

**Final Paper: Strategic Communications and Marketing Plan
The Michael J. Fox Foundation For Parkinson's Research**

Background

The Michael J. Fox Foundation (MJFF) is dedicated to discovering a cure for Parkinson's disease and improving therapeutic remedies, through aggressively funded research programs. There are 6 million people in the world affected by Parkinson's with men and women equally dealing with the condition, starting typically around the age of 50. MJFF's main purpose is to fund research towards a cure for Parkinson's disease. This mission also includes academic and scientific research to develop therapies for Parkinson's, search for causes, and provide ancillary services for the caring of loved ones. Parkinson's disease impacts the whole family, not just a patient's conditions. The foundation's groundbreaking clinical research involves scientists and industry partners made possible through financial capital for a cure. MJFF strives to have no financial reserves, deploying funds raised within months, to make the greatest impact, investing over \$1 billion to accelerate programs and treatments. According to Michael J. Fox, "the goal is to be out of business." Utilizing logic models and research networks, MJFF has a competitive advantage. With celebrity name recognition and 20 years of research and data, MJFF is "the most credible voice on Parkinson's research in the world" according to *The New York Times*. In collaboration with biotechnology, pharmaceutical, and health-tech, scientific trials allow its research to thrive.

Foundation tools such as advocacy blogs, videos, and support networks give the Parkinson's community cutting-edge educational, wellness, and community-building resources filled with inspiration. During the COVID-19 pandemic, MJFF delivers vital and robust interactive virtual events to connect with their audience, executing online platforms to combat isolation and bring the Parkinson's community together. While many of its large fundraising venues have been

cancelled due to COVID-19, money continues to be channeled to clinical research programs, grants, advocacy, and awareness with strategic benchmarks, including reviews of new grant initiatives, such as to focus on underrepresented DEI population affected by Parkinson's. As important, is the creation of podcasts and new peer-to-peer personal networks which allow Parkinson's patients, family, and friends to feel safe and secure, with open communication and engagement. Furthermore, the MJFF COVID-19 Resource Hub and e-newsletters are useful in sharing additional assets for action and news, as well as informing the Parkinson community of on-line events, social media connections, and ongoing public health research. During this unprecedented social upheaval, MJFF has and is well positioned to pivot to meet the needs of Parkinson patients and families, rising to meet this public health emergency, by doing what it does best, devoting its mission to scientific research, education, therapeutic initiatives, and understanding the whole person, not just the patient.

During the next six months, MJFF change strategy is to build new inclusive program methods to enhance academic, social, and clinical research to connect those who have Parkinson's and their loved ones through various networking mediums, in person and virtually, as they advance towards a cure. Considering the growth and maturity of MJFF, I believe this statement encompasses the next six months of MJFF, with emphasis on research, advocacy, connection, and wellness. If I were to be hired by the MJFF, I would implement many short and long-term strategic elements in the following communications and marketing plan.

Strategic Communications and Marketing Plan

MJFF, according to its charter, has an obligation to fund research with minimal disruption. To build on its strengths and considering COVID-19 as an opportunity, all financial assets that would have been used for marketing or event production can now be reallocated to research

projects to support the 6 million people diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. As more people are diagnosed daily with this debilitating disease, including sixty thousand this year, MJFF will shift strategies with additional emphasis on medical research, clinical trials, and social services to families of those undergoing Parkinson's, for support and to find a cure, further investing in the integrity of their brand.

Marketing Goals

Goal 1: Shift at least 50% capacity towards research

- Fund 20 new clinical studies and grants
- Give 20 current studies extra funding with clear targets
- Ensure 92 cents of every dollar goes towards research

As MJFF strives for a cure, research and development is at the forefront of the mission. By shifting at least 50% of fundraising and staff capacity towards research, an objective to fund 20 new clinical studies, and support 20 current studies with extra funding will provide benefits and create long term sustainability. To generate stronger financial impact, this capacity shift will allow the MJFF to ensure 92 cents of every dollar goes towards research versus the prior 88 cents. This goal aligns with the Foundation's mission and delivers on "an aggressively funded research agenda."

Goal 2: Increase engagement in the Buddy Network by 25%

- Enroll at least 100 new members a month

MJFF can build audience engagement through their Buddy Network, an online community of people with Parkinson's, their loved ones, and those caring for them. By enrolling at least 100 new members a month, the Buddy Network can increase usage and activity by 25% in the next six months. It provides networking opportunities, resources, and discussion forums with a goal

of building relationships through the platform, supporting the physical and emotional stressors of caregivers of those with Parkinson's.

Organizational Brand

MJFF needs to remain true to its brand identity, searching for a Parkinson's cure, while being responsive to the public health crisis and social turbulence due to COVID-19. With a strong sense of accountability, they can engage both internal and external stakeholders, aligning identity and values. Brand democracy is a key element that MJFF can take advantage of with Michael J. Fox as a brand ambassador to advocate for the cause to various constituents. MJFF's biggest stakeholders are their staff and board; by communicating identical messaging about organizational culture and values internally, they have a strong sense of consensus to communicate externally. Therefore, MJFF's current biggest challenge is expanding beyond itself, growing product lines, otherwise known as brand affinity. They must collaborate more with partners and institutions which includes stronger investments in clinical trials. They need to secure traditional and nontraditional partners that can widen their scope and accelerate greater societal impact. The best strategy to drive this collaboration is to partner and advocate with other Parkinson's organizations and hospitals to create a stronger presence in this health sector and ensure the continuity and speed of research programs.

Situational Analysis

The strengths of MJFF include: the premier organization in the New York City area providing exceptional staff, resources, research, and services to the Parkinson's community; its leadership, with a sound Board of Directors, Founder's Council, Leadership Council, Patient Counsel, Scientific Advisory Board, and of course, founder, Michael J. Fox. This passionate

base of constituents will help boost fundraising and brand awareness during this difficult time and beyond. The vision is emotional in essence with direct connection to a celebrity Parkinson's spokesperson that can create a larger audience and wider reach. A weakness could be considered inclusion of too many broad Parkinson's services and programs, lacking specification in a targeted area. Furthermore, in creating a more unique set of values, clearer communication of the organization's purpose can be spread. Opportunities include more partnerships, noting the importance of collective impact. By working with other Parkinson's organizations, MJFF can engage in a bigger audience, extending reach and frequency, educating a larger base. The power of the spoken word through more podcasts, webinars, and marketing videos is an easy decision since their marketing team is vast. Threats at MJFF include too many fundraising programs may overlap and cannibalize one another; and too many broad clinical studies, with varying targets and benchmarks. These conflicts can make the mission focus difficult to decipher. Is MJFF more research based? Or more fundraising donor centric? Regarding cost and revenue, with twenty plus years in its lifecycle, MJFF needs to reevaluate which events and studies are worth funding. In essence, an opportunity exists for MJFF to abide by a re-energized mission, with clear specific research goals, and partnership collaboration, while ensuring that the whole person, including a Parkinson's care team and loved ones are supported.

Target Audience 1: Care Team

Based on preliminary research, it seems that MJFF is performing remarkably at targeting those with Parkinson's, their loved ones, and researchers in the field. It appears that there is a lack of support for care team members, including movement disorder specialists, occupational and speech therapists, and other medical professionals. Better outreach to these

members through existing partnerships and connections will create stronger marketing and brand awareness. As an external audience, this segment can bridge the gap between the fundraising and research side of MFFF, as they may be involved in personal care of Parkinson's individuals who could benefit from programming, while also working with world class scientific researchers.

Target Audience 2: New Clinical Researchers

MJFF needs to focus their research by evaluating research and development initiatives and grants to be more specific. To this extent, MJFF must partner with new clinical researchers and expand their role with existing researchers to focus solely and expeditiously on eradicating Parkinson's. Otherwise, MJFF limits research to existing grants in the pipeline which may delay the main mission towards a cure which internal and external stakeholders agree is coming closer towards fruition. This focused and re-energized collaboration will gain high approval marks from the Board of Directors and Patient's Council and gain traction with social media, therefore, increasing fundraising.

Primary Calls to Action and Messaging

Target Audience 1:

- Develop connection with care team members to serve as brand ambassadors
- Help to sustain and re-energize the mission
 - Encourage Parkinson's clients to use Foundation services
 - Providing referral incentive

A challenge is the broad base of a care team members network could create an issue with how to spread content. This can be overcome by surveying the clientele of the care team to develop the strongest approach.

Target Audience 2:

- State the urgency cure which medical experts can knowledgably do
 - Create publicity opportunities for these experts through press releases, statements, podcasts, and more
- Encourage to partner with MJFF

- Utilize monetary incentives

A challenge is the lack of knowledge surrounding MJFF's communications, which can be overcome with stronger messaging specifically positioning and personality.

Marketing Objectives

For the first audience, direct response marketing through in person connects with care team members will achieve the most beneficial results. Direct mailings to current patients of these care team members will prove effective as it engages a secondary audience. Earned media should also be employed, as unsolicited marketing can engage the care team members to market the mission, vision, and value statements of MJFF with their own channels.

For the second audience, owned and paid media, MJFF website, and social media will be beneficial to spread the word to new researchers about how they can receive funding for their clinical trial to end Parkinson's. This type of media can also involve permission-based marketing allowing researchers to opt in to hear more about MJFF work and measurable progress. This will allow MJFF to receive metrics about their subscriber base and establish their trials as the predominant ones in the Parkinson's field.

Tactics

Target Audience 1:

1. Business to Business Marketing
 - a. Visit care team members with pamphlets and brochures for distribution to their network
2. Direct Mailings
 - a. Coordinate direct mail fundraising to patients through their care team members
3. Earned media = unsolicited direct marketing
 - a. Encourage current team members to share MJFF social media to their networks

Target Audience 2:

1. Email list
 - a. Advertise MJFF research and grant opportunities to new researchers
 - b. Establish new membership database specifically for researchers
 - c. Extend existing partnerships or slowly exit those that are not directly related to finding a cure

2. Advertising
 - a. Social Media
 - i. Pay for advertising slots on Facebook and LinkedIn targeted towards research and institutional demographics

Recommendation and Conclusion

This new normal will require a team effort from The Michael J. Fox Foundation. Now is the time to act and enhance MJFF research funding capabilities, as more Parkinson's individuals remain vulnerable. The increase in researching capacity and Buddy Network engagement will demonstrate that MJFF cares about those with Parkinson's and collaborates with the science community. I encourage the marketing staff and Board of Directors to adopt this plan for approval by the end of the month to increase the momentum in Parkinson's understanding and translate that to scientific deliverables to make an impact and commitment towards a cure. Without this plan, MJFF runs a risk of resting on their past accomplishments and missing an opportunity to redirect dormant funds to fast-track a Parkinson's cure.

References

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