

# Annual Report 2020



SCIENCE  
PHILANTHROPY  
ALLIANCE

**Thank you to the  
Alliance's board and  
members for their ongoing  
dedication to increasing  
philanthropic funding for  
basic scientific research.**



Robert Conn, former president & CEO of The Kavli Foundation and the Alliance's founding board chair.

**Special gratitude as  
well to the Alliance's  
founding board  
chair, Robert Conn,  
as he enjoys a well-  
deserved retirement.**

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# Executive Summary

The concurrent crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ensuing global economic fallout, and the reckoning with racial injustice in the United States dramatically changed life for everyone in 2020. The Science Philanthropy Alliance and its members were no exception.

While the events of 2020 changed how we do what we do, they also reinforced why we do it. We're witnessing a pandemic response built on the groundwork of basic science laid in part by the support of Alliance members and advisees. We've seen funders come together more than ever as they navigate common challenges and science funders are increasingly recognizing the necessity of a diverse, inclusive, and equitable research enterprise. The Alliance is honored to serve as a trusted advisor, convener, and resource during such a transformative time.

Responding to members' needs in 2020 resulted in our most active year to date. We hosted twice the number of events, expanded our advising portfolio, and helped members launch two shared interest groups to explore practices around diversity, equity, and inclusion, and measurement, evaluation, and learning. Under the leadership of new president Valerie Conn, we also deepened our bench of talent in 2020. This included key hires to our leadership team, our growing fellows program, and the addition of three senior science advisors: molecular biologist and 19th president of Princeton University Shirley Tilghman, astrophysicist and former director of the National Science Foundation France Córdoba, and physicist and former Alliance president Marc Kastner.

In the end, the Alliance influenced more than \$201 million in science funding, including basic research as well as applied research related to COVID-19—a temporary shift in focus given the urgency of the pandemic. Equally important, the team entered 2021 fully staffed and poised to capitalize on the heightened sense of purpose we all share. We've been inspired by the science philanthropy community's response to the challenges and opportunities of 2020 and look forward to supporting it in the year ahead.

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## ABOUT THE SCIENCE PHILANTHROPY ALLIANCE

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The Science Philanthropy Alliance is a community of philanthropic funders who work together to inspire other philanthropists to dedicate a portion of their giving to basic science. Alliance members act as both champions and advisors to other philanthropists to ensure more private funding is earmarked for the kinds of research initiatives that have led to the scientific, technological, and medical breakthroughs that fuel the 21st century's technology- and information-driven economy.

## Supporting Members

The Alliance ended the year with 30 members. Three new members (The Azrieli Foundation, Burroughs Wellcome Fund, and The Shanahan Family Charitable Foundation) joined in 2020 while three others opted out of membership as their priorities shifted away from basic science.

With funders' normal operations disrupted, the Alliance's exclusive members' meetings were held virtually and took on new significance, increasing from four in 2019 to seven in 2020 with record-setting attendance. In addition to presentations from members and prominent scientists, extra emphasis was placed on small-group discussions among members about common challenges and innovative solutions. Alliance members formed two shared interest groups to explore emerging issues and promising practices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and measurement, evaluation, and learning.

### Welcoming Our New Members



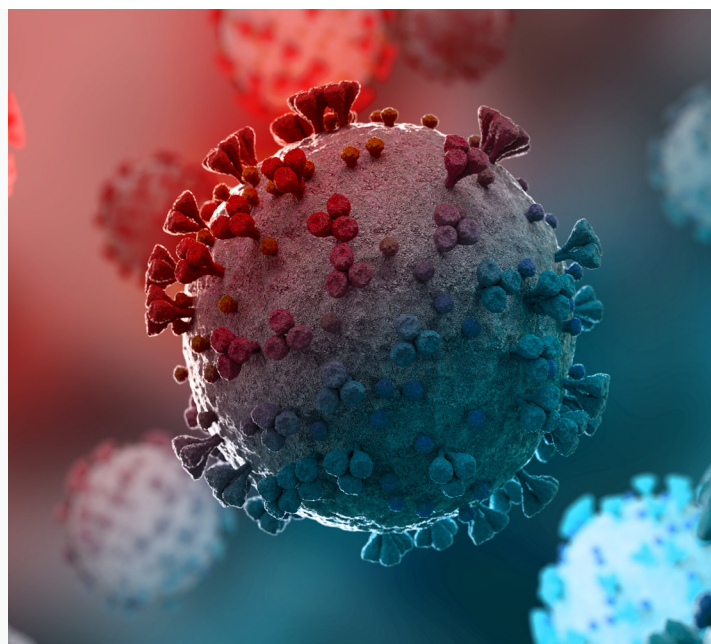
Shanahan Family  
Charitable Foundation

## Advising Philanthropists

Drawing on the expertise of its science team, senior science advisors, and membership base of leading science funders, the Alliance offers no-cost advising services to philanthropists interested in basic science. In 2020, the Alliance completed 59 projects for 28 advisees. Seven of these organizations were new to the Alliance's portfolio. Since 2015, the Alliance has advised 46 funders on their science philanthropy journeys.

### COVID-19 Response

As science funders, Alliance members and advisees play a critical role in the COVID-19 response both by supporting grantees through the current crisis and by learning from it to lay the groundwork for future pandemic responses. The Alliance moved quickly to support science funders in this work, ultimately influencing \$133 million in funding to COVID-19-related efforts, including both basic and applied science projects.



- At the outset of the pandemic in March, the Alliance hosted its first webinar to share COVID-19 science information and funding opportunities.
- To keep its members connected and informed during the fast-moving early days of the pandemic, the Alliance assembled a resource hub and real-time database of more than 100 funding opportunities.
- The Alliance surveyed its members to identify their COVID-19 funding priorities and how the pandemic was influencing their giving.
- Under the leadership of senior science advisor Shirley Tilghman, the Alliance assembled a working group of the world’s leading infectious disease experts to identify funding priorities in the effort to better understand and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Looking toward the future, the Alliance hired an infectious disease fellow with support from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative Donor Advised Fund (DAF) at the Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

## Convening the Science Philanthropy Community

The Alliance has established itself as a leading convener of philanthropists and scientists to catalyze collaboration and identify funding opportunities. Despite travel limitations, the Alliance hosted seven virtual events in 2020 (in addition to members’ meetings) attended by more than 200 individuals representing 51 private funders and 37 research institutions. Topics were driven by member interests—ranging from neuroscience and climate science to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the research enterprise.



**Virtual Events**



**Individuals Attended**



**Private Funders Represented**



**Research Institutions Represented**

### Science Research in Challenging Times

In July, the Alliance convened funders, development officers, and scientists to discuss how philanthropy can accelerate the research enterprise’s response to the pandemic and its efforts to advance equity in the sciences. The virtual event attracted more than 125 attendees, including representatives from 19 foundations in the U.S., U.K., and Canada.

Panels included discussions with Nobel laureate Carl Wieman (Stanford University), Freeman Hrabowski (University of Baltimore, Maryland County), Bonnie Bassler (Princeton University), and Rod Pettigrew (Texas A&M University), as well as interviews with Alliance members Heather Templeton Dill (John Templeton Foundation) and Louis Muglia (Burroughs Wellcome Fund).

# Strengthening Our Team

As the Alliance builds its infrastructure for the future, the organization added eight new full time staff during Valerie Conn's first year as president. This included the addition of an advisor, director of communications, and the organization's first director of operations. The Alliance's scientific expertise was further bolstered by the creation of the science director position, the addition of three new senior science advisors (below), and three new fellows: civic science fellow Karen Andrade, Ph.D., supported by the Rita Allen Foundation; climate fellow Diane Matar, Ph.D., supported by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation; and infectious disease fellow Daren Ginete, Ph.D., supported by the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative DAF, an advised fund of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

## New Senior Science Advisors

In addition to former Alliance president Marc Kastner's transition into a senior science advisor role this year, the Alliance was honored to welcome Shirley Tilghman and France Córdova. They join existing senior science advisors David Baltimore and Robert Tjian.



### [France A. Córdova, Ph.D.](#)

*14th director, National Science Foundation (Ret.); president emerita, Purdue University; chancellor emerita, UC Riverside*

In March 2020, Córdova concluded a six-year term as director of the National Science Foundation (NSF). At NSF, she oversaw a pivot in strategy to spotlight big ideas with potentially transformative return on investment, including areas that touched on quantum mechanics, big data, the rules of life, artificial intelligence, multi-messenger astronomy, changes in the Arctic, and other areas on the forefront of scientific research. Her own contributions in multi-spectrum research on x-ray and gamma ray sources and space-borne instrumentation have made her an internationally recognized astrophysicist.



### [Marc Kastner, Ph.D.](#)

*Donner Professor of Physics emeritus, MIT; adjunct professor of physics, Stanford University*

Kastner was the founding president of the Alliance, serving in the position from 2015 to 2019. Prior to leading the Alliance, he had a long career in a variety of senior positions at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He was named the Donner Professor of Physics in 1989 and later became director of the Center for Materials Science and Engineering in 1993, head of the Department of Physics in 1998, and dean of the School of Science in 2007.



### [Shirley M. Tilghman, Ph.D.](#)

*President emerita and professor of molecular biology and public affairs, Princeton University*

Tilghman was the 19th president of Princeton University, the first woman and the first biologist to hold the position. Responsible for groundbreaking discoveries in genetics, Tilghman was also the founding director of Princeton's Lewis-Sigler Institute for Integrative Genomics. In addition, she helped launch the Princeton Neuroscience Institute, the Andlinger Center for Energy and the Environment, and the Princeton Center for Theoretical Science.

## Alliance Members (as of December 2020)

### Members

Heising-Simons Foundation  
The Kavli Foundation  
Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation  
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation  
Research Corporation for Science Advancement  
Rita Allen Foundation  
Simons Foundation  
Alfred P. Sloan Foundation

### Benefactors

Burroughs Wellcome Fund  
Chan Zuckerberg Initiative  
Howard Hughes Medical Institute  
David and Lucile Packard Foundation  
John Templeton Foundation  
Wellcome  
Anonymous

### Associate Members

The Azrieli Foundation  
Sergey Brin Family Foundation  
The Brinson Foundation  
Ross M. Brown Family Foundation  
Shurl and Kay Curci Foundation  
Dalio Philanthropies  
David and Claudia Harding Foundation  
Lyda Hill Philanthropies  
The Klarman Family Foundation  
Leon Levy Foundation  
Open Philanthropy Project  
The Rockefeller Foundation  
Schmidt Futures  
Shanahan Family Charitable Foundation  
Winn Family Foundation

## 2020 Advisory Board

**Harvey V. Fineberg, M.D., Ph.D.**  
(Board Chair)  
*President, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation*

**Robert W. Conn, Ph.D.**  
*President and CEO, The Kavli Foundation*

**Adam F. Falk, Ph.D.**  
*President, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation*

**Deanna Gomby, Ph.D.**  
*President and CEO, Heising-Simons Foundation*

**Elizabeth Good Christopherson**  
*President and CEO, Rita Allen Foundation*

**Daniel Linzer, Ph.D.**  
*President, Research Corporation for Science Advancement*

**Claire Pomeroy, MD, MBA**  
*President, Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation*

**James Simons, Ph.D.**  
*Chairman, Simons Foundation*



## Senior Science Advisors

**David Baltimore, Ph.D.**

*President Emeritus, Caltech*

**France A. Córdoba, Ph.D.**

*14th Director, National Science Foundation (Ret.);  
President Emerita, Purdue University; Chancellor  
Emerita, UC Riverside*

**Marc Kastner, Ph.D.**

*Donner Professor of Physics Emeritus, MIT;  
Adjunct Professor of Physics, Stanford University*

**Shirley M. Tilghman, Ph.D.**

*President Emerita and Professor of Molecular Biology  
and Public Affairs, Princeton University*

**Robert Tjian, Ph.D.**

*Former President, HHMI; Biochemist, UC Berkeley*

## Staff

**Valerie Conn**

*President*

**Julie Kohrt**

*Director of Events*

**Karen Andrade, Ph.D.**

*Fellow, Civic Science*

**Kate Lowry, Ph.D.**

*Science Director*

**Mary Donnelly**

*Science Administrative Assistant*

**Jason Maier**

*Director of Communications*

**Elenoa Fuka**

*Budget and Data Manager*

**Sue Merrilees**

*Senior Advisor*

**Daren Ginete, Ph.D.**

*Fellow, Infectious Diseases*

**Bishakha Mona, Ph.D.**

*Fellow, Neuroscience*

**Lana Ha**

*Program Associate*

**Elizabeth Weiss**

*Advisor*

**Rachel Jackson**

*Director of Operations*



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