

EU Joint Programme - Neurodegenerative Disease Research (JPND)

JPND Evaluation Procedure

“Multinational research projects for Pathway Analysis across Neurodegenerative Diseases”

January 2017

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1. Introduction

This document describes the evaluation procedure and decision-making process applied for the JPND “European research projects for Pathway Analysis across Neurodegenerative Diseases” call for proposals. It supports the call text document and is a common statement from the funding partner organisations supporting this call.

2. Management of the Call

The following bodies are involved in the evaluation procedure of this call. Their role is specified below. Any person being involved in one of these bodies will not be allowed to submit or participate in proposals within this call.

- The Joint Call Secretariat is led by DLR-PT, Health Research, Germany. It is responsible for the management of the call. It is a point of contact for both applicants and the funding partner organisations.
- The Call Steering Committee is composed of representatives from each participating funding organisation. All decisions concerning the call procedures will be taken by the Call Steering Committee. Each funding organisation has one vote.

- The Peer Review Panel is composed of internationally recognised scientific experts from the respective field of research with regard to the topic of the call. It is responsible for the scientific evaluation of proposals at both the pre- and full proposal stage.
- The Public and Patient Involvement Advisory Board of JPND will support the Peer Review Panel when addressing Public and Patient Involvement aspects within the pre-proposals and full proposals.

3. Evaluation procedure and decision

3.1 General evaluation procedures

In accordance with the two-stage application procedure for joint proposals (pre-proposals and full proposals), there will also be a two-stage evaluation procedure, which is described in sections 3.2 and 3.3. However, some general aspects are valid for all stages of the evaluation procedure:

a. Evaluation criteria. Evaluation of the pre- and full proposals will be conducted according to the following evaluation criteria, which are equally weighted:

- **Relevance** to the aim(s) of the call.
- **Scientific quality** of the proposal, including level of innovation and originality of the proposal along with novel methodology and feasibility of the project and related risk analysis (adequacy of project work plan, time schedule, availability of well characterised patient groups or samples, quality and linkages of data within and between countries, budgetary and other resources).
- **International competitiveness** of participating research groups in the field(s) of the proposal (expertise relevant for the field, expertise of the research groups) and their appropriate mix; quality of collaborative interaction between the groups for the proposed work, level of training/knowledge exchange between research organisations, and added value, on both scientific and transnational levels, of the research consortium.
- **Deliverable outcomes** in the short, medium, long term and potential foreseen impact - potential of the expected results for future clinical and other health relevant applications in the field of neurodegenerative diseases.

b. Establishing the Peer Review Panel. The selection of Peer Review Panel members is not restricted to countries participating in JPND and international membership will be actively sought. Potential Peer Review Panel members can be suggested by all Call Steering Committee members. Peer Review Panel members are appointed for their own scientific expertise. A balance of gender and national representation will be sought. The Joint Call Secretariat will explain to Peer Review Panel members in the invitation letter and again at the Peer Review Panel meetings that they are to act as independent agents and do neither represent the funding partner organisations nor must they adopt national considerations. Their evaluations must use the framework of the approved evaluation criteria for this call.

From among the Peer Review Panel members, a chair will be appointed by the Call Steering Committee in advance of the Peer Review Panel meetings. The chair will ideally either be selected from a different country than from countries of the funding partner organisations or from a different but related neuroscientific discipline. The Joint Call Secretariat will brief the chair to make sure that he/she is fully engaged with the ambition of JPND and the JPND procedures.

c. Evaluation fees. Peer Review Panel members will not be remunerated for their efforts at any time of the evaluation procedure. However, the Peer Review Panel members will be reimbursed at standard rates for travel and accommodation expenses incurred for their attendance to the Peer Review Panel meeting.

d. Anonymity and confidentiality. Declarations of interest. The identity of the Peer Review Panel members will remain confidential. The Peer Review Panel will sign an agreement with regard to confidentiality and declare any interests in writing before undertaking the evaluation process.

Specifically, Peer Review Panel members must refrain from reviewing a pre-proposal or full proposal and absent themselves from the meeting room for the discussion of a pre-proposal or full proposal if they stand to profit professionally, financially or personally from approval or rejection of the pre-proposal or full proposal. They should also refrain from reviewing a pre-proposal or full proposal if they have published together or supervised the applicant or the co-workers within the last three years, if they work in the same department, are currently collaborating or if other professional or personal dependencies exist.

During the Peer Review Panel meetings, panel members will be required to sign a confidentiality form and state whether they have any of the above mentioned or any other association with a proposal, i.e., declare an interest. That person must leave the room during the discussion of this proposal unless the Call Steering Committee observers decide that there is no appreciable conflict. The Joint Call Secretariat will introduce this topic at the beginning of the Peer Review Panel meetings. Any Peer Review Panel member with doubts about whether they have a conflict of interest should discuss the matter with the Joint Call Secretariat ideally in advance of the Peer Review Panel meetings or declare these doubts to the Peer Review Panel so that a decision can be taken.

3.2 Pre-proposal evaluation and decision

a. Formal check of proposals. The Joint Call Secretariat will check the pre-proposals to ensure that they meet the call's formal conditions (date of submission; number of participating countries and groups; inclusion of all necessary information in English; adherence to the proposal template).

b. Eligibility check. The funding partner organisations, represented by the Call Steering Committee members, will receive copies of all pre-proposals from the Joint Call Secretariat. The funding organisations will check compliance with their respective regulations in parallel to the formal check. Each funding partner organisation will confirm eligibility of applicants from their country.

c. Peer Review Panel members. All Peer Review Panel members will be involved in the written evaluation and a subset of the Peer Review Panel members will, in addition, join the Peer Review Panel meeting for the pre-proposal evaluation.

d. Written evaluation. The Joint Call Secretariat will propose Peer Review Panel members to be assigned to pre-proposal evaluation by matching

- Keywords reflecting the scientific expertise of the expert (taken from the publication list and/or stated by the respective Peer Review Panel member itself) and
- Keywords reflecting the research area of the pre-proposal (provided by the applicants in the electronic submission system and/or the pre-proposal abstract).

Once this assignment is approved by the Call Steering Committee, pre-proposals will be sent to the respective Peer Review Panel members by the Joint Call Secretariat. Each pre-proposal will be sent to at least three Peer Review Panel members for evaluation, asking for written statements and scoring of the pre-proposals according to the following scoring system:

5 = excellent: strong recommendation for full proposal stage/funding

4 = very good: recommendation for full proposal stage/funding

3 = good: room for feasible improvement of certain aspects

2 = fair: proposal broadly addresses the criteria, but has significant weaknesses and may not be suitable for full proposal stage/funding

1 = poor: clear recommendation for rejection, as at least one of the major aspects is missing or strongly underdeveloped.

The Peer Review Panel members will be informed that their anonymous written statements and the scores will be forwarded to the applicants as part of the feedback from the Peer Review Panel evaluation, with copies provided to the members of the Call Steering Committee.

e. Peer Review Panel meeting. A subset of the Peer Review Panel members will meet in person for joint evaluation of the pre-proposals. In advance of the meeting, the Joint Call Secretariat will provide the results of the written evaluation (i.e. all scores and comments) and a preliminary ranking list (based on the average score of all reviews) to the Peer Review Panel and the Call Steering Committee. At the meeting, Peer Review Panel members will discuss written statements and scores of the pre-proposals, where appropriate. As a result of the meeting, the Peer Review Panel will

- assign one **final score** to each pre-proposal, which will be used to create a **final ranking list** of pre-proposals
- recommend the **number of pre-proposals** to be invited to the full proposal stage

The final score will be given as a consensus decision of the whole panel based on the discussions of the panel. The scoring system (see section 3.2.d) will be used; however, the final score will not be restricted to whole numbers.

f. Minutes. The Joint Call Secretariat will briefly summarise the discussion at the meeting and the recommendations made by the Peer Review Panel members. Any recommendation given by the Peer Review Panel will be forwarded to the applicants.

g. Decision on pre-proposals. According to the results of the Peer Review Panel meeting, the Call Steering Committee will decide how many pre-proposals will be invited to the full proposal stage. Based on the ranking list and the recommendation of the Peer Review Panel, an appropriate number of the top pre-proposals will be selected for the full proposal stage. All other pre-proposals will be rejected and the consortium will not be allowed to submit a full proposal.

h. Communication of the results. The co-ordinators of the pre-proposals will be informed by the Joint Call Secretariat about the outcome of the pre-proposal evaluation and decision (i.e. whether or not they are to be invited to submit a full proposal). They will also receive the written evaluations and scores (the evaluators will remain anonymous). In case that the Peer Review Panel makes clear recommendations to the applicants at the panel meeting, the Joint Call Secretariat will forward those recommendations to the applicants together with the written statements. Those co-ordinators who are invited by the Joint Call Secretariat to submit a full proposal will have to submit the full proposal by June 28, 2017. They will receive all relevant information for the full proposal stage, including a template for preparing the full proposal, from the Joint Call Secretariat. It will be made clear in writing to applicants and the Peer Review Panel members that co-ordinators are permitted to add a research group from an underrepresented country provided that a good scientific case is made. The message to co-ordinators will state that adding a group from an underrepresented country is not mandatory and have no influence on the evaluation.

3.3 Full proposal evaluation and decision

a. Formal check of proposals. The Joint Call Secretariat will check the full proposals as described in section 3.2.a.

b. Eligibility check. The funding partner organisations will check compliance with their respective funding organisation regulations as described in section 3.2.b and confirm eligibility of applicants to the Joint Call Secretariat prior to the Peer Review Panel meeting for full proposals. Inclusion of a non-eligible partner may ultimately lead to the rejection of the full proposal. Therefore, partners of a consortium are encouraged to contact their funding agencies and verify eligibility of newly added groups before submission of a full proposal.

c. Peer Review Panel members. Peer Review Panel members for the full proposal evaluation will, as a priority, be selected among those reviewers who have already been involved in the pre-proposal evaluation. Additional Peer Review Panel members will be recruited at this stage if there is a special need, for instance if a specific expertise is needed which cannot be provided among the remaining Peer Review Panel members (e.g., the requested Peer Review Panel member is not available to attend the meeting).

d. Written evaluation. The Joint Call Secretariat will assign Peer Review Panel members to full proposals. Once this assignment is approved by the Call Steering Committee, full proposals will be

sent to the Peer Review Panel by the Joint Call Secretariat. All Peer Review Panel members will receive the complete set of full proposals, from which a subset will be allocated to each Peer Review Panel member for individual review. The written assessment will be performed as described in section 3.2.d. If feasible, full proposals will be assigned to at least one of the same Peer Review Panel members who assessed the corresponding pre-proposal.

e. Peer Review Panel meeting. Peer Review Panel members will meet in person for joint evaluation of the full proposals and to make funding recommendations to the Call Steering Committee. Prior to the meeting, the Joint Call Secretariat will provide the results of the written evaluation (i.e. all scores and comments) and a preliminary ranking list (based on the average score of all reviews) to the Peer Review Panel and the Call Steering Committee. At the meeting, the Peer Review Panel will discuss each full proposal in detail. An introducer from those Peer Review Panel members who provided a written evaluation will be assigned to each proposal by the Joint Call Secretariat. The introducer will give a brief overview of the proposal followed by their own assessment. The other assigned Peer Review Panel members will then summarize their opinions. Finally, the chair will open the discussion to include the entire panel. As a result of the plenary discussion, the panel

- will give a **funding recommendation** on each full proposal (yes/no)
- will assign one **final score** to each full proposal, which will be used to create a **ranking list** of full proposals that are fundable in principal
- may **advise on a funding priority** if two or more full proposals are of equal quality and rank position.
- may comment on the **appropriateness of the budget** requested by the applicants

The final score will be given as a consensus decision of the whole panel and based on the discussions by the panel. The scoring system (see section 3.2.d) will be used; however, the final scores will not be restricted to whole numbers.

In case of divergent opinions (e.g. regarding a funding decision or a final score), a majority decision may be fostered by the chair at any time of the Peer Review Panel meeting.

f. Minutes. For each full proposal, a brief written summary of the panel discussion along with the anonymised written statements will be forwarded to the co-ordinators of the full proposals.

g. Decision on full proposals The Call Steering Committee will identify the full proposals to be funded based on the final ranking list and the available budget. The chair of the Peer Review Panel meeting will be asked to join the Call Steering Committee meeting to confirm the Peer Review Panel's views and provide scientific advice. If the number of fundable full proposals is smaller than the budget can support, only part of the funds will be used for this call. If the number of high priority full proposals is higher than the budget of a national funding partner organisation can support, the Call Steering Committee will discuss adjustments of the potential funding of the respective full proposals provided that it appears that this does not compromise the science that was the basis of the proposal's position in the rank order list. Call Steering Committee funding decisions do not necessarily need to follow Peer Review Panel ranking list in a strict way: if a high-ranked consortium fac-

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es funding problems, but a lower ranked consortium within the cluster of top-ranked full proposals does not, it will be allowable to fund the latter one. For this purpose, a clearly defined scientific threshold has to be specified by the Peer Review Panel. Positive funding decisions will be only allowed for projects above the threshold.

h. Communication of the results. The Joint Call Secretariat will communicate by E-mail the funding recommendation, the written feedback and the scores to the co-ordinators of all full proposals. Where projects are to be funded, the Joint Call Secretariat will require the co-ordinator to inform their project partners to contact their respective funding partner organisations. In addition, the national group leaders may be informed directly by the respective funding partner organisation by E-mail or by phone.

The final list of awarded projects will be published on the JPND website in alphabetical order.

4. Proposed Time Schedule

January 2017	Publication and dissemination of the JPND Joint Transnational Call
March 6, 2017	Submission deadline for pre-proposals
April 2017	Written pre-proposal evaluation
May 2017	Peer Review Panel meeting; Decision on full proposal invitation; Full proposal invitation sent to Project Co-ordinators
June 28, 2017	Submission deadline for full proposals
July / August 2017	Written full proposal evaluation
September 2017	Peer Review Panel meeting;
from October 2017	Funding decisions; Communication to Co-ordinators

5. Contact details

In case of any questions on the application process, the evaluation procedure or funding decisions, please contact the JPND Joint Call Secretariat at DLR-PT, Health Division, Germany:

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