

EU Joint Programme - Neurodegenerative Disease Research (JPND)

Procedures

for the JPND Call for proposals:

“Multinational research projects on Health and Social Care for Neurodegenerative Diseases”

January 2018

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1. SCOPE

This document represents a statement of intent from the funding organisations conducting this joint transnational call for proposals. It is for use by the funding organisations and for information of the applicants that apply to this call. It complements the information provided by the respective call text document.

The funding organisations agree to make every reasonable effort to implement the call as described below and to fund as many high-ranked proposals as possible.

2. DEFINING ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

General eligibility criteria have been specified in the call text. The decision on those criteria has been made by the Call Steering Committee, which will also decide on the compliance of proposals to these criteria. A check of applications with regard to general eligibility criteria will be done by the Joint Call Secretariat during the formal check (see sections 5.1 and 6.1).

In addition, specific eligibility criteria might apply for each funding organisation. The decision on those specific criteria and compliance to them is the individual matter of the respective funding organisation. A check of applications with regard to specific criteria will be done by each funding organisation during the eligibility check (see sections 5.1 and 6.1). Each funding organisation will provide a specific information sheet to be published together with the call text. The specific information sheet must inform on all specific eligibility criteria that will be applied by the respective funding organisation. In addition, each funding organisation will provide contact details to be published as part of the call text in order to individually advise applicants on all specific questions and criteria.

3. ELECTRONIC PROPOSAL SUBMISSION AND EVALUATION

For proposal submission by the applicants and proposal distribution among the funding organisations, the JPND electronic submission and evaluation system ("PT Outline", provided by the German JPND partner DLR Project Management Agency) will be used. Applicants will be able to register themselves to allow proposal submission. Call Steering Committee Members will be registered by the Joint Call Secretariat and the respective account will allow them to access all submitted proposals.

The electronic submission and evaluation system will also be used to collect written statements from the Peer Review Panel members. Each reviewer will be registered and comprehensively informed by the Joint Call Secretariat. In addition, the evaluation criteria and the scoring system will again be explained at the webpage where statements and scores will be deposited. Each reviewer will be able to evaluate only those proposals which will be assigned to him or her. For each proposal, the reviewer will also have to declare on putative conflicts of interest (see section 4.2) directly at the webpage. In addition, the evaluations of the other involved reviewers will not be visible for him or her until the written evaluation stages (see sections 5.3 and 6.3) have been completed.

4. GENERAL EVALUATION PROCEDURES

4.1 Peer Review

The selection of reviewers is not restricted to countries participating in JPND and international membership will be actively sought. Reviewers are not allowed to apply for this call and do not represent the funding organisations. They are appointed for their own scientific expertise and their evaluations must be based on the evaluation criteria for this call. A balance of gender and national representation will be sought.

From among the reviewers, a chair will be appointed by the Call Steering Committee. The Chair will ideally be selected from a country not participating in this call or from a different neuroscientific discipline. The Joint Call Secretariat will brief the Chair to regarding the call procedures.

Reviewers will not be remunerated for their efforts at any time of the evaluation procedure. However, they will be reimbursed at standard rates for travel and accommodation expenses incurred for their attendance to the Peer Review Panel meetings.

4.2 Confidentiality and declarations of interest

Any written or oral information from the evaluation process (except what has been specified in sections 5.6 and 6.6) as well as the identity of the reviewers will remain confidential.

The reviewers must sign an agreement regarding confidentiality and declaration of any conflicts of interest before undertaking the evaluation process. They must refrain from reviewing a proposal and absent themselves from the meeting room for the discussion of a proposal if they have any conflict of interest. A conflict of interest exists if they stand to profit professionally, financially or personally from approval or rejection of the proposal, if they have published together or supervised any of the applicants within the last three years, if they work in the same department, are currently collaborating or if other professional or personal dependencies exist. In case of any doubts about whether a conflict of interest exists, reviewers should discuss the matter with the Joint Call Secretariat or declare these doubts at the Peer Review Panel meeting.

4.3 Evaluation criteria and scoring

Evaluation of the proposals will be conducted according to the following evaluation criteria, which are equally weighted:

- **Relevance** to the aim of the call.
- **Scientific quality** including level of innovation, originality, feasibility and risk analysis.
- **Transnational added value** from working together as a research consortium.
- **International competitiveness** of participating research groups and their appropriate mix.
- **Deliverable outcomes** in the short, medium and long term including potential foreseen impact for innovation in Health and/or Social Care and provided plans for implementation.

For both written evaluations as well as Peer Review Panel meetings, the following scoring system will be used:

Value	Score	Description and recommendation
5	Excellent	Fully recommended as it stands
4	Good	Recommended with minor improvements
3	Fair	Fundable in principle, but needs major revision
2	Weak	Not recommended, weaknesses predominate
1	Poor	Clear rejection, underdeveloped

For written evaluations half-numbers may be used in order to indicate that a proposal is in between two scores. At the Peer Review Panel meetings, decimal places may be utilised to fine-tune scoring for final ranking purposes.

5. PRE-PROPOSAL EVALUATION AND DECISION

5.1 Formal and eligibility check

The Joint Call Secretariat will check all proposals regarding their adherence to the formal conditions (e. g. date of submission; number of participating countries and groups; adherence to the proposal template). For proposals not meeting the formal conditions, the applicants will be allowed to revise the proposal within a time frame of 24 hours. The Joint Call Secretariat will inform coordinators on this possibility and collect revised proposals. Proposals that still do not meet the formal conditions may be rejected without further evaluation.

In parallel, the funding organisations will check proposals for compliance with their individual regulations. Each funding organisation will confirm eligibility of the respective applicants to the Joint Call Secretariat. Proposals including non-eligible partners will nevertheless be accepted at this stage and sent for review.

5.2 Establishing the Peer Review Panel

The Joint Call Secretariat will collect reviewer suggestions (e.g. from the Call Steering Committee) and contact potential reviewers to request and coordinate their participation. The reviewer assignment will be done by matching the scientific expertise of a reviewer (keywords provided by the reviewer or taken from publication lists) to the research area of a proposal (based on provided keywords and abstract). The list of participating reviewers and their assignment to individual proposals will be circulated to the Call Steering Committee for modification and final approval.

5.3 Written evaluation

The Joint Call Secretariat will provide the reviewers with proposals for their assessment by using the electronic submission and evaluation system. Each proposal will be sent to at least three reviewers, asking for written statements and scoring (as described in section 4.3) within a specific time. After the deadline, the Joint Call Secretariat will provide the full results of the written evaluation and a preliminary ranking list, based on the average score of all submitted reviews, to the reviewers and the Call Steering Committee.

5.4 Peer Review Panel meeting

A subset of the reviewers will meet in person for joint evaluation of the proposals. Call Steering Committee members will attend this meeting as observers. At the meeting, a rapporteur (one of the

reviewers will be assigned to each proposal) will summarize the available written assessments. Afterwards, all reviewers will discuss the written statements, scores and ranking, where appropriate. As a result, the panel will agree on one final score for each proposal and recommend on the number of full proposals to be invited. The Joint Call Secretariat will briefly summarise the discussions and recommendations of the panel. The minutes of the meeting will subsequently be approved by the Peer Review Panel and the Call Steering Committee.

5.5 Decision on pre-proposals

According to the results of the meeting and the recommendations of the Peer Review Panel, the Call Steering Committee will decide on the number of full proposals to be invited. The decision will take into account the budget available for the call, seeking for a number of full proposals not exceeding a three times oversubscription of the available budget. All other proposals will be rejected and the consortium will not be allowed to submit a full proposal.

5.6 Communication of the results

The Joint Call Secretariat will inform all coordinators about the outcome of the proposal evaluation and decision. They will be provided with the statements and scores from the written evaluation as well as recommendations made at the Peer Review Panel meeting, where applicable. For proposals going forward to the full proposal stage, coordinators will receive all relevant information from the Joint Call Secretariat. This will include a proposal template as well as information on the proposal revision, including the undersubscription of funding organisations in order to advise consortia on the chances of including additional partners. Based on the proposals going forward to the full proposal stage, funding organisation being oversubscribed less than two-fold will be put on this list to be forwarded to the coordinators. It will also be stated that including additional partners from organisations which are not on this list is not recommended because it can be foreseen that no budget will be left. In addition, coordinators will also be asked for their permission to share the proposal abstract to researchers from underrepresented countries in order to facilitate the inclusion of such teams. Nevertheless, it will be made clear that adding such groups is not mandatory and will have no influence on the outcome of the evaluation.

6. FULL PROPOSAL EVALUATION AND DECISION

6.1 Formal and eligibility check

The Joint Call Secretariat and the Call Steering Committee will check the proposals as described in section 5.1. In the case of formal deficits, a revision of the proposal within a time frame of 24 hours will be allowed again. However, the inclusion of a non-eligible partner at the full proposal stage may lead to the rejection of the full proposal without further evaluation.

6.2 Establishing the Peer Review Panel

Reviewers will, as a priority, be selected among those who already attended the pre-proposal evaluation. Additional reviewers will be recruited only if there is a specific need (e.g. a specific expertise is missing) or in case that the number of available reviewers is not sufficient. Reviewer assignment will be conducted as described in section 5.2, and priority will be given to reviewers that already evaluated the respective pre-proposal.

6.3 Written evaluation

The written assessment will be performed as described in section 5.3.

6.4 Peer Review Panel meeting

A subset of the reviewers will meet in person for joint evaluation of the proposals. Call Steering Committee members will attend this meeting as observers. At the meeting, the reviewers will discuss each proposal in detail. A rapporteur will give a brief overview of the proposal and summarize his or her own assessment. Other assigned reviewers present at the meeting 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 agree on a funding recommendation and a final score for each proposal. A consensus decision by the whole panel will be sought. Nevertheless, in case of divergent opinions, a majority decision will be sought by the Chair. After all proposals will have been discussed, a ranking list will be derived from the individual final scores. If two or more proposals share an equal final score, the panel will advise on the final rank order. Where appropriate, the panel may also comment on the appropriateness of the budget requested by the applicants.

After the meeting, the rapporteurs will submit brief written summaries of the panel discussions for each proposal. The Joint Call Secretariat will collect these summaries and draft the minutes of the meeting, which will be approved by the Peer Review Panel and the Call Steering Committee.

6.5 Decision on full proposals

According to the final ranking list from the Peer Review Panel meeting, the Call Steering Committee will identify a subset of proposals to be funded (see section 7 for a description of the funding mechanism). The Chair of the Peer Review Panel will be asked to join the Call Steering Committee meeting to confirm the panel's views and provide scientific advice. If the number of proposals recommended for funding is smaller than the calls budget can support, only part of the funds will be used. However, if the number of fundable proposals exceeds the available budget, the Call Steering Committee will discuss adjustments of the potential funding in order to maximise the number of supported proposals. There may be a need for iteration following the meeting before a final decision on each proposal can be made.

6.6 Communication of the results

The Joint Call Secretariat will inform all coordinators about the outcome of the proposal evaluation and the funding decision. They will be provided with the statements and scores from the written evaluation as well as the rapporteurs summary from the Peer Review Panel meeting. Where proposals are to be funded, the project partners will be contacted by the related funding organisations (for a timeline see section 10).

The Joint Call Secretariat will formally notify the Chair of JPND as well as relevant JPND Steering Committees of the final funding decisions. The final list of awarded projects will be published on the JPND website in alphabetical order of the project titles.

7. FUNDING PROCEDURE

7.1 Allocation and use of budgets

Individual budgets were dedicated (earmarked) to this call by the respective funding organisations, as published in the related specific information sheets. These budgets will be used to support research carried out by scientists and institutions according to the rules and legal framework of the respective funding organisations. The "virtual common pot" model will be used: Each funding organisation will only fund its own approved applicants with the envisioned amount of money. There

is no allocation to a real common pot and no "cross-border" funding will apply. Due to the virtual common pot model, two scenarios might apply for each funding organisation:

- If less budget will be needed as compared to the available budget (e.g. because a low number of related applicants will be recommended for funding), the remaining budget will not be spent and remain at the portfolio of the funding organisation. Therefore, it might be possible that the total budget earmarked for this call will not be spent completely.
- If the required budget will exceed the available budget (e.g. because a very high number of respective applicants will be recommended for funding), the funding organisation might not be able to support all successful applicants (funding gap). In that case, funding will be administered according to the rank order of proposals.

In order to ensure a best-possible use of the earmarked budget and to avoid funding gaps, each funding organisation is asked to match as accurately and realistically as possible the financial demand from the proposals with the budget earmarked for the call.

7.2 Funding decisions

As far as possible, proposals will be funded in accordance to the ranking order, starting with the very best. While going down the list, it will be verified for each proposal whether sufficient budget is available from the funding organisations involved in this proposal to support all partners of the consortium. As long as this is ensured, the proposal will be funded and the requested budget will be dedicated to the individual applicants. In consequence, the remaining budget of the related funding organisations will decrease. The more proposals selected for funding, the less budget will be available among the different funding organisations to support further proposals.

In the case that a funding gap occurs (i.e. the remaining budget of a funding organisation will not be sufficient to fund the respective partner of the consortium), the Call Steering Committee will discuss possible options to overcome the funding gap. It might be necessary to negotiate with the respective applicants on an individual basis. When a solution can be found, the proposal can be funded. However, if no solution can be found, the respective proposal will not be funded at all, even if there is budget available to support the remaining partners of the consortium.

In order to retain some flexibility in the case of funding gaps, the funding decisions of the Call Steering Committee do not necessarily need to follow the ranking list in a strict way. Should a proposal on a higher rank position not be fundable because of budgetary reasons, it might still be possible to fund a lower ranked proposal (e.g. where the arrangement of funding organisations and requested budgets is different) of comparable quality.

7.2 Administration of funding

Proposals selected for funding will receive support for up to three years. Each partner of the consortium will be funded directly from the corresponding funding organisation. Funding will be administered according to the terms and conditions of the responsible funding organisations, which might be different for each partner of the consortium. There will not be any centralized funding or budget administration by JPND.

8. WIDENING CONCEPT

8.1 Pre-evaluation widening

In order to maximise the impact of JPND supported calls for proposals across Europe and beyond, a best-possible use of the earmarked budget is aspired. One important step towards reaching this goal is a better involvement of underrepresented countries (i.e. countries that do not spend their dedicated budget due to a low number of researchers participating in the funded proposals). Typically researchers from the EU-13 countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) are underrepresented in the funded proposals. For a better involvement of such teams, three separate pathways will be established before the full proposal evaluation (see the call text for more details):

- The call text encourages coordinators to include teams from underrepresented countries.
- Consortia will benefit from including a team from an underrepresented country by increasing the number of eligible partners of the consortium by one.
- After the pre-proposal evaluation, teams from underrepresented countries will be actively asked to join proposals going forward to the full proposal stage. To support this process, coordinators of successful pre-proposals will be asked for their agreement to share the abstract of their proposal as well as contact information, which may be forwarded to potential teams by the respective Call Steering Committee members. Nevertheless, sharing the abstract will be on a voluntary basis without influence on the full proposal evaluation.

8.2 Post-evaluation widening

Also post-evaluation widening will apply to this call. This foresees that consortia finally selected for funding get the option to include additional partners from EU-13 countries. Post-evaluation widening will be coupled to the following conditions:

- Up to two teams from EU-13 countries may join a consortium. Such teams must be among those applicants that were already involved at any of the pre-proposals.
- Funding of the new partner must be provided by the respective funding organisation (i.e. the new partner must be able to independently finance the own work package).
- The proposal which has been evaluated must not be changed (i.e. new work packages may be added, but existing work packages must not be modified).

8.3 Processing post-evaluation widening

Consortia selected for funding will be published at the JPND website (see section 6.6) as indicated in section 10. This publication may include information on the title of the project, the partners of the consortium as well as a short abstract on the scientific goals. Based on the publication, teams from underrepresented countries will be allowed to contact coordinators of funded consortia and negotiate their inclusion. Call Steering Committee members from the respective funding organisations may assist, e.g. by disseminating the call results to their researchers or by providing provisional funding consents. However, it must be made clear at any point of the process that post-evaluation widening is an option, but not a condition. Consortia selected for funding may independently decide on the acceptance of any additional partner without influencing the funding decision already made.

Should post-evaluation widening apply to a consortium, the coordinator needs to submit a short description of the additional work packages as well as the added value for the existing collaboration to the Joint Call Secretariat. Based on this proposal, the funding organisations being involved in the consortium will decide on subsequent acceptance or rejection. As post-evaluation widening is not a requirement, it can be anticipated that consortia will accept only in case that the new partners and work packages will be beneficial to the project. Nevertheless, a written statement of up to two reviewers from the Peer Review Panel of the call may be requested by the Joint Call Secretariat prior to the decision if such an additional assessment will be desired by the funding organisations.

In the case that post-evaluation will finally be applied, the new partners will be taken up as regular partners of the consortium and will need to sign the respective consortium agreement.

9. REPORTING

Each consortium will be required to submit a brief annual scientific progress report in January of each year and a final scientific progress report within three months of the end of the project to the Joint Call Secretariat. A template will be provided by the Joint Call Secretariat to the coordinator, who is in charge of submitting such reports on behalf of the consortium. The Joint Call Secretariat will circulate such reports to all funding organisations involved in the respective proposals.

The representatives of the individual funding organisations will assess the reports with regard to scientific progress, adherence to the work plan and compliance to the respective organisations regulations. In the case of any queries, they might either directly contact the respective consortium partners or request the Joint Call Secretariat to obtain a statement from the coordinator.

In addition to the central reporting as described above, funding organisations may request additional reports from the related consortium partners with regard to the organisations individual need.

10. ANTICIPATED TIME SCHEDULE

January 8, 2018	Publication and dissemination of the call
March 6, 2018	Submission deadline for pre-proposals
March to May, 2018	Formal and eligibility checks, review process and decision
May 8, 2018	Communication of results, full proposal invitation sent to coordinators
June 27, 2018	Submission deadline for full proposals
July to September, 2018	Full proposal review and funding decisions
from October 1st, 2018	Communication of funding decisions, publication of call results