



THE SONTAG FOUNDATION

Annual Report

2024

THE SONTAG FOUNDATION
www.sontagfoundation.org



Table of Contents

03	—	A Letter From Our President
04	—	2024 DSA Scientific Retreat
05	—	Grant Snapshot
06	—	2020-2024 Annual Giving
07	—	Distinguished Scientist Award
08	—	Sontag Innovation Fund
10	—	Other Initiatives We Support
12	—	Rick Sontag's Honorary Degree
13	—	3rd Annual Fly-In
14	—	BTFC Matching Grant Program
15	—	2024 Events
16	—	2024 Workshops
17	—	2025 DSA Scientific Retreat
18	—	Brain Tumor Network



A Letter from our President

It's difficult to top a great year like 2023 but in 2024 we did it. We started the year with our Annual Scientific Retreat featuring a talk on technology by famous Space Shuttle astronaut Captain "Hoot" Gibson. We added new personnel to help with evaluating new science and new ways to engage researchers. We co-sponsored several technical symposiums led by famous scientists (including a Nobel Laureate) regarding the causes and treatment of brain tumors. We investigated over 50 new technologies to invest in through our Sontag Innovation Fund in 2024 and closed on 6 investments. One of those investments was purchased by a large pharmaceutical company.

We awarded \$3 million in research funding to 4 new DSA winners and 9 DSA alumni. We ended the year by starting a relationship with the US Department of Defense on brain cancer research and even made a connection with the leaders of the International Space Station who offered some of our scientists the opportunity to conduct their research in the thin air 250 miles above earth. 2025 will be hard to top this, but we're going to give it a try.

- RICK SONTAG

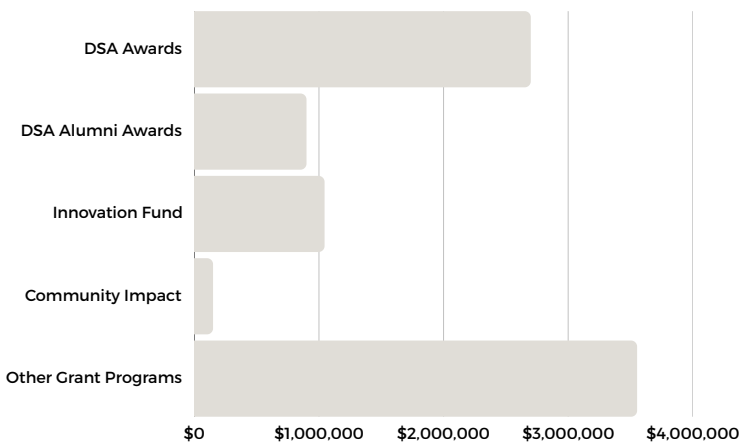
*President & Founder,
The Sontag Foundation*

The 2024 DSA Scientific Retreat

The Foundation hosted its 21st Annual DSA Retreat in February at the Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, Florida. This event brought together over 100 members of the Sontag scientific community to foster collaboration, share research updates, and discuss cutting-edge topics. The keynote speaker, Captain Robert “Hoot” Gibson, a former NASA Space Shuttle Commander, highlighted the importance of teamwork, meticulous preparation, and adaptability as key life lessons gained from leading missions in the high-stakes environment of space exploration.



Grant Snapshot



In 2024, The Sontag Foundation granted

\$8,198,287

including over \$1M in program related investments through the Sontag Innovation Fund.

Over 97%

of the funds support brain tumor related programming.

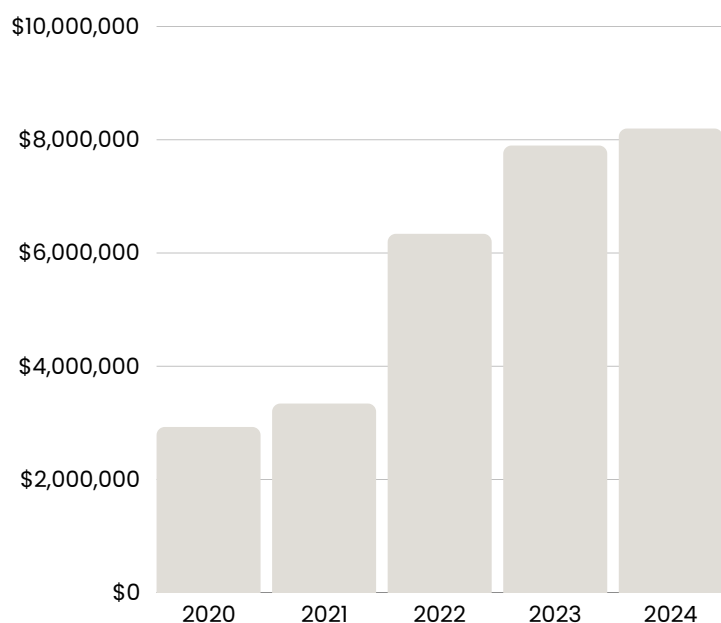


2020-2024 Annual Giving

Since 2020, The
Sontag Foundation
has awarded over

\$28 Million

to support brain
cancer research
& organizations
providing brain
tumor patient
resources.



Distinguished Scientist Award

\$750,000 disbursed over 5 years

Since 2003, the Foundation has invested over

\$77 million

to support the scientific careers of young investigators pursuing high-risk projects at a critical stage in their research. The 2024 award winners, with the potential to make a significant impact in the field of brain cancer, were selected to join the prestigious network of Sontag Foundation award recipients.

To learn more about the Distinguished Scientist Award, visit the Foundation's website:

www.sontagfoundation.org/explore/



Cathryn Cadwell, M.D., Ph.D

Dr. Cadwell is an Assistant Professor in the Weill Neurohub Department of Neurological Surgery and Pathology at the University of California, San Francisco. The title of her funded project is: Cellular and Circuit-level Reorganization of Neural Networks by Diffuse Infiltrating Glioma.



Sanjay Srivatsan, Ph.D.

Dr. Srivatsan is an Assistant Professor in the Basic Sciences Division of the Fred Hutch Cancer Center. The title of his funded project is: Reconstructing Glioblastoma's Cellular Origins Using Single Cell Genome Sequencing.



Hua Wang, Ph.D.

Dr. Wang is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Materials Science & Engineering at The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. The title of his funded project is: New-Generation Exosome Vaccines for Treating Glioblastoma.



Zhao Zhang, Ph.D

Dr. Zhang is an Assistant Professor of Pharmacology and Cancer Biology at Duke University. The title of his funded project is: Targeting Genomic Parasites for Glioblastoma Immunotherapy.

**MAR
12**

2025 Grant Application Deadline

Have a question? Shandra Koler manages the portfolio of grants and contracts for the Foundation and assists grant applicants interested in applying. Connect with Shandra via email at skoler@sontagfoundation.org.

SONTAG INNOVATION FUND

\$1M

invested in 2024

8

Portfolio
Companies

\$3.5M

invested since
inception

1st Exit

in Oct 2024

The Sontag Innovation Fund deployed \$1,044,955 in 2024 across six investments. Since fund inception in 2021, the Fund has invested over \$3.5 million dollars in eight portfolio companies across therapeutic, diagnostic and medical device sectors.

In 2024, the fund reached its first exit, Modifi Biosciences, which was acquired by Merck in October 2024. Merck paid \$30 million dollars up front to Modifi Biosciences for the acquisition in a deal worth up to \$1.3 billion dollars.

The Sontag Innovation Fund is a venture philanthropy and impact investment fund wholly-owned by the Sontag Foundation. The Fund focuses on early-stage investment opportunities with the ability to materially accelerate the development of therapeutics and technologies to diagnose, treat, prevent, and cure brain cancer. Learn more at <https://sontagfoundation.org/innovation-fund/>

“At one point, Modifi was on the brink of collapse. But the startup clawed its way back with an infusion of seed money, much of it from charitable organizations including the American Cancer Society’s BrightEdge, The Sontag Foundation and the National Brain Tumor Society. A 2022 study validated the approach, which helped convince Merck of its potential, Bindra said.

Dr. Ranjit Bindra, co-founder, Modifi Biosciences

SONTAG INNOVATION FUND

NEW ASSOCIATE!

Justin Siemann joined the Fund as a Life Sciences Associate from Vanderbilt University where he helped drive large pragmatic randomized clinical trials. In addition, he evaluated the underlying neurobiology of neuropsychiatric disorders during his postdoctoral fellowship and PhD. He will be responsible for conducting scientific due diligence, market analysis, and critically reviewing investment opportunities focused on new developments within neuro-oncology.



Scott Davis, Ph.D.
Managing Director



Justin Siemann, Ph.D.
Associate, Life Sciences

Portfolio Companies



BIOSCIENCES



Exits



Other Initiatives We Support

ASCO Conquer Cancer

2024 Sontag Foundation Young Investigator Award

The Sontag Foundation is a proud sponsor of the ASCO Conquer Cancer Young Investigator Award. These \$50,000 one-year awards provide funding to physicians focusing on brain tumor research during the transition from a fellowship program to a faculty appointment.



ASCO Young Investigator 2024 Award Winner

Tyler Lanman, MD
Massachusetts
General Hospital

Arthritis National Research Foundation (ANRF) Sontag Foundation Fellow

Prior to the founding of the Sontag Foundation, the Sontag family was a long-standing funder of ANRF in memory of Rick's mother who died of complications from rheumatoid arthritis.

In 2012, the Sontag Foundation awarded a \$1 million endowment to fund the ANRF award in perpetuity.



Fan Zhang, Ph.D

University of Colorado,
Anschutz Medical Campus
Aurora, CO

Other Initiatives We Support



Brain Cancer Research 2023 Fellow

Zulekha A. Qadeer, Ph.D

Postdoctoral Scholar
University of California, San Francisco
San Francisco, California, USA
Targeting epigenetic drivers in group 3
medulloblastoma

AACR-Sontag Foundation Brain Cancer Research Fellowship

The AACR-Sontag Foundation Brain Cancer Research Fellowship represents a joint effort to encourage and support a postdoctoral or clinical research fellow to conduct brain cancer research and to establish a successful career path in this field. The proposed project may be basic, clinical, translational, or epidemiological in nature and must have direct applicability and relevance to brain cancer.



Georgia Pinner
Program Officer

NEW PROGRAM OFFICER!

Georgia Pinner joined the Sontag Foundation as a Program Officer, bringing a strong background in program management and dedication to empowering women entrepreneurs. She previously led initiatives at the Jacksonville Women's Business Center, where she coordinated training workshops, managed fundraising events, and cultivated donor relationships. Georgia will assist Shandra Koler with the implementation of the Foundation's programmatic initiatives.

Rick Sontag's Honorary Degree

Congratulations to Rick Sontag, Founder & President of The Sontag Foundation and Brain Tumor Network, as he was honored with an honorary degree from the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School during their 2024 commencement week celebration. Recognized for his significant contributions, Rick has been a well-known figure in advancing treatments and supporting groundbreaking research initiatives.



3rd Annual Brain Tumor Organizations Leadership Fly-In



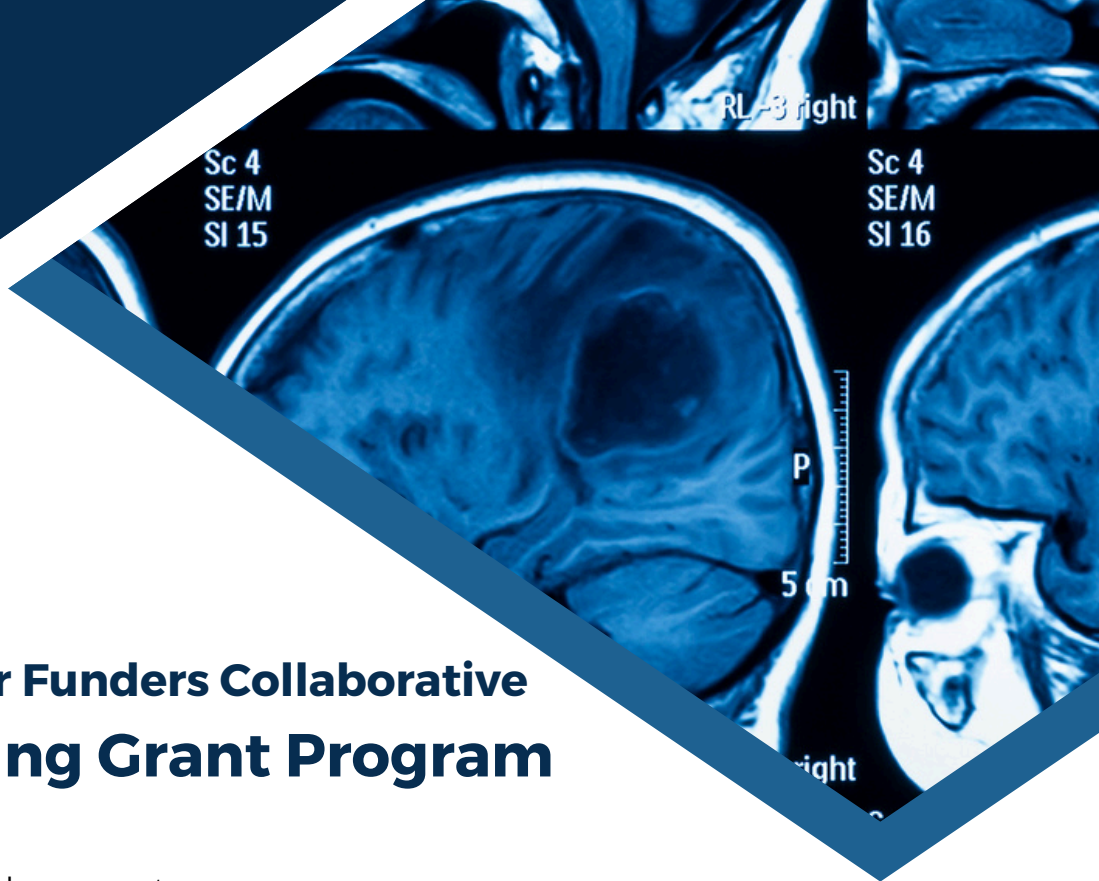
The 3rd Annual Brain Tumor Organization's Leadership Fly-In took place the week of July 15th in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. This event brought together many of the nation's leading brain tumor organizations and leading clinical and research thought leaders to discuss one of the most pressing issues facing the field, molecular profiling, and biomarker testing and the role it plays in helping patients make informed decisions about care. Partnerships like this are critical to fulfilling our mission because we firmly believe we are stronger together.



Panel on State of the Field: Molecular Profiling

Panelists:

- Dr. Craig Horbinski, Northwestern
- Dr. Matija Snuderl, NYU
- Dr. Michael Vogelbaum, Moffitt Cancer Center
- Dr. Chetan Bettegowda, Johns Hopkins
- Dr. Ashley Ghiaseddin, University of Florida

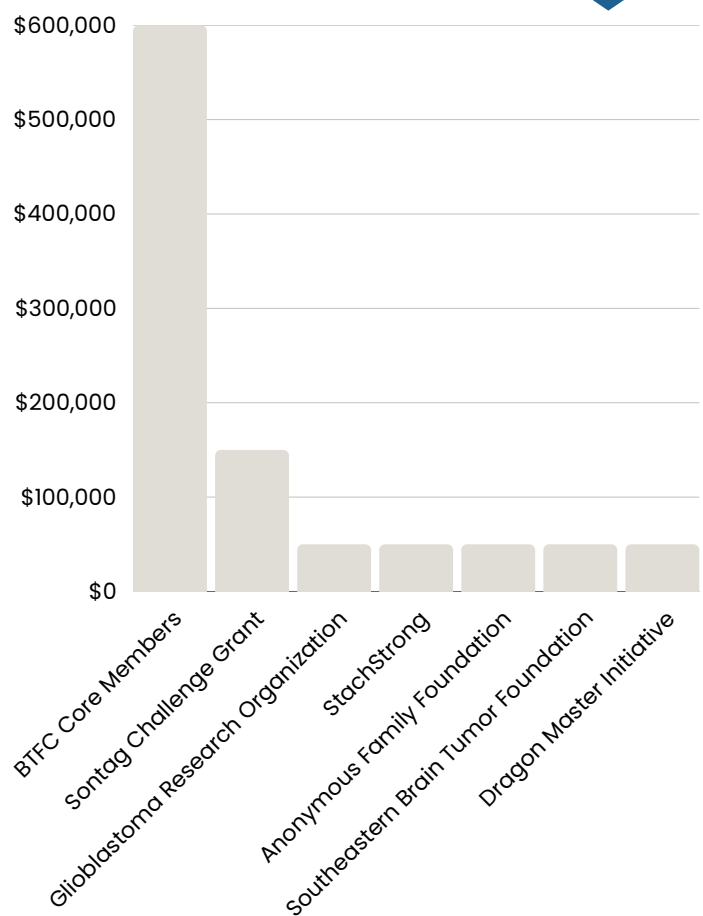


The Brain Tumor Funders Collaborative 2024 Matching Grant Program

Objective: To accelerate advancements in brain tumor research through the development and implementation of liquid biopsy technologies by leveraging the collective impact of philanthropic contributions.

The Sontag Foundation is committed to match contributions by new funders to the BTFC, **up to a total of \$150,000**. The matching grant will amplify the impact of each donation, fostering innovation and collaboration in the field of brain tumor research. As a result of the challenge grant, BTFC was able to secure **\$300,000** resulting in a **\$1,000,000** RFP.

Liquid biopsy is a promising technology that allows for the detection and monitoring of tumors through non-invasive methods. This has the potential to revolutionize brain tumor diagnosis, treatment, and monitoring, offering new hope for patients and their families.



Total Funding: \$1,000,000

2024 Events

CDMRP's Glioblastoma Inaugural Stakeholders Meeting



In May, we were honored to be chosen as one of the non-profits selected to present at the CDMRP's Glioblastoma Research Program's inaugural stakeholder's meeting. We identified knowledge gaps, capability needs, and underfunded areas crucial for future glioblastoma research investments.



NOV 21-24 | HOUSTON, TX



We had an amazing time at the Society for Neuro-Oncology 2024 Annual Meeting. With over 3,000 attendees from 50 countries, the energy was truly inspiring. We had the honor of presenting the 2024 Radiation Sciences Abstract Award TMET-28 to Navyateja Korimerla, Ph.D. from Daniel Wahl's (DSA 2021) Laboratory, attended an insightful talk by Dr. Douglas Hanahan, the 2024 Sontag Distinguished Lecture keynote speaker, and received an award for our Platinum Sponsorship of SNO. We are already looking forward to attending again next year!

2024 Workshops

Thank you to the Mark and Sontag Foundations for organizing and supporting this incredible workshop with such excellence... you really set us up to collaborate on transformative change for GBM patients, down to fueling the actual collaboration and next steps. It is the vision of Becky, Hilary, Cristiane and their teams that enabled the success of this weekend, and I am so very grateful to you and the Mark and Sontag Foundations.

All I can say is that we succeeded in compelling brilliant people to direct their intellect and skills to study GBM, and I could not be happier.

Sheila K. Singh, M.D. Ph.D. FRCS(C)

Director, Centre for Discovery in Cancer Research, McMaster University



Sontag-Mark Foundation GBM Workshop

The glioblastoma workshop with The Mark Foundation for Cancer Research was nothing short of incredible! We are deeply inspired by the collaboration and progress shared, and we are left with renewed hope for the future of glioblastoma research. A huge thank you to our incredible organizers—Tim Cloughesy, William Kaelin, and Sheila Singh—for bringing this workshop to life and creating such a powerful platform for innovation. We look forward to announcing the grantees that will be funded in the summer of 2025.



Bench to Bedside Workshop

In March, we partnered with the Focused Ultrasound Foundation to host a workshop on focused ultrasound-induced blood-brain barrier opening for glioblastoma treatment and monitoring. More than 30 experts convened to address burning questions related to the field. As a result of this important meeting, a group of subject matter experts are working on improving reporting guidelines for the use of focused ultrasound for liquid biopsy.



ISS National Lab Webinar

The Sontag Foundation hosted an invitation-only webinar where the ISSLAB team shared opportunities for scientists to exploit the extreme environment of space and utilize microgravity to provide insight into research questions that have eluded traditional laboratory experiments. The presentation included information about ongoing neuroscience projects, future initiatives, and resources available to help PIs translate projects into flight ready research.



DSA2025
BRIGHT MINDS. BOLD MISSION.

The 2025 DSA Scientific Retreat



Special Guest Speaker

Edith Widder, Ph.D.
Founder, ORCA



February 17-20, 2025

Ritz Carlton Amelia Island

Please check our website
for the most up to date
information.

[Annual Scientific Retreat](#)



Brain Tumor Network

Providing free, individualized brain tumor support to help patients overcome treatment obstacles and facilitate access to quality healthcare.

Visit Us Online at [BrainTumorNetwork.org](https://www.BrainTumorNetwork.org)