Guidelines
FNR COVID-19 Call

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Notice

This specific FNR instrument to address COVID-19 is based on a fast-track "mechanism" that allows the support of (urgent) research projects requiring an immediate start, e.g. in view of data collection or other work during the current crises. FNR project selection and funding are carried out within a short period of time, without derogating from the principles of peer review.
1. FNR COVID-19 Call Objective

In the past few months, the global COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed our society, and has impacted humanity on individual, economic, and social levels. All countries have been affected by this crisis and are starting to band together in order to fight the spread of this disease and minimize its devastating effects.

Research is specifically well-placed to assist with the response to this crisis. Expertise in a variety of different areas combined with the scientific method will enable an understanding of disease spread and mechanisms, of short-, medium-, and long-term impact on societies and economies, as well on a multitude of other areas impacted by COVID-19. Luxembourgish scientists have the experience and ability to contribute to this world-wide effort, and the FNR wishes to support researchers so that they can make an impact, both in Luxembourg and on a global scale.

The Luxembourgish research community has created a COVID-19 Task Force in order to coordinate response activities, including the FNR and the major Luxembourgish research institutions. As a part of the Task Force’s activities, the FNR is launching a rapid call to provide initial (co-)funding for supporting both short-term projects and starting phases of long-term projects that will address the current and future challenges of COVID-19.

Projects submitted to this call can cover all research domains and disciplines, but must be aligned with the WHO’s Coordinated Global Research Roadmap: 2019 Novel Coronavirus (March 2020 version) (https://www.who.int/blueprint/priority-diseases/key-action/novel-coronavirus/en/). Of particular interest is also the development and use of Text and Data Mining techniques that can help to answer high-priority scientific questions related to COVID-19, such as those presented in the COVID-19 Open Research Dataset Challenge (CORD-19) (https://www.kaggle.com/allen-institute-for-ai/CORD-19-research-challenge/tasks).

While we are aware that biomedical research can directly impact the COVID-19 challenge, it is also necessary to understand the non-medical impact on other aspects of individuals, societies, and economies, issues that can be only understood through a variety of different types of research and such project proposals will also be welcome.

Projects should be able to allow Luxembourgish researchers to contribute strongly to advance the international research agenda of COVID-19, or be of specific relevance to the Luxembourgish individual, social, and economic context in the short-, middle-, or long-term (post-pandemic). Companies are welcome to participate in collaborative research projects.

In much the same way that the COVID-19 challenge has united the world, we expect that research funded in this call will also further stimulate the collaboration of the Luxembourgish ecosystem, both between institutions as well as on an international level. To that end, the FNR would like to foster interdisciplinary solutions to address these challenges, and strongly supports the submission of projects that form interdisciplinary bridges between different groups and research institutes. Collaboration with relevant international partners is very much encouraged.
2. Call deadlines and submission pre-requisites

The first COVID-19 call submission deadline will be on 14 April 2020, 18:00 CEST. For proposals that require a longer preparation time, e.g. to merge similar project ideas or to coordinate multidisciplinary teams, a second submission deadline will be on 11 May 2020, 18:00 CEST.

Pre-requisite: The project idea (at least a summary of 20 lines) has to be published on the Research Luxembourg COVID-19 platform (https://lux-cov19.lu/) by 8th April 2020, 14:00 CEST (for the first COVID-19 call deadline) and by 29th April 2020, 14:00 CEST (for the second COVID-19 call deadline).

PIs submitting proposals to the FNR should take the feedback on the project idea provided by the COVID-19 Task Force into account.

Programme Details

Projects submitted to this call must be of relevance to the challenge “COVID-19”. The COVID-19 call (with both deadlines) is open to proposals for short-term projects (i.e. projects which could be finished within a maximum duration of 6 months) as well as for starting phases of longer-term projects (i.e. 2-3 years research projects) which require immediate support. For the latter, a milestone evaluation is foreseen at the end of the six months funding period, where a decision on additional funding will be made.

Proposals for long-term research projects tackling COVID-19 research questions can also be submitted to the FNR CORE 2020 call or the FNR OPEN 2020 call. Here, international partners can be involved and paid by the partner agencies (i.e. DFG, EMBL, SNF, FWF, NCBR) (see CORE guidelines for more details).

Funding decision of the COVID-19 call: within 2-3 weeks after the relevant call deadline. Project Start: immediately after notification of the funding decision and no later than 1 month thereafter.

The following figure gives an overview on the timeline of the COVID-19 call with 2 deadlines

General Principles

The activities under the COVID-19 call should fulfil the following general principles:

- R&D activities should respect fundamental ethical principles, including those which are reflected in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. If necessary, the approval of the "Comité National d’Éthique de Recherche" (CNER) need to be
sought before the launch of the project. In case the project has ethical implications, it is mandatory to provide a plan explaining how these implications will be dealt with within the proposal. Furthermore, consider addressing data protection issues at an early stage of a research project and take all necessary steps to comply with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the national data protection law.

- R&D misconduct (e.g. provision of false information, plagiarism or falsification of data), may result in a rejection of the proposal and possible further sanctions. Applicants must comply with the ‘FNR Research Integrity Guidelines’ accessible under: https://www.fnr.lu/download-center
- Financial support from FNR must be acknowledged to conform to FNR's guidelines accessible under: http://bit.ly/FNRAck.
- FNR has signed the “Wellcome Trust” Statement on data sharing in public health emergencies (https://wellcome.ac.uk/press-release/sharing-research-data-and-findings-relevant-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak) and applicants must commit to ensure the following for all projects funded through this call:
  - all peer-reviewed research publications relevant to the COVID-19 outbreak are made immediately open access, or freely available at least for the duration of the outbreak; article processing costs related to this can be reimbursed through the FNR Open Access Fund
  - research findings relevant to the outbreak are shared immediately with the WHO upon journal submission, by the journal and with author knowledge
  - research findings are made available via preprint servers before journal publication, or via platforms that make papers openly accessible before peer review, with clear statements regarding the availability of underlying data
  - researchers share interim and final research data relating to the outbreak, together with protocols and standards used to collect the data, as rapidly and widely as possible - including with public health and research communities and the WHO
  - authors are clear that data or preprints shared ahead of submission will not pre-empt its publication in these journals

3. Project duration, funding, and eligibility

FNR budget and eligible costs

FNR will support funding for COVID-19 initial projects up to 50k€ for a maximum period of 6 months. FNR considers its support as co-funding and is rather flexible in how the budget is spent, but a clear justification must be provided.

Eligible costs that can be covered by COVID-19 projects:

- Personnel (any person with a valid employment contract with the FNR beneficiary institution https://www.fnr.lu/fnr-beneficiaries),
- Equipment and consumables essential to the project,
- Subcontracting: Cost related to services by provided by subcontractors. The subcontractor has no IP rights and no publication rights on tangible project outputs,
• Other, including costs for surveys, clinical studies, translations, and all other costs directly related to the implementation of the project.

Please note that FNR will not cover any indirect costs.

Eligible Beneficiary Institutions

Funds provided by the FNR in the framework of COVID-19 call are aimed at the following beneficiaries:

• Public institutions performing research in Luxembourg
• Non-profit associations, societal impact companies (SIS), and foundations engaged in research in Luxembourg

Project Partners

‘Contracting Partners’ are institutions that are eligible for funding and which seek direct financial support from the FNR. Among those, the Principal Investigator’s (PI) host institution is referred to as ‘Coordinating Institution’.

‘Non-contracting Partners’ are organisations or individuals from the public or private sector (within Luxembourg or abroad) participating in the project without direct financial support from the FNR.

‘Subcontractors’ are not considered as partners (contracting or non-contracting) in the project.

Principal Investigator(s) Eligibility

In order to be eligible as PI (or Co-PI), researchers must comply with the FNR requirements for principal investigators and supervisors http://bit.ly/PIandSupervision

The PI and Co-PI have complementary expertise and must be from different research units (within the same or different eligible institutions). The “PI” listed in the application form will be the corresponding PI for the FNR and is in charge of submitting the application and reports.

Project Eligibility

• The project must fulfill the (thematic) eligibility requirements listed in the above section in this document
• Applications must fulfill the formal administrative requirements (e.g. maximum proposal length, eligible PI & Contracting Institution)
• Maximum 1 project application per PI

Contractual Obligations

For successful selected COVID-19 projects, FNR will draft a standardized agreement with the beneficiary institutions (contracting partners).

1 For more information, please consult the webpage on eligibility.
2 For more information, please consult the webpage on eligibility.
4. Review and Reporting process for COVID-19 initial Projects

Based on the project idea published on the Research Luxembourg COVID-19 platform, the COVID-19 Task Force will provide feedback to the applicants on possible collaborations/synergies in Luxembourg, as well as on the project’s urgency and critical need for Luxembourg. Applicants will thus have an opportunity to take that feedback into account before finalizing the project proposal that they submit to the FNR.

An established interdisciplinary Review Panel, coordinated by the FNR, will review all submitted applications. The Review Panel is composed of external scientific experts covering different domains. All experts involved in the evaluation are required to sign a confidentiality agreement with the FNR before the review process. In the panel meeting, all proposals will be discussed based upon the criteria below, and the Review Panel will suggest a funding recommendation to the FNR.

Review Criteria

Each proposal application will be assessed against the following criteria:

- **Relevance (and output) of the COVID-19 related research project**: Is the proposed research project able to make progress towards solving a critical research question, a knowledge gap or a technological need (globally and/or in Luxembourg) that has arisen due to the challenge of COVID-19? This can be either current (required in the current crisis) or future (addressing post-crisis issues). Is the project likely to achieve relevant output (on the short or on the long-term)? Is the approach chosen robust?

- **Approach feasibility and team competences**: is the proposed plan a feasible way to solve the problem addressed? Does the scientific approach make sense in light of what is known (and what needs to be uncovered) about COVID-19? Does the project team have the required competences and skills to complete the project? Are appropriate partners (national and international) involved?

A report, template provided by the FNR, has to be submitted to FNR by the PI(s), a maximum of one month after the project’s end. If the project was intended to cover the starting phase of a longer-term project, a milestone evaluation will be done by the end of the initial funding phase, which might require a more detailed description for a later project continuation.

5. Submission of Proposals

The application language is English. Any project idea will need to have been previously published on the Research Luxembourg COVID-19 platform (https://lux-covid19.lu/) (see section 2 for deadlines). Grants for COVID-19 projects will be awarded through calls for proposals. Proposals are submitted by the Principal Investigator (PI), on behalf of the host institution which is the applicant legal entity. Applications have to be submitted until the deadlines indicated in section 2.
A completed Proposal Application Form for COVID-19 project call (details in Annex 1) will need to be submitted by the PI via the FNR Electronic Grant Submission System: https://grants.fnr.lu
Annex 1 – Application Form

The **COVID-19 proposal** application consists of completing and submitting the Online Application Form and its attachments.

Applications consist of the following different elements:

- The **Online Application Form** is completed in the FNR’s online Grant Management System and contains the general administrative details of the application (including a justification of the budget requested);

- The **Project Description Form** contains more detailed information on the proposed research project; a **maximum of 4 pages** (including bibliography, formatting: Arial 11pt font, normal margins), providing a
  - justification why the project falls into the remits of the COVID-19 call, specify whether the proposal responds to a need expressed by one or more communities impacted by COVID-19; detail on the output and impact intened (targeted audience, characteristics etc) in the short-term, as well as in the longer run;
  - details on the state-of-the-art, approach and methodology, as well as on the project implementation;
  - In case the proposal covers the initial phase of a longer project, applicants should provide some details of this follow-up project.

- The **CV of the PI and team members** (maximum 3 pages for the PI and maximum 1 page per person).

The Project Description Form and the CV(s) have to be converted to PDF and uploaded. They are part of a web-based online application and cannot be submitted alone.

Further advice and support can be obtained by contacting the FNR.