Cas9-mediated tagging of endogenous loci using HITAG

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Abstract

To facilitate the interrogation of proteins at scale, we have developed High-throughput Insertion of Tags Across the Genome (HITAG). HITAG enables users to produce libraries of cells, each with a different protein of interest C-terminally tagged, to rapidly characterize protein function. To demonstrate the utility of HITAG, we fused mCherry to a set of 167 stress granule-associated proteins and characterized the factors which drive proteins to strongly accumulate within stress granules.

Introduction

To obtain an accurate working model of the cell, we must first understand the dynamic behavior and interaction partners for each of the thousands of proteins within it. A powerful approach to interrogate protein function is through the use of protein tags which are often appended to the C-terminus of a protein of interest, so as to minimize their influence on protein folding and localization[1,2]. When fused to a protein, these tags enable a myriad of studies such as the *in vivo* examination of protein localization (e.g. fluorescent protein tag), the affinity purification of a protein and its interaction partners from cells (e.g. FLAG epitope tag), or the rapid destruction of a target protein (e.g. FKBP-DD small molecule regulated degron tag)[3–6].

As CRISPR/Cas9 has simplified the modification of mammalian genomes, there has been growing interest in tagging all human proteins at their endogenous loci to facilitate the comprehensive mapping of protein behavior[7]. To achieve this goal, groups have relied on homologous recombination to insert tags at the C-terminus of target genes or used non-homologous end joining (NHEJ) to insert synthetic exons containing protein tags into the introns of target genes[7,8]. While powerful, these approaches still involve significant amounts of labor for each line generated or can perturb protein function due to the tag being inserted into the middle of the protein, respectively.

To fulfill the need for a high-throughput method of gene tagging that would minimally perturb protein function, we developed High-throughput Insertion of Tags Across the Genome (HITAG). HITAG uses Cas9 in combination with non-homologous end joining to insert protein tags into the C-terminus of target genes. Key to the HITAG approach is that

the process occurs within a mixed pool of cells wherein, at the end of the procedure, each

cell harbors a distinct protein that is C-terminally tagged. In analyzing the insertion events

mediated by HITAG, over 70% were found to be "perfect" fusions between the tag and the

target gene without the insertion or deletion of additional bases. To enable HITAG, we

performed iterative rounds of optimization including the development of a modified

selection marker to improve the enrichment of properly tagged cells. Using HITAG, a set

of 167 stress granule (SG)-associated proteins was fused to mCherry and the features

driving some of these proteins to strongly accumulate within SGs were explored. Our

results reveal a clear role for protein localization, the ability to bind to RNA, and the

propensity to phase separate in influencing efficient protein accumulation within SGs.

Results

Generating pools of tagged cells using Cas9+NHEJ

To develop HITAG, we began with a previously reported method of NHEJ-based

endogenous gene tagging termed CRISPaint[9]. In CRISPaint, a donor plasmid containing

the tag to be inserted into the genome is transfected into cells. Along with the donor

plasmid, 3 other plasmids containing Cas9, a gRNA against the C-terminus of the gene to

be tagged (target-gRNA), and a gRNA against the donor plasmid (donor-gRNA) are also

delivered (**Supplementary Figure 1**). Once all plasmids are inside the cell, Cas9 complexes

with the target-gRNA and the donor-gRNA to cut the target gene and the donor plasmid,

respectively. The cleaved donor plasmid can then become ligated into the endogenous

locus via NHEJ. If the tag gets knocked in-frame to the gene of interest, it will also lead to

the expression of a downstream drug resistant marker, enabling the facile enrichment of

properly tagged cells by applying drug selection.

While powerful, CRISPaint is limited in that it can only be applied towards one target gene

at a time, making it quite laborious to study a large number of genes. To adapt this system

into one suitable for rapidly generating libraries of tagged lines, the requirement for

performing independent transfections for each target gene needed to be removed. To

address this bottleneck, a mixture of target-gRNAs was packaged into lentiviruses and

delivered to cells at a low multiplicity of infection (MOI ~0.1) to ensure that on average,

each cell would integrate a single target-gRNA into its genome. This pool of cells was then

transfected *en masse* with the remaining components required for tagging (Cas9, donor

plasmid, donor-gRNA), thereby enabling each cell to uniquely tag the gene to which its

integrated target-gRNA is directed (**Figure 1a**). Finally, to enrich properly tagged cells, a

round of drug selection was applied.

In optimizing this high-throughput approach, we sought to avoid competition between

the target-gRNA and donor-gRNA for complexing with Cas9, since if competition did occur,

it would interfere with either cleavage of the endogenous locus or the donor plasmid and

in doing so decrease the rate of knock-in[10,11]. To achieve this goal, two orthogonal Cas9

proteins, SpCas9 and SaCas9, were employed, each of which interacts with a unique gRNA

scaffold. In this design, SpCas9 is used to cleave the endogenous target gene and SaCas9

is directed to linearize the donor plasmid (**Supplementary Figure 2**). Another benefit of

using two orthogonal Cas9 proteins is that properly tagged genes will not be recut, which

can occur when only using a single Cas9 protein should the target gene and the donor

plasmid have a similar sequence proximal to their PAM sites (**Supplementary Figure 3**).

Finally, to reduce off-target insertions which can occur if the donor-gRNA were to

inappropriately cleave the genome, several different SaCas9 donor-gRNAs were examined.

From this analysis, a donor-gRNA that showed high tagging efficiency and specificity was

identified and used throughout the remainder of the study (**Supplementary Figure 4**). As

a "perfect" fusion, without the loss or addition of bases, is the most common repair

outcome from the tagging, we developed three donor plasmids that upon fusion to the

target gene will place the tag in the appropriate translational reading frame

(**Supplementary Figure 5**)[9]. The design enables users to achieve precise tagging by

selecting an optimal donor plasmid depending upon the location within the C-terminal

codon that the target gene is cut by Cas9.

To demonstrate the utility of HITAG for studying protein behavior at scale, we used it to

investigate stress granules (SGs). SGs are transient liquid-liquid phase separated (LLPS)

RNA-protein complexes that form in response to environmental stress[12,13]. To date, the

factors which drive certain proteins to accumulate strongly within SGs remain unclear. We

hypothesized that by tagging a large number of SG-associated proteins with the

fluorescent protein, mCherry, we could gain insight into the properties that drive strong

versus weak accumulation in SGs. Having established our initial approach to high-

throughput gene tagging, a 193-member target-gRNA library against SG-associated

proteins was designed and delivered to HEK293T cells (**Figure 1a**). Into the resulting

mixture of cells, the remaining plasmids required for tagging were transfected in and

puromycin-resistant cells were then selected. To determine the bias in tagging in the

resulting library, the abundance of each gRNA within the population of cells before and

after the procedure was determined (**Figure 1b**). As expected, the distribution of gRNAs

in the initial population of cells before mCherry knock-in was even, with no gRNA

dominating the pool. In contrast, after mCherry insertion and puromycin selection, a

marked skew in the population was observed with 5 gRNAs occupying more than 60% of

the pool, suggesting that only a handful of genes were efficiently tagged during our initial

attempt, and that further optimization was required.

Optimizing insertion rates and drug selection steps

As numerous genes were poorly targeted in our initial library, we first sought to improve

the efficiency of the process by optimizing the ratio of the transfected plasmids. Using a

HEK293T cell line that stably expressed a single target-gRNA against the histone gene,

HIST1H4C, 10ng or 100ng of each of the plasmids required for tagging (Cas9, donor

plasmid, donor-gRNA) were delivered (**Figure 1c**). These studies revealed that a higher

amount of the donor plasmid (100ng) and a lower amount of the donor-gRNA (10ng) led

to a significant increase in the number of mCherry positive cells, before the application of

drug selection. Further optimization of the transfection conditions demonstrated an upper

limit to the benefit of delivering more donor plasmid (500ng), improvements by adding

additional Cas9 plasmid (100ng), and a decrease in insertion rates when the amount of

donor-gRNA is further reduced relative to the amount of donor plasmid (**Figure 1c**). These

results indicate that the amount of cleaved donor plasmid is a major factor determining

the tagging efficiency and suggest that cutting the donor plasmid too early, via increased

amounts of donor-gRNA, before the endogenous locus is cleaved, may be detrimental.

Given that the puromycin resistance marker is under the regulation of the endogenous

gene that is tagged, we next hypothesized that weakly transcribed genes may not produce

enough of the resistance protein to survive drug selection. To increase the level of

puromycin resistance conferred upon tagging, a modified donor plasmid (P3) was

constructed containing three tandem copies of the puromycin resistance gene downstream

of the mCherry tag (**Figure 1d**). As a control, a donor plasmid with three copies of the

puromycin resistance gene downstream of mCherry, but containing a stop codon after the

first PuroR copy was also constructed (P3S). These modified donor plasmids along with

the original donor plasmid with one copy of the PuroR gene (P1) were then transfected

along with Cas9 and the donor-gRNA into HEK293T cells containing a single target-gRNA

against either HIST1H4C, the chaperonin complex member, CCT7, or the nuclear pore

protein, NUP93. Minimal difference in the number of mCherry positive cells before

puromycin selection was observed among the different donors (**Supplementary Figure 6**).

In contrast, the number of viable cells dramatically increased after puromycin selection

using the P3 donor plasmid which expresses the three copies of the puromycin resistance

gene (**Figure 1d**). These results suggest that in our initial approach, many properly tagged

cells were likely lost due to insufficient expression of the drug selection marker.

Upon applying the improved transfection conditions and optimized P3 donor plasmid

design to the initial 193-member SG target-gRNA library, a marked improvement in the

number of tagged genes was observed. Of the genes that were tagged in the pool, 29

genes showed an abundance >1% following puromycin selection as compared to only 8

genes meeting this threshold in the initial approach (**Figure 1b**). In addition, a strong

correlation ($\rho=0.78$) among independent biological replicates was also found, suggesting

that the results were reproducible (**Supplementary Figure 7**). We designated this

optimized pipeline for generating pools of tagged cells HITAG.

Application of HITAG to stress granule factors

To ensure optimal tagging, our initial library of 193 SG targets had been selected such

that they all shared the same reading frame upon being cut by Cas9. To tag the remaining

proteins previously associated with SGs, two additional target-gRNA libraries of 190 and

205 members were created and used to generate additional pools of mCherry-tagged cells

via the HITAG approach.

To begin to characterize the fidelity of HITAG, the junctions between the various target

genes and the inserted mCherry tag (junction reads) were selectively enriched via a nested

PCR approach. From these analyses, 244 of the 588 genes that were targeted across the

three reading frame libraries were tagged and survived drug selection (**Supplementary**

Figure 8). The number of junction reads associated with each tagged gene was then

compared to its respective target-gRNA abundance within the same pool of cells. As

anticipated, a good correlation between these two metrics was observed (ρ = 0.84),

suggesting that the target-gRNA within each cell is driving the tagging events and that

target-gRNA abundance is a reasonable surrogate for which genes are tagged within the

library (**Supplementary Figure 9**).

While HITAG was able to target a large proportion of the genes within the library, many

failed to be tagged. To investigate the factors influencing these results, the characteristics

of tagged and untagged genes were interrogated. Given our previous findings regarding

the expression of the puromycin resistance marker limiting the efficiency of selection, we

first examined if gene expression influenced the results. On average tagged genes showed

a higher level of expression as compared to untagged genes (**Figure 1e**). Despite the

overall importance of gene expression, several genes showed high expression but remained

poorly tagged. In order to reduce the number of amino acids lost from the C-terminus of

the various target genes being examined, gRNAs were selected based on their proximity

to the stop codon. We hypothesized that a portion of the variation in tagging may have

been driven by inefficient target-gRNAs that poorly cut the endogenous target site. When

analyzing the on-target efficacy score of various target-gRNAs, tagged genes were

associated with target-gRNAs that had higher predicted efficiency scores as determined

by CRISPick[14] (**Figure 1f**).

A concern when using NHEJ to insert DNA sequences into endogenous loci is that it can

lead to error-prone repair with additional bases being lost from both the target gene and

donor construct. When analyzing the sequenced junctions from the pool of mCherry

tagged cells, 73.6% of all junctions were precise fusions between the endogenous locus

and the donor plasmid, in line with previous studies[9,15] (**Figure 1g**). Of the remaining

junctions, 21.7% retained the proper frame between the gene of interest and the mCherry

tag but showed a loss or gain of bases, with a strong bias towards smaller 1-2 amino acid

deletions and insertions within the observed repair products (**Figure 1g** and

Supplementary Figure 10). The remaining 4.7% of the repaired junctions were out-of-

frame products, presumed to have arisen from cells that have both a properly tagged allele

conferring drug resistance and an out-of-frame allele.

To investigate whether the HITAG approach can be applied to other cell lines, a set of 205

stress granule associated genes were tagged with mCherry using the human colorectal

carcinoma cell line, HCT116 (**Supplementary Figure 11**). The features of tagging such as

the efficiency, specificity, overall repair profile, and biases in tagging were similar between

HCT116 and HEK293T cells, suggesting that HITAG represents a general method for

tagging genes in high-throughput.

Characterization of tagged proteins and their association with stress granules

To examine the behavior of the tagged proteins within our mixed pool, single cells were

isolated, grown clonally, and the gRNA inside each was sequenced (for details see materials

and methods). Within the 806 clonal lines obtained, 167 unique proteins were mCherry

tagged, with each protein being represented by a median of 3 clonal isolates

(**Supplementary Figure 12**). To quantify the rates of improper tagging, proteins that were

tagged within at least 10 independent isolates and showed distinct subcellular localization

(e.g. nuclear localization) were examined (**Supplementary Figure 13**). On average ~95%

of the clones for a given protein showed the expected pattern of mCherry localization.

These results were further confirmed for two targets, BCALF1 and HNRNPA2B1, by using

PCR to amplify the junction between the target gene and the mCherry tag.

To probe if the mCherry tag alters protein localization, the subcellular distribution of the

tagged proteins (**Supplementary Figure 14**) was compared with the annotations listed

within the Human Protein Atlas[16]. Of the 155 proteins with localization data in the Human

Protein Atlas, 141 agreed with our findings. For the 14 proteins with conflicting results, 6

had annotations in other databases[7,17], with 5 of these agreeing with our findings[7]. As a

whole these data suggest that HITAG generates a high percentage of cells where the label

is inserted as designed and that the C-terminal fusion of mCherry to proteins of interest

rarely perturbs their localization.

While there are hundreds of proteins that have been found in SGs, what drives their

accumulation and why some proteins are more efficiently recruited to SGs is under active

investigation. To probe these questions, all 167 clonal lines were treated with 0.5 mM

sodium arsenite for 1 hour to induce SG formation. Stress granules were then visualized

by staining for the canonical SG marker G3BP1 (**Figure 2a**). Of the 167 tagged proteins,

only 23 showed the formation of distinct foci that overlapped with the G3BP1 marker

(strong accumulation), as determined by fluorescence microscopy (**Figure 2b**). To

determine if the mCherry label might be affecting protein dynamics, 6 proteins that showed

either strong or weak accumulation (no G3BP1 overlapping foci) within SGs were stained

with antibodies against the target protein in wild-type cells and the results compared to

our findings (**Supplementary Figure 15**). Comparisons between the staining patterns

showed that the mCherry tag had a minimal effect on altering a given protein's interaction

with SGs.

In examining the 23 proteins with strong accumulation, several distinctive features

immediately became apparent. Among the hits, all showed predominantly cytoplasmic

localization and had associated RNA binding activity. In addition, the majority could be

clustered by protein-protein interactions into two groups centered around either EIF4G1

or G3BP1 (**Figure 2c**).

To further characterize the nature of proteins that showed a strong association with SGs,

the strong and weak accumulators were compared on a variety of features such as protein

length, size of intrinsically disordered regions, abundance, charge, and liquid-liquid phase

separation (LLPS) propensity (**Figure 2d** and **Supplementary Figure 16**). Somewhat

surprisingly, features such as protein length or number of protein interaction partners

showed no correlation with the strength of accumulation within SGs. Of the metrics

examined, a propensity to LLPS showed the greatest difference between strong and weak

accumulators, suggesting a critical role for multivalent intra and intermolecular interactions

in driving these proteins behavior within SGs. These findings are in line with the fact that

during times of translation inhibition, SGs form by stalled preinitiation complexes,

containing EIF4G1, and their associated RNAs which undergo condensation upon

interaction with key nucleating RBPs such as G3BP1[12]. They also highlight the known role

of protein-RNA and protein-protein interactions in driving SG formation[12,13].

As a whole, these results demonstrate that while many proteins may associate with SG,

only a relative few have the required features to enable their robust accumulation. In

agreement with these observation, several nuclear RNA-binding proteins were found to

have high LLPS scores but poor accumulation within SG within our dataset. Yet, previous

reports have shown that during times of stress, some of these proteins can become

localized to the cytoplasm, fulfilling the critical requirement we highlight, which then

enables them to readily accumulate within SGs[18,19].

Discussion

Here we report the development of High-throughput Insertion of Tags Across the Genome

(HITAG), a fast and accessible method for generating libraries of endogenously tagged

proteins. Although numerous methods exist for performing targeted knock-ins into the

mammalian genome, most allow only a single protein at a time to be targeted, are

inefficient, or place tags in between coding exons which can disrupt protein folding and

function[7,8,20–23]. By increasing the throughput of performing C-terminal tagging, HITAG will

help facilitate the scalable interrogation of protein function and dynamics. In future

developments the coupling of HITAG with single-cell approaches such as pooled optical

screens will remove the need to isolate clonal populations post-tagging and provide a

further boost to discovery throughput[24].

Despite the fact that all the proteins that were fused to mCherry in this study have been

previously annotated as stress granule-associated, only 23 showed fluorescent puncta that

overlapped with the canonical SG marker G3BP1 upon subjecting the cells to sodium

arsenite treatment[25,26]. While several factors were found to be associated with strong

accumulation within G3BP1 foci, cytosolic localization, the ability to interact with RNA, and

a propensity to phase separate were found to be among the most critical. In future studies,

the generated lines may be used in combination with live cell and single molecule imaging

modalities to better understand the kinetics and distribution of each tagged protein within

SGs to gain further insight into granule assembly, disassembly, and heterogeneity.

While HITAG is able to generate a diverse library of endogenously tagged proteins, there

are several areas that can be further explored to improve the quality of the generated

libraries. First, the correlation between gene expression and tagging efficiency, in

combination with the observation that knocking in multiple puromycin resistance genes

reduces our targeting bias, suggests that lowly expressed genes are being lost due to

insufficient levels of drug marker expression. To overcome this limitation, additional copies

of the puromycin resistance marker, beyond the three currently being used, should be

considered. In addition, efforts to identify more efficient drug markers via the mining of

metagenomes or performing laboratory evolution on existing markers are additional

options that can be considered[27,28]. Second, the finding that predicted gRNA activity

influences the rate of gene tagging suggests that Cas9 variants with reduced PAM

requirements may increase the efficiency of targeting by allowing greater flexibility in

selecting which gRNA to use while still enabling insertions to occur near the C-terminus

of the target genes[29,30]. In addition, although a perfect junction without any loss or insertion

of amino acids is the most common repair outcome observed during the use of HITAG,

there are still ~22% of junctions that show loss or gain in nucleotides. This raises the

possibility that one may be able to direct Cas9 to cut downstream of the stop codon and

rely on error-prone repair to process away the stop codon and place the tag in-frame of

the protein of interest. If this alternative approach was found to be efficient, it would

increase the number of gRNA available for use and may also reduce the number of amino

acids that are lost during tagging in cases where the most C-terminal PAM is several amino

acids away from the stop codon.

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experiments were performed in CSCI Flow Cytometry core facility at Columbia University

Irving Medical Center under the leadership of Michael Kissner.

Contributions

J.K. and A.C. designed experiments, assisted with data interpretation, and directed the research program. B.K.S. performed the initial feasibility studies. J.K. optimized the HITAG methodology including the development of the triple puromycin marker. J.K. and J.S. conducted the NGS sample preparation and isolated the clonal populations. J.K., J.S., and A.F.K. analyzed the resulting NGS data. J.K. and L.Z. performed the image analysis and interpreted the results of the localization data. J.K and A.C. wrote the manuscript with input from all authors.

Conflicts of interest

A.C. has several issued and provisional patents managed by Harvard University and Columbia University on CRISPR based tools and methods. In addition, AC, JK, and BKS have filed patents related to HITAG with Columbia University.

Data availability

All sequencing data were uploaded to SRA under BioProject accession number: PRJNA895413. The script for the junction read analysis is available on https://github.com/afkratz/HITAG-analysis-code. Additional scripts can be obtained upon written request.

Materials and Methods

Plasmid construction

To construct the gRNA expression plasmids, pSB700-blasto (Addgene #167904) was used for SpCas9-specific gRNA expression and a modified pSB700-vector containing a SaCas9 compatible gRNA scaffold with a zeocin-resistance gene was used for SaCas9-specific gRNA expression. Vectors containing gRNAs were cloned by Golden Gate using Esp3I as described previously[31]. pCAS plasmid was constructed from a previous dual-Cas9 plasmid (Addgene #107320) by replacing the 3xHA sequence with a P2A sequence using Gibson assembly. pDNR was constructed from pCRISPaint-TagGFP2-PuroR (Addgene #80970) using Gibson assembly. To construct the modified P3 donor with additional copies of the puromycin resistance gene two puromycin resistance genes were PCR amplified with primers designed to add a T2A sequence on each end. These fragments were then assembled into a version of pDNR that was digested with ZraI using Gibson assembly. All plasmids were validated by Sanger sequencing and will be made available via Addgene. Sequence of the P3 donor, pCAS, the target-gRNA, and donor-gRNA vectors are provided in **Supplementary Table 2**.

Target-gRNA design

To design target-gRNAs the CRISPick tool from the Broad was used with settings Human GRCh38, CRISPRko, and SpyoCas9[14]. Guide RNAs with Esp3I restriction sites inside of them, a polyT stretch longer than 4 base pairs, or more than one exact match in the human genome were excluded from use even if they were the gRNA closest to the stop codon. Frame number was categorized as the number of bases required to complete the cut codon after cleavage.

Construction of stress granule library

A list of stress granule associated genes was collected from the existing literature[25,26]. These methods identified SG proteins based on biotinylation of proteins in close spatial proximity to core SG components or affinity purification of SG followed by mass spectrometry. Using this list a set of target-gRNAs against each gene was generated with any target-gRNAs that would result in a loss of more than 6 amino acids from the C-terminus of a protein being removed. The resultant list of target-gRNAs was then sorted into three libraries based on the frame (**Supplementary Table 1**).

Three gRNA libraries with different frames were synthesized as oligo pools from Agilent. Each gRNA library was then PCR amplified from the initial oligo pool and cloned into the modified pSB700 vector using Golden Gate assembly as previously described[31].

Construction of HEK293T cells containing a library of target-gRNAs

HEK293T cells were cultured in Dulbecco's Modified Eagle Medium (DMEM) + 10% FBS + 1% penicillin/streptomycin and incubated at 37°C and 5.0% CO_2. On day 1, HEK293T cells were seeded at ~3.5×10^6 cells per well in 6-well plates for lentivirus production. On day 2, a mixture of 600ng psPAX2, 150ng pMD2.G, and 450ng of the target-gRNA plasmid was transfected into each well using lipofectamine 2000 according to the manufacturer instructions. On day 3, the media was changed. Lentivirus was harvested by collecting the supernatant after centrifugation (500g for 5 minutes) of the media on day 4 and day 5. The lentivirus stocks were stored at -80°C in 1ml aliquots. To generate HEK293T cells with

on average a single target-gRNA integrated into their genome viral stocks were tested for

infectivity and cells were infected at an MOI of ~0.1.

Quantifying the efficiency of tagging

When optimizing the tagging approach, cells were plated at a density of 5-7x10^4 cells per

well in a 24-well plate with a media volume of 600µl. After 24 hours transfections were

performed according to the manufacturer instructions with 100ng pCAS, 100ng pDNR-

gRNA, and 200ng pDNR being delivered. In cases where the amount of each vector being

delivered was changed an inert "stuffer" plasmid, pBR322, was delivered to ensure that the

same total amount of plasmid DNA was delivered across all conditions. Media was changed

on the next day of transfection.

On day 6 after transfection, the transfected population was split to poly-D-lysine (PDL)-

treated 96 well plates at a density of 1-2x10^4 cells per well. The following day cells were

fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde for 5 minutes. The cells were then washed with PBS,

stained with DAPI for 5 minutes, and washed twice with PBS. The cells were imaged using

the ImageXpress® Pico Automated Cell Imaging Systems. Tagging efficiency was

determined by the number of mCherry-positive cells showing the proper localization over

the total number of cells as determined by DAPI staining of nuclei.

Creating HITAG libraries

To initiate the HITAG procedure target-gRNA containing cell libraries were seeded into 6-

well plates at 2.5-5.0x10^5 cells per 6-well. One 6-well plate was used per library. On the

next day, HITAG plasmids were transfected with 5-times more plasmid and transfection

reagents used for the 24-well plate condition. Cells were split 1:4 in media with 0.5µg/ml

puromycin 7 days after the transfection. The selection stopped until the next day when the

negative control cells died out. Selected tagged cells were expanded by changing media.

A stress granule library of HCT116 cells was generated by going through the same

procedure as outlined for HEK293T cells except the concentration of drug (blastidicine,

5.0µg/ml; puromycin, 2.5µg/ml), transfection reagent (FugeneHD), and the scale at which

transfections were performed (4 T75 flasks) was varied.

gRNA analysis

$1\text{-}2\times10^6$ cells were harvested with trypsin and washed once with PBS. The cell pellet was

resuspended in 500µl Lucigen DNA QuickExtract reagent and incubated at 65°C with

shaking at 750rpm for 15 minutes. After brief centrifugation, the sample was incubated at

95°C with shaking at 750rpm for 5 minutes. gRNA regions were PCR amplified using the

following conditions: 98°C 45s, [98°C 15s; 56°C 15s; 72°C 20s] x n , 72°C 2min, 4°C hold,

where n is the cycle number before the PCR reaction saturated (usually between 20-25

cycles). The second round PCR was performed to add the Illumina indices: 98°C 45s, [98°C

15s; 56°C 15s; 72°C 20s]x8, 72°C 2 min, hold at 4°C. The PCR products were then run on a

2% agarose gel and the band of interest was purified. Samples were then sequenced on

an Illumina NextSeq 500. The resulting reads were then analyzed by either aligning them

using Bowtie2 or the MAGeCK pipeline[32].

High-throughput isolation and analysis of target-mCherry junctions

Genomic DNA was extracted from 1-2x10^6 cells using the Qiagen DNA extraction kit

(#69504). Enzymatic DNA fragmentation was performed using the NEBNext® Ultra™ II FS

DNA Library Prep Kit (E7805S). 2µg of genomic DNA (500ng per reaction) was treated with

5 minutes of enzymatic fragmentation. All subsequent steps were performed as instructed

by the manufacturer. The DNA fragments containing the mCherry sequence was amplified

through a nested PCR approach. For the first round PCR, 500ng of fragmented and

adapter-ligated DNA were amplified (50ng per reaction) using a primer binding on the

reverse strand of the mCherry sequence (see **Supplementary Table 3** for primer sequences)

and another primer binding to the p7 adaptor using the following PCR condition: 98°C

45s, [98°C 15s, 65°C 15s, 72°C 90s] x20, 72°C 5min, hold 4°C. After the resulting sample

was purified using SPRI beads aiming to capture all products greater than 100 bp in size.

The second-round PCR reaction was then performed using 50 ng of the first-round PCR

product (10ng per reaction) using PJ3 (**Supplementary Table 3**) and index primers under

the following PCR condition: 98°C 45s, [98°C 15s, 65°C 15s, 72°C 90s] x8, 72°C 5min, hold

4°C. The final PCR products were then isolated using SPRI beads aiming to remove all

products smaller than 200 base pairs.

To characterize the target gene-mCherry tag junctions, we began by constructing a

database of all genomic regions adjacent to the target cut sites. NGS reads were then

blasted locally twice, once against the database of target genomic regions, and once

against the three linker sequences, which differ by a few bases in order to maintain the

appropriate reading frame. Reads which featured at least 20 bases of alignment to genomic

targets and at least 20 bases of alignment to linker sequences were analyzed by comparing

the locations of the alignments to the expected location based on the gRNA cut site.

Insertions were identified as sections of a read which did not align to either the genomic

target or the linker sequence, while deletions appeared as a difference between the

expected cut site and the observed cut site.

Generation of clonal cell lines and identification of the gRNA in each well.

The library of cells with mCherry tagged SG-associated proteins was detached from a T75

flask and washed once with prechilled PBS. The cells were resuspended in Ca/Mg-free PBS

+ 1% FBS, filtered with a 50um mesh filter and kept in ice. Before single-cell sorting, SYTOX

Blue (1:1000, Thermo S34857) was added as a cell viability indicator. In preparation for

single cell sorting, 96-well plates were filled with 150µl of media and prewarmed to room

temperature. Viable cells were sorted on the 96-well plates using Sony MA900 in the

Single-Cell Mode. Cell were placed in the incubator and the media from all plates was

changed as needed. Each well was confirmed visually to have one colony per well after 10

days.

PCR-ready genomic DNA was prepared by mixing ~2x10^4 cells in each well with 30µl

Lucigen DNA QuickExtract. After incubating the plates for 15 minutes at 65°C followed by

10 minutes at 95°C, 1µl of the DNA extract was used for PCR to amplify the gRNA sequence.

The same gRNA PCR condition were used as described above except 35 cycles were used

during the first round of PCR. Read counts of gRNAs for each well were then analyzed. For

a gRNA to be identified in a given well it needed to be present at an abundance at least

3 times greater than the next most abundant gRNA in that same well.

Immunofluorescence staining for stress granule formation

Sodium arsenite stress was applied by incubating cells with media containing 0.5mM

NaAs2O3 for an hour. Cells were then washed once with PBS and immediately fixed with

4% paraformaldehyde for 5 minutes, washed twice with PBS + 0.1% TritonX-100 incubating

for 10 minutes between each wash step, and blocked with Superblock™ Blocking Buffer

(Thermofisher #37581) with 0.1% TritonX-100 for 2 hours at room temperature. For primary

antibody staining, cells were covered with 100μl Superblock with 0.1% TritonX-100 and

primary antibodies (G3BP1, proteintech 13057-2-AP, 1:1000 dilution; mCherry, proteintech

68088-1, 1:1000 dilution) overnight at 4°C. After washing the cells with PBS + 0.1% TritonX-

100 (15 minutes) and Superblock with 0.1% TritonX-100 (15 minutes), cells were incubated

with secondary antibodies (Goat anti-mouse, Invitrogen A32727; Goat anti-rabbit,

Invitrogen A32731, 1:1000 dilution) for an hour at room temperature. After one wash with

PBS + 0.1% TritonX-100, cells were stained with 0.1 μg/ml DAPI in PBS for 5 minutes

followed by two PBS washes. At this point plates were either immediately imaged or

covered with aluminum seals and stored at 4°C.

Collection of protein features

Three published algorithms including PSPredictor, CatGranule and Plaac were used to

predict various scores related to phase separation[33–35]. The number of intrinsically

disordered regions, number and fraction of charged residues, hydropathy, and net charge

were calculated using CIDER[36]. All the scores were predicted with default parameters using

the dominant isoform.

Protein-protein interaction network analysis

The protein-protein interaction network was extracted from the STRING database, with the

network type set as physical network and a minimum required interaction score of 0.400[37].

All of the text mining, experimental data, and databases were accepted as active interaction

sources. Orphan genes, without interacting partners, are not included in the final network.

K-means was used for clustering, and the cluster number was set to 2. Visualization is

made by Gephi 0.9.2, with different colors indicating different gene groups and node size

indicating node degree.

Figure Legends:

Figure 1. Development of HITAG and properties of the generated lines (a) Schematic

summary of HITAG. (b) Distribution of gRNAs within the population of cells before tagging

and after tagging and drug selection with the initial versus optimized HITAG approach.

Each colored bar represents the abundance of one gRNA within the population. (c) Tagging

efficiency before drug selection as a function of different ng amounts of pCAS, pDNR-

gRNA, and pDNR plasmid. Data shown are from three biological replicates (independent

transfections), the error bars indicate ± the standard deviation. The optimal condition with

an asterisk over it showed a significant difference (two sample t-test, * = $p < 0.05$) to all

other conditions tested. (d) Relative number of cells surviving puromycin selection when

different donor plasmids with one or three copies of the selection marker were used, data

are normalized to the P1 condition. Data shown are from three biological replicates

(independent transfections), the error bars indicate ± the standard deviation, the donor

with an asterisk over it showed a significant difference (two sample t-test, * = $p < 0.05$) to

all other donors tested across targets. Comparison of how (e) RNA expression level,

represented as log (FPKM +1) or the (f) gRNA activity score of each target-gRNAs

influences if a gene is tagged or not within the pool of tagged HEK293T cells (Mann-

Whitney-Wilcoxon test, **** = $p < 10^{-4}$) . (g) Distribution of repair outcomes summed

across all targets upon performing HITAG in HEK293T cells. Perfect junction indicates

precise annealing of the endogenous locus to the donor plasmid without a loss or addition

of bases after Cas9 cutting.

Figure 2. Using HITAG to understand the properties of proteins that accumulate within

SGs. (a) Staining of proteins which show robust accumulation within SGs after treatment

with 0.5 mM of $NaAs_2O_3$ for 1 hour. (Blue:DAPI, Green: anti-G3BP1, Red: anti-mCherry). (b)

List of proteins found to strongly accumulate within SG as determined by their overlap

with the canonical SG marker, G3BP1. (c) Network depicting the interactions among

proteins which show robust accumulation within SGs. (d) Predicted ability to LLPS as

determined by LLPSDB. As all proteins that showed strong accumulation were

predominantly localized to the cytoplasm for comparison cytoplasmic proteins were

divided into those that strongly or weakly accumulate into SGs. As an additional group,

we included all other proteins that showed weak accumulation but did not primarily localize

to the cytoplasm (non-cytosolic) (Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon test, ns = not significant; ****

= $p < 10^{-4}$).

Supplementary Figure 1. Schematic summary of CRISPaint approach for NHEJ-based gene

tagging. Four different components - Cas9, target-gRNA, donor-gRNA, and donor plasmid

- are transfected into cells and required for the CRISPaint approach. In CRISPaint, SpCas9

cleaves the target gene at its C-terminus and the donor plasmid (pDNR). Linearized pDNR

can then become inserted into the genome through NHEJ. The cells which are properly

tagged in-frame will express mCherry fused to the protein of interest along with the

puromycin resistance gene (PuroR), which enables properly tagged cells to grow in the

presence of puromycin.

Supplementary Figure 2. Schematic summary of HITAG approach for NHEJ-based high-

throughput gene tagging. In the HITAG approach the target-gRNA is designed to interact

with SpCas9, while the donor-gRNA is designed to interact with SaCas9. The library of

target-gRNAs against the various genes of interest is first integrated into the pool of cells

at low infectivity such that each cell gets on average a single target-gRNA or none. The

remaining CRISPR components are then transfected in. This then enables each cell in the

population to tag a unique gene to which their target-gRNA is against. When tagging

occurs in-frame the protein of interest gains the C-terminal tag and a drug resistance

marker (e.g. puromycin resistance gene) is also expressed, enabling properly tagged cells

to be readily isolated via a round of drug selection.

Supplementary Figure 3. Schematic depicting how properly tagged genes can be recut

when using only a single Cas9 protein. (a) When using only a single Cas9 protein, as is

done in the original CRISPaint approach, the properly tagged product can be recut if the

3 PAM-proximal base pairs of the target gene are identical or similar to those of the donor

plasmid. This occurs because the spacer sequence of the target-sgRNA with an accessible

SpCas9-PAM site is regenerated in the final knock-in product. This recutting is then

expected to inhibit the emergence of the perfectly tagged products. (b) Recutting can be

avoided when using two orthogonal Cas9 proteins, as is done in the HITAG approach. This

occurs because even if the final product that forms has homology to the spacer sequence

of the target-gRNA it will have a SaCas9-PAM site proximal to it, and thus not be an

appropriate substrate for SpCas9 which has different PAM requirements.

Supplementary Figure 4. Identifying efficient and specific gRNAs against the donor

plasmid. (a) The efficiency of three different donor plasmid targeting gRNAs (gRNA1-3)

were assessed for the ability to add a C-terminal mCherry tag to either CCND1, HIST1H4C,

or PCNA. To measure efficiency, the percentage of cells with the appropriate mCherry

localization as determined by fluorescence microscopy was quantified before the

application of drug selection. Frame refers to the reading frame of the donor plasmid when

cut. As there are three possible reading frames (i.e 0, 1, and 2) that a given target gene

could be cut in, 3 donor plasmids corresponding to each frame were prepared for each

donor-gRNA being tested. This enables the system to then cut the target gene and donor

plasmid in such a way that should they undergo a perfect fusion (without the addition or

removal of bases) the tag and drug marker will be in the appropriate reading frame. (b)

The same donor-gRNAs as in panel A were also examined for specificity by transfecting

them in combination with SaCas9 and a mCherry-containing donor plasmid. As no target-

gRNA is provided in this experiment, all drug resistant clones that arise are due to either

low levels of stochastic double strand breaks or the donor-gRNA cutting an endogenous

site in the genome to enable the donor plasmid to then insert itself. Based on these studies

gRNA2 was determined to be the optimal donor-gRNA and for all subsequent studies was

used. Three biological replicates (independent transfections) were performed for all

conditions and error bars represent ± standard deviation.

Supplementary Figure 5. Schematic summary of the results of tagging depending on the

"frame" in which the target gene is cleaved by SpCas9. Here, the frame number is defined

as the number of nucleotides that must be added by the donor so that the target gene

and the tag of interest are in-frame. In the original CRISPaint approach three unique donor-

gRNA are used against a single donor plasmid to generate each of the needed reading

frames, with each donor-gRNA potentially having its own unique set of off-target within

the genome. In contrast, HITAG employs three different donor plasmids that all work with

a single donor-gRNA. By designing each donor plasmid to have either 0, 1, or 2 bases

added it enables the same donor-gRNA, which is tested to ensure it has minimal off-target

activity, to be used across all studies. For example, pDNR (Frame 0) is used when tagging

a target gene that does not require additional nucleotides added for the tag to be in-

frame with the cut gene.

Supplementary Figure 6. Comparing tagging efficiency when using donor plasmids with

varying numbers of the puromycin resistance gene. P1: a single copy of puroR, P3: three

copies of puroR, P3S: three copies of puroR but a stop codon is placed after the first puroR

copy. Three biological replicates (independent transfections) were performed. Error bars

represent ± standard deviation. Results shown are the percentage of properly tagged cells

before drug selection as determined by fluorescence microscopy.

Supplementary Figure 7. Comparing gRNA abundance between two independent rounds of

HITAG on the same target-gRNA library. The abundance of each target-gRNA within the pool

of cells was internally normalized between 0 to 1 for each replicate. ρ represents the Spearman

correlation coefficient.

Supplementary Figure 8. Percentage of tagged gene members within each reading frame

and as a whole across the generated HITAG libraries. Red and grey boxes indicate the

tagged group and the untagged group of genes, respectively.

Supplementary Figure 9. Correlation between the read counts from each gRNA within the

pool of HITAG modified cells compared with the target-mCherry tag junction reads derived

from the same pool of cells. The abundance of each target-gRNA and junction reads within

the pool of cells was internally normalized to be between 0 to 1 before performing the

comparison. ρ represents the Spearman correlation coefficient between the two sets of data.

Supplementary Figure 10. Characterization of the junction between the target gene and

mCherry tag. Frequency of the number of amino acids lost from (a) the target genes or (b)

the linker, which connects the tag to the endogenous target gene, respectively. (c)

Frequency of the number of amino acids insertion. Insertion refers to the number of amino

acids that are inserted between the target gene and the tag. Red dots indicate the junctions

which show no deletion or insertion of additional amino acids.

Supplementary Figure 11. Result from applying HITAG to HCT116 cells. The SG target-

gRNA library 3 (frame 2) was integrated into HCT116 cells and the subsequent pool of

cells was taken through the remainder of the HITAG procedure to isolate a mixed

population of mCherry tagged cells. (a) Correlation between the normalized read counts

from each gRNA within the pool of HITAG modified HCT116 cells compared with the

normalized target-mCherry tag junction reads derived from the same pool of tagged

HCT116 cells. ρ represents the Spearman correlation coefficient between the two sets of

data. (b) Distribution of repair outcomes summed across all targets upon performing HITAG

in HCT116 cells. Perfect junction indicates precise annealing of the endogenous locus to

the donor plasmid without a loss or addition of bases after Cas9 cutting. Comparison of

how the (c) RNA expression level represented as log (FPKM +1) or the (d) On-target efficacy

score of the target-gRNAs influence if a gene is tagged or not within the pool of tagged

HCT116 cells (Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon test; *** = $p < 10^{-3}$).

Supplementary Figure 12. The number of times a given gene was tagged within the set

of 806 clonal lines that were isolated after performing HITAG. The yellow bar represents

the median number of clones obtained for a given targeted gene.

Supplementary Figure 13. Examining the rates of off-target tagging by quantifying the

consistency of results when multiple clones of the same tagged gene were obtained. (a)

Proteins with either nuclear or ER localization which had 10 or more clones to examine

from within the 806 clonal isolates were studied to determine the number of clones that

showed the appropriate localization. (b) PCR validation using primers to show that

microscopy-based results were concordant with targeted PCR directed at the junction

between either HNRNPA2B1 or BCLAF1 and the mCherry tag. Yellow rectangle marks the

location of the expected PCR band. C: control DNA from untargeted HEK293T cells. L:

Ladder.

Supplementary Figure 14. Decision tree used to compare localization information between

this study and the Human Protein Atlas. Protein subcellular localization information was

available for 155 out of 167 genes in Human Protein Atlas database. 141 out of 155 genes

showed a similar subcellular localization within our data as described in Human Protein

Atlas. Of the 14 genes that disagreed with the data from Human Protein Atlas, 6 genes

were found in Opencell or the RBP Image Database. 5 out of 6 of these genes agreed with

our subcellular localization findings.

Supplementary Figure 15. Comparison of protein localization and behavior between

mCherry-tagged version of a protein and the endogenous untagged counterpart. Images

of stained cells under both homeostatic (normal) and stressed (arsenite) conditions are

shown.

Supplementary Figure 16. Analysis of the features which drive strong accumulation within

SGs. Because all proteins that strongly gather in SG were primarily cytosolic analyses are

done comparing cytosolic proteins that show strong vs weak accumulation. As an

additional category, proteins that show non-cytosolic localization are also examined. (a)

propensity to localize to a foci as determined by CatGranule, (b) prion-like propensity score

as determined by Plaac, (c) Protein length (number of amino acids), (d) Number of

intrinsically disorder regions, (e) RNA expression level represented as log (FPKM+1), (f)

protein abundance extracted from mass spectrometry data, (g-i) fraction of charged

residues, (j) net charge per residues at pH 7.4, (k) absolute mean net charge at pH 7.4,

and (l) Uversky hydropathy were compared between the groups. (Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon

test, ns: not significant; * = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 10^{-2}$; *** = $p < 10^{-3}$; **** = $p < 10^{-4}$)

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Figures

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Supplementary Figure 1.

Supplementary Figure 2.

Supplementary Figure 3.

Supplementary Figure 4.

Supplementary Figure 5.

Supplementary Figure 6.

Supplementary Figure 7.

Supplementary Figure 8.

Supplementary Figure 9.

Supplementary Figure 10.

Supplementary Figure 11.

(a)

(b)

(c)

(d)

Supplementary Figure 12.

Supplementary Figure 13.

(a)

Gene	Localization	Correct % (correct/total)
AKAP8	Nucleus	**100%** (10/10)
BCLAF1	Nucleus	**91.7%** (11/12)
HNRNPA2B1	Nucleus	**100%** (10/10)
HNRNPAB	Nucleus	**85.0%** (34/40)
HNRNPC	Nucleus	**100%** (10/10)
HNRNPH3	Nucleus	**93.5%** (29/31)
ILF2	Nucleus	**100%** (13/13)
MATR3	Nucleus	**84.6%** (11/13)
MCM7	Nucleus	**90.0%** (9/10)
PPIG	Nucleus	**90.9%** (10/11)
SRSF5	Nucleus	**100%** (31/31)
CALR	ER	**100%** (16/16)
PDIA3	ER	**100%** (18/18)

(b)

Supplementary Figure 14.

Supplementary Figure 15.

mCherry-tagged clones visualized with anti-mCherry antibody

Target protein within untagged cells visualized with antibodies against the endogenous target

Supplementary Figure 16.