

Request for Proposals (RFP): “Happiness and Well-Being: Integrating Research Across the Disciplines”

Saint Louis University, with the help of a very generous grant from The John Templeton Foundation and under the direction of Dan Haybron, welcomes proposals from various disciplines to investigate questions that concern *well-being*.

Our subject has to do with human thriving or flourishing, or more generally quality of life: what makes people’s lives go well or badly for them? This is a broad domain concerning what philosophers call “prudential value”: what benefits or harms people, or makes them better or worse off. Research on well-being covers many topics, including virtues, a sense of meaning or purpose, positive and negative emotions, moods, friendship, religious commitments and beliefs, pleasure, stress, and so forth, insofar as these things relate to our prospects for lives that go well for us. Much of this research falls under the heading of positive psychology, but studies of well-being need not explicitly identify with that field, and can include mental health research, inquiries in non-psychological domains, and so forth. And while our ultimate concern is to secure good lives, research on well-being includes both desirable and undesirable states, just as the study of human health does not ignore sickness.

A great deal of current well-being research centers on *happiness*, which is variously understood: in some approaches, ‘happiness’ is just another word for well-being; more commonly, it refers to a certain kind of deep and enduring psychological condition; in still other cases it refers to a more fleeting psychological state. While happiness research concerns matters of central interest to the study of well-being, and is therefore represented in some of the questions below, it is the aim of this RFP to support work that investigates many other topics related to well-being in addition.

We anticipate proposals for empirical and non-empirical studies that address one or more of the questions listed below. Proposals may be for projects that utilize the methodologies of the sciences, philosophy, theology, or religious studies. *Because one goal of the larger initiative of which this RFP is a part is to foster interdisciplinary research on these topics for mutual benefit, proposals must include at least one researcher with expertise in philosophy, theology, or religious studies as personnel on the proposed project.* We are particularly interested in projects with the potential to have a broad impact on well-being research, such as investigations of measures or cross-cultural themes.

Further details about eligibility, award amounts and terms, application instructions, selection criteria, and more are included at the end of this document. For more information about the larger initiative, to include a lexicon of key terms, the members of the multi-disciplinary advisory board, and additional components, opportunities, and events, please visit the project website at www.happinessandwellbeing.org.

RFP QUESTIONS

1. **Good lives: subjective well-being and beyond.** *How can we advance our understanding of the nature of good lives?*
 - Subjective well-being: enriching our understanding. Much well-being research centers on subjective well-being, including measures of life satisfaction and positive and negative affect.

Are the prevailing conceptions of these notions and their importance adequate? When different subjective well-being indicators give different results, as when life evaluation and affect measures correlate differently with income, what should we conclude about people's well-being?

- Eudaimonistic approaches. Another large body of research, including “eudaimonic” psychology, is inspired by the work of Aristotle and others in the eudaimonistic tradition, with a central focus on ideals of nature-fulfillment, self-fulfillment, self-realization, etc. How do measures of these sorts relate to the philosophical tradition? How might empirical and philosophical work along these lines be better integrated? To what extent can eudaimonic and subjective well-being approaches be reconciled, or integrated within some broader theoretical approach? Relatedly, many people value goods like authenticity and fulfilling one's capacities or realizing one's potential, as seen in slogans like “be yourself” or “be all you can be,” as well as in common notions about excellence and moral maturity as contributors to an enviable life. And John Rawls' widely-cited “Aristotelian Principle” suggests that the exercise of our capacities is a potent source of subjective well-being. How might well-being research bring greater insight into such questions?
- What about other values often associated with well-being: love, knowledge, accomplishment, or other goods commonly posited by “objective list” theorists, or in religious or spiritual thought?
- Connecting or engaging with value is widely thought significant for well-being, in a variety of ways. How, for example, does meaning in life connect with happiness and well-being? What is the significance of experiencing one's activities as meaningful or worthwhile, versus reflectively judging one's life to be meaningful? What about the experience of beauty, or of wonder, reverence, or awe? Do people who are more receptive to such experiences tend to benefit in other ways?
- Are there tensions between commonly proposed ingredients of, or paths to, well-being—e.g., between the self-awareness encouraged by mindfulness programs and the lack of self-consciousness characteristic of flow states—and if so, how should these be reconciled?
- How important is well-being, or its putative component happiness, in the broader context of a good life? What are the instrumental benefits of subjective well-being, as well as of “negative” mental states?
- Insights from religious and spiritual traditions. Have certain notions of happiness or flourishing from religious or spiritual traditions, or related concepts that are important in those traditions, been underexplored in empirical or philosophical work on these topics? Might a more theologically rich account of well-being offer advantages over current philosophical theories, and show promise of advancing empirical work?

2. **The emotional realm.** *How can we enrich our understanding of emotions, moods and related states as they bear on well-being?*

- How can we improve our understanding of the complexities of the emotional realm, particularly regarding emotional phenomena that are subtler than “classic” emotions like feeling happy or sad? How does joy relate to cheerfulness, elation, gratitude and other positive emotions? Is flow an emotional phenomenon? Of particular interest are questions relating to tranquility or “attunement” versus stress, tension, or anxiety.
- How do different kinds of emotional states differ in their importance for well-being, e.g., tranquility versus exuberance?

- Stress. In caring for other animals, limiting stress to the animal is often considered a top priority. Might that be the case in humans? If so, should well-being research focus more on stress?
 - Emotional well-being vs. hedonic balance? It has been suggested that some affects, such as pleasant or unpleasant physical sensations, or merely experiencing something as pleasant or unpleasant, should be distinguished from emotional states or moods (as for example in the relatively unemotional pleasures of a fast food meal). One recent philosophical account of happiness rests on such a distinction, and similar distinctions can be found, e.g., in Stoic and Buddhist thought. Is there empirical corroboration for such a distinction?
 - The value of negative affect. Another set of questions relates to negative affect: how important are unpleasant emotions (e.g., anxiety, shame, fear) or apparently “mixed” emotions (compassion, e.g.) to well-being? Similarly, is it crucial to well-being that we experience the right *balance* between so-called positive and so-called negative emotions?
 - Appropriate emotional states. How should emotional responses be related to our circumstances? Some ancient thinkers, for instance, recommended a stance of detachment or acceptance, while others advised sensitizing ourselves to our circumstances, e.g. feeling anger at times. Are certain approaches more conducive to well-being?
 - Profiles of flourishing. What kinds of emotional profiles are characteristic, and perhaps diagnostic, of individuals who are thriving, versus faring poorly? Given research indicating that most people experience a predominance of positive affect, is it clear that a mere predominance of this sort is desirable? Might well-being require an overwhelming predominance of positive affect?
3. **Living well: virtues, skills and well-being.** *How are virtues and skills related to well-being?*
- Causal links between virtues and aspects of well-being. Are there undiscovered causal relations between some of the virtues and other goods that might constitute well-being, like happiness? For example, what is the relationship between honesty, humility, or compassion, on the one hand, and subjective well-being, on the other?
 - “Silencing” immorality. Some people tend more than others to see unethical courses of action, such as cheating, as simply not being live options: such options do not figure in their deliberations at all. Do such individuals tend to fare better, or be happier, than those who give serious consideration to unethical behavior (even if they ultimately decide against it)?
 - Non-moral virtues. What is the relationship between certain non-moral virtues (self-control or industry, for example) and well-being?
 - Practical wisdom is important for living and faring well, and failures to flourish are often attributed to a lack of wisdom: having one’s priorities out of order, or lacking perception or judgment, for example. One role for this virtue is to deal with the problem of recognizing and balancing the many different values that come into play in everyday life. For instance, cultivating individual traits like optimism or kindness may offer limited benefits if the individual lacks a well-developed sense of how to balance their demands. How, then, should practical wisdom be understood, and what is its role in well-being? Can we identify conditions that foster or hinder its development, and interventions that might cultivate it?
 - The appropriate pursuit of well-being. How do the demands of virtue constrain or guide the pursuit of well-being? For example, how might interventions be affected by consideration of the fittingness of certain emotions in a given situation? Is it important that certain interventions, like acts of kindness, be motivated by considerations other than self-interest?

- Cultivating the enjoyment of virtue. How can persons cultivate or construe themselves in such a way that they experience pleasure, perhaps even joy, in virtuous behavior—and what effects would such a psychology have on themselves and others? Does the cultivation of virtues tend to foster “upward spirals” of well-being?
 - Religious perspectives on the virtues. How might a better understanding of virtues favored in certain religious or spiritual traditions, such as compassion, hope, love, temperance, justice or righteousness enhance the study and promotion of well-being?
 - Developing skills is an important part of many approaches to the promotion of well-being, particularly in ancient wisdom traditions—e.g., the Buddhist practice of meditation or “mind training.” It is sometimes even suggested that “happiness is a skill,” and more broadly that living well is an art. How might we better understand the role of skills and their development in well-being? To what extent does empirical research show such methods to be effective in promoting well-being? Are there prospects for integrating such approaches with other methods, for instance other sorts of interventions studied by positive psychologists?
4. **Measures and methods.** *How can measures and methods for investigating well-being be improved?*
- Philosophical issues in empirical research. Well-being research involves unusually difficult conceptual issues, as well as contested questions of value (for instance, what is good for people, or what constitutes a virtue). How should scientific work on well-being deal with these issues? Could validation protocols be improved by greater attention to philosophical and theological issues?
 - Beyond self-reports. Would research in these areas benefit from additional objective measures such as physiological, neuroimaging or behavioral measures, or additional emphasis on such measures, in addition to subjective techniques? Might such measures improve our ability to compare well-being across cultures?
 - Key predictors of well-being. Certain items are widely agreed to be important for well-being: good versus bad relationships, a good versus a bad job, having a sense of security, etc. Might a set of such indicators be used to supplement subjective well-being and other general well-being measures, or perhaps to help validate general well-being measures? For instance, if a life evaluation measure more strongly tracks quality of relationships, work, and feelings of security than an affect measure, or vice-versa, would this be evidence that it is a better general indicator of well-being?
 - Qualitative methods. How can qualitative research methods such as ethnography be used to improve our understanding of well-being? Could quantitative instruments be enhanced by pairing them with qualitative approaches, perhaps shedding light on the meaning of the numbers?
 - Cross-cultural assessments. How might methods for understanding, assessing and comparing well-being across cultures be improved?
 - Perspectives from mental health research. One of the largest and oldest areas of well-being research involves the study of mental health. How might the insights of mental health research be used to improve well-being measures, particularly measures of emotional well-being? How might mental health research be better integrated with other strands of well-being research?
 - The dynamics of well-being are enormously complex, involving a wide range of variables and feedback mechanisms. How can we improve our understanding of these complexities, and how might this help us to pursue and promote well-being more effectively?

- Within-person studies. Would benefits come from more within-person studies?
 - “Big data” and crowdsourcing. Technological developments have made it easier to employ large sample sizes and engage the efforts of large numbers of people. How might such methods be used to enhance our understanding of well-being?
5. **Cross-cultural perspectives.** *How might our understanding of well-being be enhanced by attending to a wider range of cultures, or bringing different cultural and spiritual traditions into conversation?*
- Neglected populations. Research on a broad array of populations can help to illuminate our understanding of the causes and correlates of well-being, as well as our understanding of the diversity of human thinking about the good life. *Are there populations (countries, cultures, religious groups, etc.) that have been underexplored in recent research in the relevant areas, and if so, how might investigation of these populations increase our understanding of the themes of this RFP?* Examples of such populations might include, among others, hunter-gatherer and other small-scale societies, subsistence farming and fishing communities, or “positive outliers”—societies that exhibit higher levels of well-being in certain respects than might be expected. Do some cultures’ ways of thinking about the good life pose challenges for certain philosophical theories of well-being? An important issue in development contexts concerns migration, for instance from rural to urban areas, as hundreds of millions of people are projected to do in coming decades. Are there certain biases that tend systematically to yield poor migration decisions, either moving when one should not, or staying in place when one should move?
 - Concepts across cultures. Are concepts like happiness and well-being, and related concepts like satisfaction, self-realization, meaning, or sacrifice found in all cultures? Some cultures emphasize psychological states like enjoyment or happiness less than others. Do some not value such things at all, or prioritize them differently, or value them only under certain conditions? Do we find differences like these among different religious groups or theological traditions?
 - How do cultural and religious identities influence well-being and interventions for promoting it?
 - Might religious perspectives on well-being be enhanced by bringing different spiritual traditions into conversation? For example, natural law and divine command approaches; or, alternatively, Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu or other traditions?
6. **How people think about the good life.** *What do people care about, and how do they think about the good life?*
- What concepts do people employ in thinking about good lives?
 - What drives ordinary judgments of well-being and happiness?
 - What do people value, both for well-being and for other reasons?
 - Values vs. priorities, desires, etc. How do we distinguish people’s *values*—what they ultimately care about, like happiness or love—from other concerns (for example, practical priorities like money)? Can we distinguish the values that individuals take to concern their well-being from their other values? Do people’s everyday preferences often conflict with their own deepest values?
7. **Rationality, agency, and the pursuit of well-being.** *What might we learn from research on human rationality and agency about how best to pursue and promote well-being?*
- Impudence, situation-sensitivity, and well-being. Abundant research finds that people make

a wide range of mistakes in pursuing flourishing lives; we are often irrational or otherwise imprudent in our thinking and behavior, and in ways that diminish our well-being. Moreover, human agency seems to be highly sensitive to situational factors, as in the phenomena of social contagion or common reactions to exposure to natural scenery, which suggests that social and physical environments play a significant role in shaping the way we think, feel, and act. How do such findings bear on our understanding of well-being?

- Do the aforementioned findings trouble common views about healthy human agency? For example, do they raise problems for certain views about the role of autonomy in well-being, Aristotelian claims that we flourish through the fulfillment of our natures as rational beings, or economic views about rationality and the promotion of well-being? Do people who show less sensitivity to certain situational influences tend to fare better, or worse, than those who are more susceptible to such influences?
- Does this research bear on conceptions of the self? For example, does it suggest that affective or nonrational processes, or rituals and other practices, play a greater role in defining the self than some theories allow? If so, what does this tell us about human well-being?
- Freedom and well-being. Another set of questions relates to freedom: much evidence points to a generally positive relationship between certain kinds of freedom and well-being. But what sorts of freedom are most important for well-being? To what extent is it important to live in certain sorts of community, where some goods come naturally—e.g., the “front porch” conversations typical of certain neighborhoods—or are secured in concert with others? If having a greater range of options, while generally beneficial, does not always translate into higher well-being, are there certain shared, core predictors of well-being to which we should assign special priority?
- The religious psychology of well-being. How might recent developments in psychology and neuroscience bear on the religious psychology of well-being? For example, how does our understanding of human agency and cognition, including mechanisms of social cognition, reasoning, automaticity, moral development, etc. bear on the cultivation of theological virtues, or the individual’s relationship with God?

8. **Developmental and long-term perspectives.** *How might well-being research profit from attention to well-being as it develops over the human lifespan, both in typical and non-typical cases?*

- Beyond the usual suspects. Most well-being research centers on “normal” adult human beings. But an enormous portion of the human experience lies outside this realm, including old age, disability, and childhood. Such cases are important in their own right, but studying them can also shed light on broader questions about human well-being. How might we improve our understanding of human well-being by attending to these so-called “marginal” cases?
- Childhood. Childhood is particularly important to get right, as it concerns all individuals at an especially vulnerable stage of life, with ramifications through the remainder of life. How does thinking about well-being need to adapt to adequately address childhood? What sorts of interventions, including educational, parenting, and community practices and institutions are most effective in fostering both short and long-term well-being for children? How might the cultivation of skills through practices like meditation or prayer benefit children? How might schools and parents better cultivate moral virtues like compassion and integrity, or “executive” virtues like toughness, grit, self-reliance and resourcefulness, to enhance well-being throughout the lifespan? Do some approaches to child development emphasize

comfort or safety, or achievement, to the child's detriment? Do children fare better in highly safe, structured environments or in so-called "free-range" regimes?

9. **Other neglected topics.** *In addition to the questions listed just above, we welcome proposals to investigate other neglected topics that fit the theme of this RFP.* Potential examples include approaches to pursuing well-being in certain contexts like consumer culture, questions about the importance for well-being of things like intrinsic motivation, dedication to purposes greater than oneself (e.g., other individuals, God, just causes), forgiveness (including divine forgiveness, especially in cases where human forgiveness is not possible), clarity of conscience, and more besides.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Instructions for Empirical Proposals: Applicants seeking support for empirical projects may request up to \$310,000 for projects not to exceed two years in duration. Exceptionally promising projects requiring greater funding will also be considered. The total available payout for these awards is \$2.5 million. Letters of Intent are due by October 15, 2015. Notification will be made by December 15, 2015, with submission of full proposals no later than March 15, 2016. Final award decisions will be issued by June 1, 2016, for research to begin no later than September 1, 2016.

Instructions for Non-Empirical Proposals: Researchers with expertise in philosophy, theology, or religious studies seeking support for non-empirical projects may request up to \$200,000 for projects not to exceed two years in duration. The total available payout for these awards is \$800,000. Letters of Intent are due by October 15, 2015. Notification will be made by December 15, 2015, with submission of full proposals no later than March 15, 2016. Final award decisions will be issued by June 1, 2016, for research to begin no later than September 1, 2016.

Submitting an Application

Letter of Intent (LOI) Stage for empirical proposals

Applicants are required to submit:

- A complete curriculum vitae for the project leader and all other team members (if applicable).
- A letter of intent that includes the central questions of the project, the background and significance of the questions, identification of which of the RFP questions (listed above) the project addresses, and a summary of the methodology and hypotheses. This should include a brief "integration narrative" discussing how the project will involve a genuine collaboration across disciplines. The letter should not exceed 3,000 words (references do not count toward this total).
- The amount of funding requested (one sentence is fine for this). No budget narrative or justification is needed at this stage. The amount can be revised at the full proposal stage.

Application materials should be submitted by e-mail attachment, if possible, to wellbeing@slu.edu. Applicants should include “Well-Being – Empirical LOI” in the e-mail subject line. The only acceptable file formats are .doc (including .docx) and PDF. Questions about the application process can be sent to the same address. For LOI deadlines, see the instructions above.

Full Proposal Stage for empirical proposals

Those applicants who are invited to submit full proposals must include:

- A cover letter with the title, amount requested, duration of the project, and team members (if applicable).
- A description of the work to be carried out, not to exceed 6,000 words (references do not count toward this total). The description should include the central questions of the project, the background and significance of the questions, identification of which of the RFP questions (listed above) the project addresses, an integration narrative (see above), and a summary of the methodology and hypotheses.
- A project abstract of up to 500 words which explains the project and its significance to non-academics, and which would be published on the project website (and possibly in Templeton materials) and included in publicity materials if the proposal is funded.
- A timeline.
- A detailed budget with accompanying narrative explaining line items. Overhead is limited to 15%, and funds cannot be used for major equipment purchases.
- Approval of the department chair and the institution’s signing officials.

Full proposals should be submitted by e-mail attachment, if possible, to wellbeing@slu.edu (questions about full proposals can be sent to the same address). Applicants should include “Well-Being – Empirical Full Proposal” in the e-mail subject line. The only acceptable file formats are .doc/.docx and PDF. Full proposals will be accepted only from applicants who have been invited to submit by the project director, on the basis of the LOI phase. For full proposal deadlines, see the instructions above.

Letter of Intent (LOI) Stage for Non-Empirical Proposals

Applicants are required to submit:

- A complete curriculum vitae for the project leader and all other team members (if applicable).
- A letter of intent that includes the central questions of the project, the background and significance of the questions, identification of which of the RFP questions (listed above) the project addresses, and a summary of the main ideas and arguments. The letter should not exceed 1,000 words (references do not count toward this total).
- The amount of funding requested (one sentence is fine for this). No budget narrative or justification is needed at this stage. The amount can be revised at the full proposal stage. We are funding salary only (and no overhead), following the NEH model.

Application materials should be submitted by e-mail attachment, if possible, to wellbeing@slu.edu. Applicants should include “Well-Being – Non-Empirical LOI” in the e-mail subject line. The only acceptable file formats are .doc/.docx and PDF. Questions about the application process can be sent to the same address. For LOI deadlines, see the instructions above.

Full Proposal Stage for Non-Empirical Proposals

Those applicants who are invited to submit full proposals must include:

- A cover letter with the title, amount requested, duration of the project (not to exceed two years), and team members (if applicable).
- A description of the work to be carried out, not to exceed 2,000 words (references do not count toward this total). The description should include the central questions of the project, the background and significance of the questions, identification of which of the RFP questions (listed above) the project addresses, and a summary of the main ideas and arguments.
- A project abstract of up to 500 words which explains the project and its significance to non-academics, and which would be published on project website and possibly in Templeton materials, and included in publicity materials if the proposal is funded.
- A timeline.
- A budget. We are funding salary only (and no overhead), following the NEH model.
- Approval of the department chair and the institution’s signing officials.

Full proposals should be submitted by e-mail attachment, if possible, to wellbeing@slu.edu (questions about full proposals can be sent to the same address). Applicants should include “Well-Being – Non-Empirical Full Proposal” in the e-mail subject line. The only acceptable file formats are .doc/.docx and PDF. Full proposals will be accepted only from applicants who have been invited to submit by the project director, on the basis of the LOI phase. For full proposal deadlines, see the instructions above.

Grant Eligibility

The PI must have a Ph.D. and be in or contracted to a faculty position at an accredited college or university prior to the beginning of the supported research. Applicants can have their name on only one empirical proposal and only one non-empirical proposal for this competition, and can only be the PI for one project in total. The judging panels will consist of philosophers, theologians, religious studies scholars, and scientists with appropriate specializations.

Selection criteria will include: feasibility of the project in the specified timeframe, prior research accomplishments of the project leader and other team members, originality, innovation, and significance of the intended project, relevance of the project to the themes of the RFP as described above, quality of the budget justification, coherence of the intended research plan, the potential of the research to inform future empirical work on well-being, and balance and complementarity among the various projects to be funded. While additional funding from other sources is not required, applicants are encouraged to seek such funding and to list the amount and sources of

additional funds in their proposals. All applications must be submitted in English and all payments will be made in US dollars.

Projects that are primarily historical in focus will not be funded.

Funded projects must have their PI commit to the following:

- Submit interim and final reports, as well as interim and final expenditure reports. The interim and final reports should not exceed 2 pages, and should detail the outcomes of the funded project. Reports must be submitted at the end of six months and at the conclusion of the project if the project is for one year.
- Participate in a workshop, to be organized by SLU, that will convene a small subset of the PIs from other funded projects to discuss research in progress (expenses covered).
- Attend and present conclusions at the capstone conference (expenses covered).
- Include among their project activities at least one activity that is aimed at engaging a non-scholarly audience. Examples of such activity include (but are not limited to) a public talk, an interview, an op-ed, a course or seminar, a blog post in an outlet with considerable reach, etc.
- Consent to have their presentation at the capstone conference videotaped for the project website.
- Notify the project at wellbeing@slu.edu of all conference presentations, papers, and books that arise from the funded research.
- Follow stipulations of grant award as communicated by Saint Louis University.

All questions should be directed to:

Happiness and Well-Being: Integrating Research Across the Disciplines

Email address: wellbeing@slu.edu

Physical address (email preferred):

Department of Philosophy
Saint Louis University
3800 Lindell Blvd., Rm. 130
St. Louis, MO 63108

Summary of Key Dates

- Letters of Intent are due by October 15, 2015
- Notification will be made by December 15, 2015
- Full proposals are due no later than March 15, 2016
- Final award decisions will be issued by June 1, 2016
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