Here. Until Parkinson’s Isn’t.

- Launched in 2000 by actor Michael J. Fox
- Global strategic funder and facilitator: more than $1.5 billion deployed to Parkinson’s disease research and drug development
- Vision seeks a world without Parkinson’s disease (so we can close our doors and go home)
- Mission execution through a strategic research vision centered on enabling progress in disease understanding, measurement and treatment
- Accelerating cures by connecting community: people with Parkinson’s, care providers, researchers, industry, regulators, payers, policy-makers, strategic partners and other visionary philanthropists
Our Challenge (in 2007)

- MJFF had established a robust set of funding programs and infrastructure for grant-making.

- We were supporting important work but felt traditional programs may be missing higher risk, innovative ideas.

- We were efficient, but traditional funding programs still took several months to find and fund promising ideas.
Rapid Response Innovation Awards (RRIA)

A faster but riskier alternative to traditional funding programs launched to foster real-time thinking

What We Wanted
- Innovative (“crazy”) ideas
- All stages (basic to clinical)
- Limited preliminary data needed
- Fast funding decisions

Who Was Eligible
- Anyone at non/for-profit
- International allowed
- Post-docs could apply with an ‘administrative’ Principal Investigator

What We Provided
- 1 Year “pilot” of $75,000
- Opportunity for supplement if results looked promising

What Was Required
- Short proposal
- Rolling Submission (no deadline)
RRIA workflow was built for speed and flexibility

Proposal Submitted → Proposals Assigned Weekly to Internal Science Team → Internal Triage Decision → Proposal Sent to External Reviewers → External Review Decision → Proposal Declined

“Open Door” Decline → “Probably Do Not Fund” → Address Reviewer Questions

“Send Out to Review” → “Do Not Fund” → “Fund” → Process Grant for Funding → Execute Grant Contract

“Probably Fund...”
RRIA Submissions 2007-2014

from preliminary analysis of n = 1579 submissions; does not represent all submissions (e.g., some submissions not included if were administratively rejected or incomplete)
Applicants were global(ish)

But vast majority of submissions came from investigators in the U.S. (>60%), U.K, Canada and Europe

Applicant submissions from under-represented countries were too few to make an analysis of fund rate success by country/region meaningful but is something we are exploring more broadly in our current programs
RRIA incentivized variety of applicant submissions

- 40% First Time PD
- 63% First Time MJFF
- 12% Industry Applicants
How Fast Were We?

With a 58% reduction in time to funding commitment vs a traditional grant program run over same period (e.g., Target Validation Program) we were clearly meeting our speed goal!

Note: Funding Speed is calculated off date when MJFF executes a grant; applicants are often told days to weeks before that time.
What We Sacrificed for Speed

- Limited review feedback offered to applicants unless there was interest in a re-submission
- Small funding meant limited scope of work realistically feasible: best for “pilot” studies
- Strategic dot-connecting across proposals and across other non-RRIA funding programs was limited
How innovative (risky) were we?

Grant outcome* may offer a measure of innovation and potential insight into program success

Using ‘risk of failure’ as our proxy for innovation revealed we were no better than our traditional funding programs

*Data based on grant ‘success scoring’, a subjective assessment made by MJFF staff with input from external assessors
Why we stopped RRIA

Researchers loved RRIA but MJFF felt that it was no longer supporting larger mission needs

- Program was not meeting innovation goal despite clear increase in decision-making speed
- Weekly review process was becoming burden to team who were often launching and supporting many other initiatives and programs in parallel
- Frequent overlap with projects funded (often at larger scale) through other funding programs
- An overall shift away from “catch all” programs to more strategically directed funding
THANK YOU.

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