



Cultural Evolution Society Transformation Fund

The Cultural Evolution Society is running a funding scheme called **Transforming the Field of Cultural Evolution and its Application to Global Human Futures**, thanks to a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

The scheme aims to transform the important, yet underfunded, field of cultural evolution. How our cultures evolve (including how information is transmitted, how people make decisions, and the interaction of culture with our biology) is a pressing issue in a world in which our cultural activities are causing rapid, and drastic, social and physical changes.

Through the scheme, the Cultural Evolution Society aims to tackle several issues:

- 1) The ever-increasing obstacles to success that early career academics face – this will be redressed through funding, mentoring and training opportunities.
- 2) Western-centrism, i.e. the tendency of research to focus far too much on the West and for only Western researchers to receive funding – researchers from countries outside of Northern America and Western Europe are especially encouraged to apply to this scheme.
- 3) Disciplinary divides (for example between psychologists and anthropologists or physicists and historians) that hamper research progress.
- 4) The gap between scientists and public policy makers – dedicated support is available to help communicate research activities to relevant contacts, in order to enable society as a whole to benefit from research in cultural evolution. Policy makers could more often draw on an explicit scientific theory of cultural change, and the sciences often investigate *what* needs to be changed but invest less in *how* this may be achieved.

Research projects

The funding competition will fund **16 Research Projects** in four broad areas:

1. **Variation in creativity and imagination** (both across cultures and between species) and the impact this has on the evolution of our technology, as well as art, music, language and religion. We may also understand the influence of cultural norms and different educational practices on creativity throughout the life-time.
2. **Cultural influences on access to 'reality' (or our rationality)**. When we think of rational thought, we often consider processes based on an evaluation of objective facts rather than supernatural beliefs or emotions. However, recent theories in many diverse disciplines have focused on human 'irrationality' and how this may be 'sensible' as we live in a world of uncertainty where logic is not a perfect guide. Investigating how cultural beliefs influence our perceived realities and ability to imagine future ones, as well as investigations of how, or why, we transmit so-called 'fake news' are important avenues of research.

3. **The impact of globalization on cultures.** We live in an ever more interdependent world, the current and future implications of which are ripe for investigation through a cultural evolutionary lens. For example, the effects of the hyper-availability of online information to enormous global audiences, and the novel features of digital information transmission, are only recently being investigated. Globalization also poses inherent risks, especially as we increasingly face cooperative dilemmas on an unprecedented global scale (e.g. climate change, pandemics). Likewise, it is also possible that the merging of humanity into a single “effective population” will erase cultural variation with negative impacts on knowledge diversity and our ability to adapt to new challenges.
4. **Applying cultural evolution to enhance human futures.** How cultural evolutionary insights can be used for positive change was identified as one of the ‘grand challenges’ in the field of cultural evolution. One key example is that an understanding of cultural transmission, and the various biases in when and whom individuals learn from, may be used to enhance the spread of desired behaviours. In principle, understanding of these processes could aid in the current Covid-19 health workers’ ‘war’ against misinformation. More generally, cultural evolution could inform ‘Behavioural Insights’ or ‘nudge’ theories used by institutions globally in an attempt to improve public policy.

There is more detail regarding these themes on the [website](#).

Applied Working Groups

Alongside the funding of the research grants, there is also a competition to fund **5 Applied Working Groups**. These will be designed by the applicants, to implement cultural evolution with real impact on, for example, policy (e.g. public health, education), politics, business, climate change, conservation and welfare. The workshops should include conversations between academics and relevant non-academics to disseminate cultural evolution insights to the general public and engage policy makers in using cultural evolution to help solve current and future real-world problems.

At the end of 2024, there will be a conference in Durham (UK), where the findings from all of the research projects and working groups will be presented to scientists, policy makers and the general public.

The application deadline is 5th January 2022, and there will be a pre-application workshop in early November 2021. Details of the scheme are available [here](#), and you can also find out more on the following social media accounts:

<https://twitter.com/CultEvolFunding>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/cultural-evolution-funding>

<https://www.facebook.com/CultEvolFunding>

For any questions, please email our grant manager Lorna Winship in the first instance:

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