

Fondazione
CARIPLO



FONDAZIONE CARIPLO – FONDAZIONE TELETHON JOINT CALL FOR APPLICATIONS 2026

GUIDELINES FOR COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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, conducted by researchers working in Italian public or private non-profit research institutions.

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.

Committee Members' Role

The Fondazione Cariplo – Fondazione Telethon Scientific Committee members (hereon “Committee Members”) will support the evaluation process, by providing written comments and a score for each eligible Application.

General Instructions

The Applications and the Evaluation Form are available on *Fondazione Telethon Grant Management* system portal at this [link](#), accessible through personal login and password.

For questions concerning access to the Fondazione Telethon Grant Management, the Reviewer is kindly asked to contact our IT Admin (telethonscience@fondazionetelethon.it).

We ask Reviewers who use AI-based generative tools – such as Large Language Models (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, ...) – to operate responsibly and in compliance with European standards, as laid out by the “[Living Guidelines on the Responsible Use of Generative AI in Research](#)”. Reviewers should be aware that certain uses, such as uploading proposals and delegating evaluation to generative AI tools, may represent a breach of confidentiality obligations and other regulations.

Reviewer Account

Registered Users in TETRA (the former Grant Management system)

Reviewers already registered in TETRA – the former Fondazione Telethon Grant Management system – are **kindly asked NOT to create a new account**.

Please click on **Forgot Password?** and follow the given instructions for setting a New Password, then enter the portal.

New Reviewer to Fondazione Telethon Calls

To register and review the Applications, Reviewers should click on the **Register Here** button and enter their email address: to complete the registration process follow the online instructions.

Peer Review Process

Triage Phase

The Triage Phase is the first phase of the Review process. It is used to identify top-ranking projects among eligible Applications for full evaluation. During this phase, each project is assigned to two or three Committee Members depending on the number of applications received, who are asked to assess scientific merit and assign scores accordingly. Each Committee Member will have access to the “Overall Description of the Research Project” and Biosketch sections ONLY.

Only top-ranked projects proceed to Full Review.

Triage Instructions

Committee Members are requested to access the *Fondazione Telethon Grant Management* system portal at this [link](#) through personal login and password. If you experience any issues accessing or downloading the Application from the Fondazione Telethon website, please consider using a different browser or enabling pop-ups. By clicking on **Pending Triage**, the Committee Members will find the list of all the Applications assigned to them and access each Application’s evaluation form by clicking on the specific project. The Committee Members will have access ONLY to the “Overall Description of the Research Projects” and Biosketch sections. These sections will be visible by clicking on the **View/Print** button next to **Application Preview**.

For both types of Application, according to the Triage Scoring Scale reported below, Committee Members will select one of three score ranges and then will manually enter a numerical score in the **Triage Score** section of the form. The score should reflect the reviewer’s recommendation on whether the project should advance to full review. If the reviewer selects a score range of 1.0 – 3.5 or 3.6 – 4.5 they must also indicate the project’s **Weaknesses** (multiple selections are allowed).

Weaknesses are categorized as follows:

- not hypothesis-driven
- not original and/or innovative
- inappropriate design and methods
- not feasible
- weak preliminary studies (only Full Applications)
- poor rationale
- weak Tdark/disease link
- weak genetic link (if relevant)
- other (please specify in the comments)

Committee Members are also asked to fill in the **Comments on Weaknesses** section (max 3,000 characters). In the **Comments on Weaknesses** section, we kindly request each Committee Member to provide a few sentences to highlight any issues regarding the project. **Please note that Committee Members’ comments**

may be used to provide the Applicants with a written overall justification if their proposal is excluded during the Triage Phase.

Triage Scoring Scale		
Triage Score	Project Evaluation	Recommendation
4.6 – 5.0	Outstanding	No concerns, suggested for full review
3.6 – 4.5	Good to Excellent	Some concerns (please justify), could undergo full review
1.0 – 3.5	Poor to Average	Major concerns (please justify), not suggested for full review

When all parts of the evaluation form have been completed, the Committee Members will click on **Submit** and the Application will be listed in the **Submitted Reviews** tab on the Home Page.

Full Review Phase

Applications that **pass the Triage Phase** will advance to the **Full Review Phase** and will be evaluated by three Committee Members.

In support of their evaluation, Committee Members will be provided with written comments from one appropriate international External Reviewer (Full Applications only), selected *ad hoc* for each Application by FC - FT Scientific Officers.

During this remote phase, both the *Primary* and *Secondary Reviewers* have to provide written comments, while the *Tertiary Reviewer* has to provide an overall statement. All reviewers are required to assign a score that corresponds to their written remarks.

Written comments are an essential part of the review and are critical in developing summary statements for the Applicants.

Individual comments will be incorporated anonymously into a consolidated Review Report that will be returned to the Applicant. Committee Members should therefore ensure that their comments are accurate, clearly written, and free of derogatory language.

Please note: External Reviewers’ written comments will also be included as such in the Review Report.

Remote evaluation Instructions

Three Committee Members will review each assigned Application, and each reviewer will provide a score.

Committee Members are requested to access the *Fondazione Telethon Grant Management* system portal at this [link](#) through their personal login and password. If you experience any issues accessing or downloading the Application from the Fondazione Telethon portal, please consider using a different browser or enabling pop-ups.

By clicking on **Pending Panel Review**, the Committee Members will find the list of all Applications assigned for review and can access each proposal’s evaluation form by clicking on the specific project. The Committee Members will find general information about the project in the **Review tab**, and the full proposal will be visible by clicking **Actions**, then **View Application in Split Screen**, or by clicking the **View/Print** button next to **Application Preview**.

Committee Members will be asked to evaluate and score each proposal based on the following criteria and the type of Application.

For Pilot Applications:

Project quality and feasibility

- **Science significance and originality** (max 3,500 characters including spaces) – Is the Tdark(s) link to rare diseases properly addressed? Is the proposed research original and/or innovative? Does the proposal offer a clearly stated rationale?

- **High-risk/High-reward potential** (max 3,500 characters including spaces) - To what extent does the project propose a high-risk scientific approach with the potential for scientific advancement (high reward)?
- **Appropriateness of Design and Methods** (max 3,500 characters including spaces) – Are the experimental approaches/methods appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? Is the project feasible and can it be completed within the proposed timeframe? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and provide alternative plans? Please highlight overall strengths and weaknesses.
- **PI and team competence** (max 3,500 characters including spaces) - Is the PI and Team appropriately trained and well suited to carry out the proposed work? Is the work proposed proportionate to the level of experience of the principal investigator and key personnel? Does the Team play a significant role in the field of the submitted research project? Is the plan to engage/train young researchers appropriate?
- **Total requested Budget** (max 3,500 characters including spaces) - Is the budget appropriate for the proposed research?

Scores

Score range: from **1.0 (poor)** to **5.0 (outstanding)** by 0.1-unit increments.

Full Review Scoring Scale		
Score	Value	Description
4.6 – 5.0	Outstanding	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
4.0 - 4.5	Excellent	Very strong with only minor weaknesses
3.6 - 3.9	Good	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
2.0 – 3.5	Average	Some strengths but also some major weaknesses
1.0 - 1.9	Poor	A few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

Definitions:

Minor: an easily addressable weakness that does not substantially reduce the project's value

Moderate: A weakness that reduces the project's value

Major: A weakness that severely limits the project's value

When all parts of the evaluation form have been completed, the Committee Members will click on **Submit** and the Application will then be listed in the **Submitted Reviews** tab on the Home Page.

For Full Applications:

Project quality and feasibility

- **Science significance and originality** (max 3,500 characters including spaces) – Is the Tdark(s) link to rare diseases properly addressed? Is the proposed research original and/or innovative? Does the proposal offer a clearly stated rationale?
- **Appropriateness of Design and Methods** (max 3,500 characters including spaces) – Do the preliminary results support the principles to be tested? Are the experimental approaches/methods appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? Is the project feasible and can it be completed within the proposed timeframe? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and provide alternative plans? Please highlight overall strengths and weaknesses.
- **PI and team competence** (max 3,500 characters including spaces) - Is the PI and Team appropriately trained and well suited to carry out the proposed work? Is the work proposed proportionate to the level of experience of the principal investigator and key personnel (Partners/collaborators)? Does the

Team play a significant role in the field of the submitted research project? Is the plan to engage/train young researchers appropriate?

- **Total requested Budget** (max 3,500 characters including spaces) - Is the budget appropriate for the proposed research? For multicentre research proposals, is the shared budget appropriately justified?

Project impact

Potential of the proposed research (max 3,000 characters including spaces) - What will be the potential impact of the proposed research if successful (does it address an important gap, what difference will it make to the scientific community)? What will be the potential impact on patients in the long term?

Scores

- *Project quality and feasibility*

Relative weight: 80%

Score range: from **1.0 (poor)** to **5.0 (outstanding)** by 0.1-unit increments.

Full Review Scoring Scale		
Score	Value	Description
4.6 – 5.0	Outstanding	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
4.0 - 4.5	Excellent	Very strong with only minor weaknesses
3.6 - 3.9	Good	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
2.0 – 3.5	Average	Some strengths but also some major weaknesses
1.0 - 1.9	Poor	A few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

Definitions:

Minor: an easily addressable weakness that does not substantially reduce the project’s value

Moderate: A weakness that reduces the project’s value

Major: A weakness that severely limits the project’s value

- *Project Impact*

Relative weight: 20%

Scores and scoring criteria (based on the potential project impact):

Score=5: High Impact

Score=4: Medium Impact

Score=3: Low Impact

The overall score will be automatically calculated by combining the two scores according to their relative weight.

When all parts of the evaluation form have been completed, the Committee Members will click on **Submit** and the Application will then be listed in the **Submitted Reviews** tab on the Home Page.

Study Section

Based on the Committee Members’ written evaluation and scores, top-ranking projects will be discussed during a plenary meeting, chaired by two of the Committee Members.

Each project will be introduced by the *Primary Reviewer*, who will briefly describe the project and illustrate strengths and weaknesses. The *Secondary* and *Tertiary Reviewers* will also provide their statements. A discussion among all the Panel Reviewers will take place before reviewers confirm their final scores. Based on these outcomes, the final list of research projects recommended for funding will be compiled.

Milan, June 23, 2026