COVID RELATED PROJECT QUESTIONS

We understand that researchers and research teams may go through a difficult period triggered by the COVID-19 lockdown. Research projects may currently be suspended and key parts of projects may have to be postponed for a significant amount of time, FNR wishes to offer flexibility in the handling of grants and grant proposals. We are also aware that a number of researchers are heavily involved in the activities of the COVID-19 Task Force Work packages and have therefore suspended other ongoing research projects. As a general rule, we will therefore consider requests for cost-neutral extensions of FNR grants beyond the initially specified project duration. Under certain conditions, PhD candidates and Post-docs that are on paid leave using the special “Leave for family reasons in connection with the coronavirus epidemic” (« Congé pour raisons familiales lié au coronavirus ») can also obtain a cost-neutral grant extension. Details can be found below.

Please note: These measures are subject to adaptations over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please refer to this document regularly for updates.

1. Submission

Have the submission deadlines for project proposals been extended?
Please consult the FNR website https://www.fnr.lu/funding/ for programme-related information.

Will FNR funding decisions be delayed?
FNR strives to keep the funding decisions as planned. Information on potential changes will be communicated through normal FNR channels (FNR info, website, etc...).

How do updated deadlines affect eligibility criteria for potential PhD/Postdoc candidates under Industrial Fellowships?
For the calculation of derived dates where the submission deadline is a variable, the old deadline counts, e.g.

- If a PhD candidate is already enrolled in his/her PhD for longer than a year on 4th May 2020 but not on 17th April 2020, he/she is still eligible. The same counts for the 8 years after PhD of Postdocs.
- Industrial Fellowships grants can be funded retroactively until the first day of the month of the OLD submission deadline, i.e. 1st April 2020.

Are there new deadlines within the INTER programme?
For any INTER Calls where the FNR is not lead agency, the FNR will follow any decision made by the lead agencies. Please check the INTER website regularly for updates or contact the persons in charge.

2. Ongoing projects

2.1. Delay
What to do if delays occur through postponement/cancellation of activities due to COVID-19 in running FNR-funded projects?

If a running FNR-funded project is delayed because key parts (e.g. experiments, fieldwork, surveys, testing campaigns, workshops etc.) are being postponed or cancelled, the relevant FNR programme manager should be contacted to discuss a possible extension of the grant duration and budget-related questions.

As a general approach:

- PIs can use the cost-neutral extension of their projects as mentioned in the contract between FNR and the beneficiary institutions (check the FNR/Institution contracts: e.g. 1, 3 or 6 months depending on the programme). The PI does not have to inform FNR. Costs can be booked on the project budget during the respective period. Budget shifts can be considered in line with the stipulations of the FNR contracts.
- Upon request, the FNR will agree to a 3 months cost-neutral extension of FNR grants beyond the initially specified project duration. The general rules for project extensions prevail. Budget shifts can be considered in line with the stipulations of the FNR contracts.
- Project extensions going beyond the 3 months will be considered on a case by case basis. The general rules for project extensions prevail. Budget shifts can be considered in line with the stipulations of the FNR contracts.
- Events in Luxembourg that are/were planned within an FNR-funded project (e.g. end of project colloquia), that cannot take place due to the COVID-19 situation, may be postponed for up to one year (counting from the date the event was originally foreseen). Please contact the relevant FNR programme manager.

Relevant for RESCOM, INTER Mobility and PSP Classic/Flagship:

- Grant holders of these programmes may postpone their conferences / events / research stays for up to one year (from the originally planned date onwards). Please contact the relevant FNR programme manager.

Relevant for PhD projects:

- For PhD candidates funded via AFR, Industrial Fellowship, PRIDE or IPBG: PhD funding is limited (by Règlement Grand-Ducal) to a maximum of 48 months. For PhD candidates that are on paid leave using the special “Leave for family reasons in connection with the coronavirus epidemic”, a suspension of the grant can be requested for the duration of the leave under the same rules and conditions as for maternity, parental and sick leave (AFR terms & conditions, art. 25). A corresponding cost-neutral extension of the grant duration is granted by the FNR (under the condition that the Host Institution can extend the employment contract). Such a grant suspension must be explicitly requested by the Host Institution.

- For PhD candidates encountering a delay in their research project due to the COVID19 lockdown, alternative arrangements should be sought (in agreement with their supervisors and/or CET) to adapt the project plan in order to finish the PhD within the funding period.
- For PhD candidates funded via multi-annual research programmes (i.e. CORE, INTER, OPEN, ATTRACT, PEARL, etc.) a cost-neutral extension is possible, but have to be requested at the FNR and must be in accordance with the host institution (and degree awarding and, the 48 months limitation does not apply.

4 May 2020
Relevant for Post-docs funded under Industrial Fellowship, PRIDE or IPBG programmes:

- For Post-docs funded via Industrial Fellowship, PRIDE or IPBG programmes: funding is limited (by Règlement Grand-Ducal) to a maximum of 24 months. For Post-Doc grantees that are on paid leave using the special “Leave for family reasons in connection with the coronavirus epidemic”, a suspension of the grant can be requested for the duration of the leave under the same rules and conditions as for maternity, parental and sick leave (AFR terms & conditions, art. 25). A corresponding cost-neutral extension of the grant duration is granted by the FNR (under the condition that the Host Institution can extend the employment contract). Such a grant suspension must be explicitly requested by the Host Institution.

Can I postpone the start of my FNR-funded research project?
If you have planned to start your FNR-funded project in spring 2020 and you encounter any delay related to COVID-19, you can extend the start of your project to the latest date mentioned in the FNR funding letter.
For all other cases, please contact the relevant FNR programme manager.

Will the FNR consider a certified leave (e.g. long-term health issues for the PI, congé pour raisons familiales or due to childcare at home due to COVID-19) as valid reason for the postponement of an FNR-funded grant?
A project extension will be considered under these circumstances. The general rules for project extensions prevail. Please contact the FNR programme manager in charge of your project.

2.2. Funding
Can I request funding for non-reimbursed costs arising from project related travel cancelled due to COVID-19 cancellations?
You should first check to get refunded where possible. Use your cancellation rights, a lot of carriers/hotels offer them. Non-refundable travel/hotel costs or costs which are not covered by a travel insurance are eligible costs on FNR funded grants. The overall budget of the FNR grant cannot be increased. Budget shifts can be considered in line with the stipulations of the FNR contracts. Adequate documentation (i.e. proof of cancellation, amount of refund, etc.) needs to be provided in the cost reporting.

What costs does FNR cover if a meeting/event is cancelled because of COVID-19 pandemic?
FNR covers costs that are not reimbursed by a third party for cancelled project-specific activities. The overall budget of the FNR grant cannot be increased. Budget shifts can be considered in line with the stipulations of the FNR contracts. Adequate documentation needs to be provided in the financial reporting.

Can salaries of allocated staff on FNR-funded research projects be booked on the FNR-funded project budget?
Salary costs of staff affected to an FNR-funded project may continue to be booked on the project budget, provided the staff was not re-allocated during this period to other activities. If project staff
was on leave during this period (e.g. “Leave for family reasons in connection with the coronavirus epidemic”), salary costs cannot be booked on the project for the duration of the leave.

Relevant for PSP Classic and Flagship programmes:
In addition to above-mentioned rules, PSP projects that rely on structures that are closed (e.g. schools, maison relais etc) or offer workshops or other activities that cannot take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic: workshops, courses etc may be rescheduled to a later timepoint. Alternatively, budget shifts may be possible in order to reallocate budget and enable alternative activities (e.g. switch to online course, prepare new courses etc), which are coherent with initial project objectives. Please contact the relevant FNR programme manager to discuss further.

3. Reporting

Can annual/final reports currently be submitted?
Yes, annual/final reports can be submitted as usual via the FNR online submission system.

Have submission deadlines for annual/final reporting been extended?
For programmes that have an annual reporting deadline on 31st March, it has been decided to postpone the deadline to 15th May 2020.

The deadline for annual/final reports of other FNR programmes can be extended on request by one month (as foreseen in the convention). If more time is needed please contact the programme manager in charge of your project.