#) is a prominent interdisciplinary and peer-reviewed journal in the consciousness space. In its most recent issue, the Journal addressed key ideas such as the integrated information theory, phenomenological interpretations and investigations, Chalmers' meta-problem of consciousness, and Buddhist meditation. In order to appeal to a wide audience, the Journal accepts publications from many fields, including the sciences, humanities, philosophy, and religion, among others. It is currently edited by Valerie Gray Hardcastle at the University of Cincinnati.

VI. Conferences & Gatherings

Both larger conferences and smaller gatherings of like-minded funders, scientists, and other interested parties have long been an important aspect of the field of consciousness. These gatherings allow different groups of people to get together to learn about the future of the field as well as network with each other and foster collaboration on new projects and areas of interests. We have identified 15 different conferences, some that are held annually and some that are more or less frequent, though this is by no means a comprehensive list of all the events in the consciousness space. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these conferences and events have been moved to an online format, postponed indefinitely, or canceled entirely. The associated appendix includes an aggregated list of the current status of the conferences and events as of May 1, 2020.

VII. Notable Areas of Interest

Psychedelics

Psychedelics are currently having a cultural renaissance, with significant movement towards legalization for their use in therapeutic treatment of a number of mental health disorders and broad implications for the field of consciousness.

The term “psychedelics” was coined in the 1950’s and refers to a group of drugs that trigger psychedelic experiences by the activation of serotonin receptors in the brain, such as LSD and psilocybin. These experiences often cause changes in a user’s thoughts, visual perception, and auditory perception - in short, they lead to an altered state of consciousness. The history of psychedelics, both medically and culturally, is rich and complex.¹⁷ Today’s research and resurgence is the result of many different individuals and organizations working over many years to change cultural perceptions and conduct academic research in controlled settings.

¹⁷ Modern research into psychedelics began in the 1940s and continued for almost 15 years before they rose to cultural prominence for the general public. This initial research interest was broad but primarily related to psychiatry, and, by the mid 1960s, over 1,000 scientific research papers had been published on psychedelic research, and over 40,000 patients had taken LSD to assist with treating depression, alcohol addiction, and other mental health issues. As recreational use of psychedelics grew in the 1960s and it became a key symbol of the counterculture movement, public perception and government policy of psychedelics changed rapidly. By 1969, LSD was illegal and the vast majority of psychedelic research in the United States stopped with the passage of the Drug Abuse Control Amendments of 1965. By the early 1970s, only one psychedelic research center and a handful of active projects remained in the United States. Practically no research was done in the field for decades because the topic was controversial, the funding was limited, and the government approval process was complex.

From a research perspective, Johns Hopkins has been the epicenter of academic research on psychedelics in the United States for the last 15 years. In 2000, scientists at Johns Hopkins were the first in the United States to receive regulatory approval to re-initiate research with psychedelics; in 2006, researchers led by Roland Griffiths published a landmark study that found that volunteers “rated the psilocybin experience as having substantial personal meaning and spiritual significance and attributed to the experience sustained positive changes in attitudes and behavior.” Since then, Johns Hopkins researchers have published over 60 peer-reviewed studies demonstrating therapeutic benefits as well as safety guidelines and best practices for psychedelic research. In September 2019, Johns Hopkins Medicine announced the launch of the [Center for Psychedelic and Consciousness Research](#) with \$17 million in private funding. The Center, led by Griffiths, will focus on researching how psychedelics affect individual behavior, brain functioning, learning, and memory as well as the brain’s biology and mood. The Center is the first of its kind in the United States, and its operational expenses will be covered for the first five years by the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation and four philanthropists: Tim Ferriss (author, podcast host, and investor, who personally contributed \$2 million and has become a vocal advocate of psychedelic research), Matt Mullenweg (co-founder of WordPress), Blake Mycoskie (founder of TOMS), and Craig Nerenberg (investor). Outside the United States, similar research is being done at the [Imperial Centre for Psychedelic Research at Imperial College London](#), which was formally established with a £3 million grant in April 2019.

From a regulatory perspective, the [Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies \(MAPS\)](#), a non-profit research organization, has worked to raise awareness and understanding of psychedelic substances by helping scientists design, fund, and obtain regulatory approval in the United States and Europe for the use of psychedelics as therapeutic treatment. Founded by Rick Doblin in 1986, MAPS has disbursed over \$20 million since its inception. MAPS’ current top priority is to develop MDMA-assisted psychotherapy into a legal, FDA-approved treatment for PTSD. In 2017, MAPS received FDA ‘Breakthrough Therapy Designation’ for MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for PTSD, indicating that the treatment may have a meaningful advantage over available medications for PTSD and leading to the fast-tracking of continued research. MAPS and the FDA are currently collaborating closely on Phase 3 clinical trials, with FDA approval for MDMA-assisted psychotherapy anticipated by 2021 or 2022.

From a cultural perspective, Michael Pollan’s 2018 bestseller *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* has also dramatically shifted the dinner table conversation and renewed an interest in the potentially positive cultural impact these drugs can have.

The relevance to the field of consciousness is multi-fold – here, we note two key contributions. First, there is increasingly strong evidence that psychedelics are powerful tools for behavior change and destructive thought change for individuals suffering from various forms of mental disorders, from addiction to PTSD to eating disorders. Second, individuals who have used psychedelics in therapeutic settings report having deeply powerful, life-changing experiences. In a study cited by Pollan in *How to Change Your Mind*, “participants ranked their psilocybin experience as one of the most meaningful in their lives, comparable ‘to the birth of a first child or death of a parent.’ Two-thirds of the participants rated the session among the top five ‘most

spiritually significant experiences’ of their lives; one-third ranked it the most significant such experience in their lives.”

Although individuals within the field of consciousness are deeply engaged in following the research and many are cautiously optimistic about psychedelics, many also have significant reservations about the road ahead. Some individuals that we spoke to cautioned the transitory influence of psychedelics, noting that the effects on consciousness may not be as profound or sustained outside of the experience while taking them. Others are nervous about the regulatory pathway and potential ethical issues around the commercialization of psychedelics, with disagreements in the field about which drugs should be legalized and under what circumstances they should be available, as well as the right steps to take in order to achieve these aims. Individuals from MAPS, Tim Chang, and others recently founded the Auryn Project, a non-profit working to create ethical guidelines for psychedelic businesses and ensure ethical, equitable, and affordable access to psychedelic medicine through public outreach and advocacy.¹⁸ As a first step, they’ve created the North Star Ethics Pledge, “a commitment from newly forming and long established psychedelic organizations to act with intention, integrity, and reverence for these medicines and the rich history that they bring.” The pledge is formally launching in April 2020.

Mindfulness & Meditation

Many of the funders, centers, and conferences in consciousness also work in the related fields of mindfulness, meditation, and overall mental wellness. For many in the field of consciousness, more deeply understanding the nature of consciousness fits into a broader set of goals around improving human existence in practical ways, of which mindfulness practices are often one. The work of Fetzer, Templeton and others described above in supporting research into the influence of meditation on health outcomes, as well as the interest of foundations like 1440, Evolve, and Bridge Builders investing in mindfulness and meditation, are discussed above and in detail in the appendix. While this report does not attempt to comprehensively profile the many foundations and funders, spiritual and thought leaders, and researchers and academics in the broad universe of mindfulness and meditation, here we briefly note the highly related nature of these fields and the work being done in them.

In the past few decades, there’s been a dramatic increase in both teaching and researching the effects of mindfulness practices in the United States. Academics are researching the effects of mindfulness practices on everything from blood pressure and hypertension through to anxiety and depression. This work continues through a number of the academic centers and foundations detailed elsewhere in this report and the appendix, and by other organizations which were outside the scope of this report.

In the course of our conversations, several funders noted particular concerns about rising rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders in young and adolescent populations, and the opportunity for mindfulness-based programs both inside and outside the classroom to help address these challenges. Even further, as Bridge Builders and others noted above, the rise of

¹⁸ Tim Chang is a venture capitalist personally interested in gamification startups to engage users in healthy living habits. For example, he has invested in Lumos Labs, which leads the Human Cognition Project. Our conversation with Chang shed light on some of these intersections between wellness, technology, and venture capital investment.

COVID-19 and its correlative impact on mental and physical health, plus the need for social distancing, raise large-scale, new questions about how mindfulness and meditation practices will be scaled and also offered remotely. This area is ripe for further analysis and discussion.

Corporate Movements

Teaching and supporting mindfulness practices as a path towards greater employee satisfaction and productivity has become tremendously popular in the corporate world. In the wake of COVID-19, many are hoping to see corporate movements grow and evolve to shifting mental health needs and a greater acknowledgement of the importance of mental health. While not a major focus for this report, we briefly note some key players and representative trends.

[Search Inside Yourself](#), originally created in 2007 for Google employees by Chade Meng-Tan (an early Google engineer) and established as an independent nonprofit in 2012, teaches mindfulness and emotional intelligence, supporting individuals on intrapersonal and interpersonal growth. Within Google it became a tremendously popular course; today, through the nonprofit, over 50,000 people in more than 50 countries have taken the Search Inside Yourself program.

[Aetna](#), in collaboration with Duke University, Viniyoga Stress Reduction and Mindfulness at developed, launched, and evaluated two mindfulness programs in 2010 and found that participants showed significant improvement in both perceived stress levels and various heart rate measurements, and it now offers the program to hundreds of clients in addition to their own employees.

[Thrive Global](#), founded by Arianna Huffington in 2016, works with individuals and corporations to reduce stress and combat burnout. Thrive focuses on storytelling to elevate the global conversation about well-being and performance, digital tools to help individuals track and sustain behavior change, and corporate partnerships to help companies better understand employee performance and the detrimental effects of burnout.

VIII. Key Takeaways & Recommendations

Funding in the field of consciousness has many opportunities and challenges. Here are our key takeaways:

1. Considerable philanthropic investment over many years has helped create the building blocks for the modern interest in consciousness. Legacy funders who have made ongoing, multi-year investments in academic research and institutions, media and storytelling, and seminal field-building efforts have created the foundation for bringing the field of consciousness into the mainstream.
2. At the same time, basic research into neuroscience and the neurological underpinnings of consciousness is still in its infancy. There are still many competing theories and avenues of research, and only focused, long-term funding and research will help winnow those theories and enable major breakthroughs that will be necessary to move scientific

- understanding forward. Getting researchers to collaborate and distill leading theories while abandoning others with little evidentiary basis is a predictably difficult challenge.
3. The challenge of shared language and shared goals is robust in this field. Consciousness means many different things to different players, and without shared language, it's extremely difficult to achieve clarity and alignment around shared goals.
 4. A lack of common language and clarity about goals, outcomes, and impact also impedes collaboration. Funders have historically not cooperated much in this field and there are few instances of shared case studies or assessments of the efficacy of different funding strategies across the field. While there have been many conferences and convenings over the years, we heard repeatedly that there's been little space to share lessons learned and critical analyses of funding successes or failures.
 5. Many funders are drawn to the field for personal reasons and their personal journey is a primary motivation and guide for their work. The deeply personal nature of this work for many funders, and at times a resistance toward developing a more precise theory of change, presents challenges for rigorous analysis of the efficiency and effectiveness of funding.
 6. The rise of interest in this field, coupled with newer dynamics at play with COVID-19, have created even more opportunity and pressure to collaborate than previously existed. As interest in the field grows, funders recognize that collaboration is necessary to maximize outcomes, and they are increasingly open to data-driven analyses, case studies of best practices and lessons learned, and other ways to share knowledge.
 7. Funders who have been investing philanthropically in this field for some time, including Bruce Fetzer and Dawid Potgieter, almost uniformly underscore the importance of clear focus, long-term investment horizons, identifying promising ideas and researchers that need dedicated funding to advance their work, investing in those who are deeply committed and inherently collaborative and bringing the fruits of their research into the mainstream through investing in communication and media. This vision is echoed by many newer funders as well, including Jeff Walker, Jason Yotopoulos, and Tiny Blue Dot.
 8. In order to have a clear focus, funders should be explicit about their mission and goals, whether they be to fund essential research, find applications that ameliorate major health conditions worldwide, advance open science, create commercial enterprises, share intellectual property, or other goals.
 9. Fundamental research is a critical first step in a pipeline to de-risk venture investment in the field, ensuring investment with the opportunity to scale is grounded in valid theories and contributing to the overall health of the ecosystem.
 10. Venture investment provides an avenue for scaling tangible, real-world solutions emerging from philanthropic and academic work, and the opportunity for venture is well recognized. Identifying and supporting the right talent for these investments and adapting business models to changing economic and cultural realities will be essential.
 11. Going forward, many funders expressed an interest in self-reflection, a discussion of where systems-level work may proceed, and the importance of regular exchanges between established institutional funders and newer entrants, both of whom bring critical assets and perspectives to the field.
 12. Both legacy and newer funders expressed genuine interest during our interviews in finding opportunities for exchange of funding strategies and results and collaborative due

diligence and co-funding where appropriate. In particular, there is a strong interest in creating opportunities for a small group funder dialogue and exchange of ideas, opportunities, and lessons-learned in a private setting.

Most interviewees agreed we are at both the early stages of understanding the neurological underpinnings of consciousness and at a uniquely cataclysmic time where the needs for meaningful investments are greater than ever. We recommend that interested funders consider convening a small gathering to discuss and debate these findings and explore opportunities for future collaboration and field building.

Christine Sherry
Sherry Consulting
June 15, 2020

List of Interviewees

Bradford, Nichol – Transformative Technology Lab

Chang, Tim – Mayfield Fund

Chima, Aneel – Director, Stanford Division of Health and Human Performance

Czarniak, Katarina – Synergos

Donnelley, Elliott – White Sand Group

Durda, Melissa – Synergos

Fetzer, Bruce – Fetzer Memorial Trust, Fetzer Institute

Hartwell, Charlie – Bridge Builders Collaborative

Kriens, Scott – Bridge Builders Collaborative, 1440 Foundation

Lever, Jonathan – Fetzer Institute

Lee, Mina – Independent Consultant

Morris, Jayson – Evolve Foundation

Ormos, Melanie – The Philanthropy Workshop

Pitofsky, Jim – John Templeton Foundation

Potgieter, Dawid – Templeton World Charity Foundation

Reggente, Nicco – The Tiny Blue Dot Foundation

Van Eeghen, Henri – Synergos

Walker, Jeff – Bridge Builders Collaborative

Yotopoulos, Jason – Emerald Gate Foundation