

EU Joint Programme - Neurodegenerative Disease Research (JPND)

Procedures for the JPcofuND2 co-funded call for proposals:

**“Multinational research projects on Personalised
Medicine for Neurodegenerative Diseases”**

February 2019

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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 JPcofuND2 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 be further explained at the webpage of the electronic submission and evaluation system 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 them until the written evaluation stages (see sections 5.4 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 or JPcofuND2 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 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 5.7 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 leave 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 researchers involved in the submitted projects within the last three years, if they work in the same department, laboratory or unit, 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:

- **Excellence**

including the level of innovation and originality of the proposal along with novel methodology, 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.

- **Impact**

deliverable outcomes in the short, medium and long term and likely impact - potential of the expected results for future clinical and other health relevant applications.

- **Quality and efficiency of the implementation**

including feasibility of the project such as 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.

For both written evaluations as well as the Peer Review Panel meeting, 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	May only be supported on the basis of major revisions
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. For final scores derived from the remote evaluation of pre-proposals (see section 5.6) or the Peer Review Panel meeting on full proposals (see section 6.4), 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 after the submission deadline, the applicants may be allowed to revise the proposal within a time frame of 24 hours. However, a revision will only be allowed in the case of slight shortcomings which may be fixed without changing the content of the proposal. The Joint Call Secretariat will provide a suggestion to the Call Steering Committee on which proposals may be subjected to revision and which may be rejected. The Call Steering Committee will finally decide by E-Mail and on an individual basis on each proposal. Where a revision will be allowed, the Joint Call Secretariat will inform coordinators on this possibility, collect the revised proposals and check for compliance with regard to the deadline and the formal conditions of the call. Proposals that still do not meet the formal conditions may be rejected without further evaluation. The Joint Call Secretariat will provide the Call Steering Committee with all information on the revisions and access to all proposals.

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 may nevertheless be accepted at this stage and sent for review as long as they fulfil the requirements of the call without the non-eligible partner.

5.2 Establishing the Peer Review Panel

The Joint Call Secretariat will collect suggestions regarding reviewers (e.g. from the Call Steering Committee) and contact potential reviewers to request and coordinate their participation. The list of

participating reviewers, including possible substitutes, and their assignment to individual proposals will be circulated to the Call Steering Committee for modification and final approval.

5.3 Reviewer assignment

The Joint Call Secretariat will prepare a list of all submitted proposals that includes the title of the project, the list of diseases, relevant keywords, a list of the project partners and the scientific abstract. This list will be circulated among the Peer Review Panel and each reviewer will be asked for a self-assignment to a specific number of proposals according to his or her specific expertise. Reviewers will also be asked to check for conflicts of interest according to the list of project partners. In parallel, the Joint Call Secretariat will perform an accompanying check for conflicts of interests. Based on the reviewers' feedback, the Joint Call Secretariat will prepare a draft assignment of reviewers to all proposals, thereby assigning three reviewers to each proposal. Where there is no information on self-assignment available, the Joint Call Secretariat will assign reviewers to those proposals, thereby matching information from the scientific abstract of the proposal and keywords of the reviewers' expertise.

5.4 Remote evaluation

For each proposal, all three reviewers will be asked for written statements and scoring (as described in section 4.3). The reviewers will be informed that their anonymous written statements will be forwarded to the applicants.

A deadline for providing the remote evaluations will be given to the reviewers. It is envisaged that all proposals will receive three independent remote evaluations. One week ahead of the deadline, the Joint Call Secretariat will remind those reviewers that have not yet delivered their evaluations. A notification will be included to communicate within 24 hours if they are not able to submit the evaluations on time. After the deadline, non-responsive reviewers will be asked to provide missing evaluations within one week. In parallel, the respective proposals will be sent to a substitute reviewer, asking for an evaluation within one week.

In the case of still missing evaluations at the end of the remote evaluation stage, the Joint Call Secretariat will keep on collecting these evaluations until the day of the decision (see section 5.6). However, these late evaluations may not be included in the consolidation phase (see section 5.5). The Call Steering Committee will discuss on an individual basis on how to integrate these late evaluations into the process and on an extension of the evaluation phase in case that some assessments may still be missing.

5.5 Consolidation

The remote evaluation phase will be followed by a consolidation phase: the three reviewers of a proposal will gain access to all available remote evaluations (written statements and scores) of the respective proposal. Reviewers will be allowed to revise their own evaluation in the light of the other evaluations within one week. Any revision of the own evaluation must be justified and will be tracked by the Joint Call Secretariat.

It is the aim of the consolidation phase to highlight proposals with disparate evaluations and thus to harmonize the outcome of the remote evaluation as long as it is accepted by the involved reviewers. However, if no revisions will be requested by the reviewers themselves, also strongly divergent evaluations will be accepted and no further attempts of harmonization will be done.

5.6 Decision on pre-proposals

After finishing the consolidation phase, the Joint Call Secretariat will provide the written statements and scores of all proposals to the Call Steering Committee. Changes to the scores applied during the consolidation phase by the respective reviewers will be highlighted. An average score (arithmetic mean) and the standard deviation (based on the individual scores provided by the reviewers) will be calculated for each proposal.

In order to agree on a final rating for each proposal, the Call Steering Committee will either confirm the average score derived from the consolidation phase or, if there is still a high level of discrepancy, apply weighting of individual reviewers scores. However, weighting will be restricted to the following principles:

- Where the standard deviation is above a value of 1.0 because two of the individual reviewers scores are 4.0 or above and only one score is 2.0 or below, the two highest scores will be double-weighted;
- Where the standard deviation is above a value of 1.0 because two of the individual reviewers scores are 2.0 or below and only one score is 4.0 or above, the two lowest scores will be double-weighted.

For the decision on pre-proposals, the final score of each proposal will be rounded to the first decimal position and a ranking list of all proposals will be established. A telephone conference will be organised among the Call Steering Committee members to jointly 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 approximately a 2-fold oversubscription of the totally available budget of the call. In addition, funding organisations being oversubscribed more than 3-fold after the pre-proposal stage should envisage individual arrangements to reduce their own oversubscription. All other proposals will be rejected and the consortia will not be allowed to submit a full proposal.

5.7 Communication of the results

After funding decisions have finally been validated by all funding organisations, the Joint Call Secretariat will inform all coordinators about the outcome of the pre-proposal evaluation and decision. They will be provided with the statements from the remote evaluation and the decision made by the Call Steering Committee. 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, upon previous agreement of the organisations involved. Based on the proposals going forward to the full proposal stage, funding organisations' being oversubscribed less than two-fold will be put on this list to be forwarded to the coordinators. 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 scientific evaluation. Also, the addition of partners must always be in compliance with the respective national funding rules of involved funding organisations.

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 may again be allowed. However, the inclusion of a non-eligible regular partner at the full proposal stage will 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. For the reviewers' assignment priority will be given to reviewers that already evaluated the respective pre-proposal. Additional reviewers will be assigned 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).

6.3 Written evaluation

Three reviewers will be asked for written statements and scoring (as described in section 4.3) for each full proposal. The reviewers will be informed that their anonymous written statements will be forwarded to the applicants. A deadline for providing the remote evaluations will be given to the reviewers. One week ahead of the deadline, the Joint Call Secretariat will remind those reviewers that have not yet delivered their evaluations. After the deadline, non-responsive reviewers will again be asked to provide missing evaluations within one week.

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 as well as an independent observer of the European Commission will join the Peer Review Panel 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 ranking order. The panel may apply categories of full proposals with similar overall quality (e.g. categories A, B and C) and, where appropriate, 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 call’s 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 arrangements in order to maximise the number of supported proposals (see section 7 for further details). 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 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 respective 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. It will also submit the list of projects to be funded to the European Commission together with other relevant information (observer’s report). 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. No “cross-border” funding will apply.

In addition, the top-up funding provided by the European Commission will be partially used to overcome existing funding gaps, i.e. where the requested budget exceeds the earmarked budget of the respective funding organisation. Thus, the top-up funding by the European Commission may be used as a common pot. Details on how the top-up funding may be used have been specified in JPcofuND2 Consortium Agreement.

Due to the described funding 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 ad-

ministered according to the ranking order of proposals, making use of the respective national budgets and the top-up funding by the European Commission.

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

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. Priority should be given to overcoming the funding gap by national arrangements, e.g. by increasing the available budget for the call. If no national arrangements can be made, the Call Steering Committee may decide to use part of the top-up funding by the European Commission to overcome the funding gap. Details on how the top-up funding by the European Commission may be used are provided in the JPcofuND2 consortium agreement. 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 case that the Peer Review Panel will rank two or more proposals on the same ranking position (i.e. they receive the same overall score), the Call Steering Committee may decide on the proposals to be funded according to the available budgets and with the aim to maximise the number of high quality projects to be funded.

7.3 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 JPcofuND2.

8. 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 individual funding organisations will assess the reports with regard to scientific progress, adherence to the work plan and compliance to the respective organisation's 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 organisation's individual need.