



## Fondazione CARIPLO – Fondazione TELETHON ALLIANCE

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### JOINT CALL FOR APPLICATIONS - 2026

#### Introduction

Fondazione Cariplo (FC) and Fondazione Telethon ETS (FT) made an alliance to foster basic research to support projects focused on unknown aspects of rare diseases. Basic research, especially in the field of rare diseases, remains a neglected and underfunded area of investment, yet plays a pioneering role in advancing research in more common diseases.

Analysis of the scientific literature shows that research tends to focus on a small portion of the human genome. Importantly, the most studied genes are not always the most biologically relevant: in many cases, research focus is often driven by the timing of gene discovery, rather than its actual significance. As a result, many DNA regions and gene families - including their associated mRNAs and proteins – remain poorly characterized, despite their potentially important roles in molecular pathways, and in both physiological and pathological mechanisms.

#### Aim of the Call

This Call supports basic research projects aimed at investigating targets, such as genes/gene families, mRNAs, and proteins, whose function remains unknown in rare diseases of genetic (both monogenic and polygenic) and non-genetic origin. These targets are classified as Tdark, according to the framework developed by the Illuminating the Druggable Genome Knowledge Management Center (IDG-KMC).

Applicants are required to verify the Tdark classification of their target(s) of interest by downloading the "[Pharos Target Classification](#)" file from FC and FT websites and consulting the "tdl" column which specifies the Target Development Level of each protein.

The association between the selected the Tdark(s) and the disease does not need to have been previously demonstrated or published. However, **applicants must provide a clear and well justified rationale for the selection of the Tdark target(s) in relation to the specific disease under investigation.**

Projects might focus on the following genetic aspects:

- Genes associated with rare diseases whose function is completely or largely unknown
- One genotype, multiple clinical phenotypes
- Genetic modifiers

For this Call, research projects can be submitted in one of the two different formats:

**PILOT APPLICATION:** one-year research projects aimed at generating data and/or tools to elucidate the role of Tdark targets in rare diseases. Preliminary data are not mandatory; however, where available, they should be included to strengthen the scientific rationale and demonstrate project feasibility. Only single-center proposals are eligible.

**FULL APPLICATION:** research projects with a duration up to two years, supported by a solid background. Preliminary data are required. Both single- and bi-center proposals are eligible.

Applicants (Lead and Partner) can apply to only one Application format of the FC-FT Joint Call, with one research project.

Projects that actively foster the training, engagement, and professional advancement of young researchers are strongly encouraged.

## **Key Dates**

Call opening: **23 June 2026**

Application Submission Deadline: **16 September 2026**

Notification to applicants of triage phase outcome by **mid-December 2026**

The study section will take place by end of **March 2027**

Notification to applicants of final outcome by **May 2027**

## **Project Duration and Budget**

Pilot Applications: each research project can have a maximum budget of €50,000 and must be completed within one year. If needed, a no-cost extension of up to six months may be requested.

Full Applications: each research project can have a maximum budget of €250,000 with a two-year duration. Applicants may request a no-cost extension of up to one year.

## **Contacts**

Please contact the FT and FC scientific staff at [telethonjointcall@fondazionecariplo.it](mailto:telethonjointcall@fondazionecariplo.it), specifying the topic in the email subject.

## **Eligibility Criteria**

### ***Eligible Diseases***

This Call supports research projects on rare diseases of genetic (monogenic and polygenic) and non-genetic origin. For disease classification, see <https://www.orpha.net/>; for genetic origin information, visit <https://omim.org/>.

### ***Non-Eligible Diseases***

- Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), as funding opportunities for ALS are available through AriSLA (<http://www.arisla.org/>), a dedicated Foundation supported by FC and FT;
- Non-coding RNA (miRNA, lncRNA etc.).

### **Eligible Projects**

Research projects can be submitted as:

- **New application:** A proposal for a new, not already funded project.
- **Resubmission:** An application previously submitted but not funded, which has been substantially revised in response to reviewers' feedback. Only one resubmission is allowed following an initial unfunded submission. Resubmitted applications will be evaluated competitively alongside all other peer-reviewed applications.
- **Renewal:** A request for additional funding to build on a previously funded research project. Renewal applications will be evaluated competitively alongside all other peer-reviewed applications.

### **Eligible Host Institutions**

Only research proposals submitted by investigators (Lead and Partner) working either in **public or private Italian non-profit research Institutions** are eligible. FC only supports projects received by Host Institutions that meet the eligibility requirements set out in the document "Criteri generali per la concessione dei contributi", available at the following link: [Criteri per la concessione dei contributi](#).

Researchers working in the Fondazione Telethon Research Institutes (TIGET, TIGEM) are not eligible.

### **Eligible Applicants**

Applicants holding an active FC - FT Joint Call grant are eligible to apply only if their existing grant is either completed or currently in its final administrative year, and the administrative report for the second-to-last year has already been submitted to both FC and FT Grant Offices. Accordingly, if the application to the present Call is successful, holders of an active FC - FT Joint Call grant (as Lead or Partner) must complete or close their existing grant before starting the new project, in accordance with the timelines outlined in the "Regolamento di Gestione" for FT and the "Guida alla rendicontazione" for FC. Alternatively, the Grantee may choose to decline the new grant.

Applicants holding an active Pilot grant are NOT ELIGIBLE to apply to the present Call.

### **Application Details and Requirements**

Applications must be prepared in accordance with the specific guidelines, which are an integral part of this Call. Guidelines and all related documents are available for download on the Call webpage at the following [link](#).

### **Evaluation Process**

<b>Applications that are incomplete and do not comply with the requirements stated in this Call for Applications and relevant Guidelines will not be accepted.</b>
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All FC - FT staff and reviewers comply with confidentiality and conflict of interest policies. Each application will be subject to administrative and relevance eligibility checks. Eligible applications are evaluated by the FC - FT Scientific Committee, an international panel of distinguished experts, whose members' names will be published on a dedicated webpage. Grants are awarded through a competitive selection process. Pilot and Full Applications will be evaluated through separate, dedicated peer review processes and competition.

Projects will be evaluated through the following peer review steps:

**Phase I:** Eligibility Check

**Phase II:** Triage

**Phase III:** Full Review

The reviewers' evaluation guidelines will be available on the FC - FT websites.

### ***Phase I: Eligibility Check***

All applications are checked for compliance with guidelines and eligibility criteria; those that do not conform will be rejected at this stage.

### ***Phase II: Triage***

During the Triage Phase, the FC - FT Scientific Committee assesses each application for scientific competitiveness, based exclusively on the "Overall Description of the Research Project" section.

Only top-ranked projects proceed to Full Review.

Detailed evaluation criteria are provided in the "Guidelines for Committee Members" available on the FC and FT websites.

### ***Phase III: Full Review***

#### ***Remote Evaluation***

Applications that pass the Triage Phase will undergo **Full Review** and will be evaluated by the Scientific Committee members. **Only Full Applications will be additionally evaluated by *ad hoc* external reviewers.**

The FC - FT Scientific Committee members and *ad hoc* external reviewers (when needed) will be asked to separately evaluate each proposal based on the following criteria:

- PILOT APPLICATION:
  - 1. Project quality and feasibility**
    - science significance and originality;
    - design and method appropriateness;
    - project feasibility;
    - team competence;
    - budget adequacy.
- FULL APPLICATION:
  - 1. Project quality and feasibility**
    - science significance and originality;
    - design and method appropriateness;
    - project feasibility;
    - team competence;
    - budget adequacy.
  - 2. Project impact**
    - potential impact of project results on advancing scientific knowledge and long-term impacts on patients.

For Full Applications, two separate scores will be given to the two criteria (quality and impact), and they will contribute to the **final score of the project** with a weight of 80 and 20 percent, respectively.

### *Study Section*

Top-scoring proposals will be discussed by the FC - FT Scientific Committee in a dedicated Study Section. Following the discussion, all Panel members will score each project, and the highest-ranked projects will be recommended for funding. The FC - FT Scientific Committee will also review the proposed budgets, which might be adjusted from the original requested amounts.

## **Outcome of the Evaluation Process**

**Phase I: Eligibility Check.** Only applicants whose applications do not comply with guidelines and eligibility criteria will be notified by email by mid-October 2026.

**Phase II: Triage.** All applicants will be notified of the triage outcome by email and only rejected applicants will receive access to the FT Review Report by mid-December 2026.

**Phase III: Full Review.** All applicants will be notified of the outcome of the Full Review by email and will receive access to the FC - FT Review Report by May 2027.

## **Awarding of Research Funds**

All Applicants will be notified by email at the end of the review process and will receive the Review Report by the end of May 2027. FC and FT will communicate to all successful Applicants the administrative details and instructions to activate the approved grants.

Applicants must activate the grant within three months from receiving the instructions for grant activation. By this time any previously active FC - FT Joint Grant must be in the closed status. Please check the “Regolamento di gestione” for further details for FT and in the “Guida alla rendicontazione” for FC.

At the end of the evaluation process, the allocation of funds will be approved by the respective Boards of Directors of FC and FT. Awards are contingent upon the availability of funds, dedicated equally to such partnership. FT wishes to remind Applicants and their Institutions that funds are raised through many small individual donations. FC and FT, therefore, bear a special responsibility to oversee an appropriate allocation of funds.

FC will support projects on rare diseases of both genetic and non-genetic origin. For grants awarded by FC, which does not carry out direct administrative management of the grant, please refer to “Bandi con modalità di rendicontazione elettronica (dal 2007 in poi)” available at the following link: [Guida alla rendicontazione](#). FT will support projects on rare diseases of genetic origin only. Projects focusing on cancer will NOT be supported by FT. For grants awarded by FT, please refer to “Regolamento di gestione” for administrative management and policies.

## **Publications, Data Sharing and Final Scientific Reports**

All Grantees are required to:

- Acknowledge FC and FT in all publications arising from the project by specifying the project number in the Acknowledgements/Funder section and send the relative PDF file to [papers@fondazionetelethon.it](mailto:papers@fondazionetelethon.it);
- Be compliant with the FC and FT Open Access Policy (please refer to [https://www.fondazionecriplo.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/policy\\_open\\_access\\_it.pdf](https://www.fondazionecriplo.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/policy_open_access_it.pdf) or

<https://www.fondazionetelethon.it/en/what-we-do/support-of-research-and-patients/support-to-research/open-access/>);

- Be compliant with the European General Data Protection Regulation no. 679/2016 as well as with any other applicable local law;
- Actively promote meaningful engagement with civil society, targeting diverse audiences beyond peers and the academic community.
- Submit a Final Scientific Report at the end of the project.

### **Privacy of Personal Data**

FC, FT and the Host Institution will be considered as being autonomous data controllers of the personal data to be processed under the Application.

The Host Institution is allowed to indicate the personal data of the Applicant as well as of any other researcher involved in the Application (Key Personnel and Collaborators), on the condition that the Host Institution: (i) has provided the involved researchers with the information about privacy policy reported on the grant tracker platform and available to download on the website (ii) has thereby gathered the relevant consents; and (iii) will approve the Application ensuring that the above conditions have been respected.

FC and FT shall, at any time, have the right to examine such documents (information to data subjects and declaration of consent) at the Host Institution location. The Host Institution shall deliver any document, according to FC and FT requests.

**Milan, June 23, 2026**