

Procedure for awarding interdisciplinary doctoral project funds

Preamble

The German Research Platform for Zoonoses is an information and service network for all research groups active in the field of zoonoses in Germany. Its goal is the rapid development of functional, flexible and sustainable solutions for the research, prevention and control of zoonotic infectious diseases, and the implementation of these solutions in cooperation with the relevant institutions.

In order to achieve this goal, the Zoonoses Platform supports scientific and infrastructural work in the field of zoonoses research. This work is intended to provide an incentive for intensive research networking and cooperation between human and veterinary medicine on the one hand, and universities and non-university research institutions on the other.

The submission and the organization of the review process of interdisciplinary doctoral projects within the framework of the zoonoses platform is the responsibility of the Münster office. The necessary funds for the implementation of the projects are granted by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)/ project management agency Gesundheitsforschung im Deutschen Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt e. V., or, in the case of thematically suitable projects, by the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the Federal Ministry of Defence or the Federal Ministry of Health.

Eligibility

Doctoral projects can be applied for through project leaders for a duration of three years if both project leaders and doctoral student are members of the German Research Platform for Zoonoses. In addition, applicants must have an offer of employment (or the prospect of such employment) for the duration of the interdisciplinary doctoral project in order to guarantee supervision of the doctoral student for the project's duration. Persons with guest status are entitled to participate in projects as cooperation partners. Members of the Internal Advisory Board are entitled to initiate projects. Applications can be submitted at any time. Depending on the requirements of the funding agency, grants can only be awarded within Germany.

Type of project

The Zoonoses Platform traditionally attaches great importance to supporting early-career researchers. There is a need to link early career scientists across disciplines and train them with the mindset of a zoonoses researcher who is part of an interdisciplinary community. This is an important building block to meet future needs in infection research (see G20 goals) through high quality research by scientists with a broad, interdisciplinary spectrum.

Hence, the Zoonoses Platform supports interdisciplinary doctoral projects in the field of zoonoses research in order to qualify doctoral students at a very early stage in their academic careers in line with the One Health idea. At the end of the interdisciplinary

doctoral project, the [One Health Certificate](#) by the Zoonoses Platform is to be obtained as further proof of qualification. The requirements for obtaining this certificate are described in the Guidelines on obtaining the [One Health Certificate](#).

The doctoral student must be able to prove that she or he has the opportunity to complete a doctorate at her or his home university or a partner university, and that she or he is integrated into an existing graduate program or a formalized doctoral structure (minimum requirement: doctoral committee with annual meetings). Proof must be provided of the interdisciplinary nature of the project with relevance for zoonoses research. For this purpose, at least two disciplines (e.g. veterinary medicine, human medicine, biology, climate research) with relevance for zoonoses research must be involved in the project. Here, a description and written confirmation of the envisaged cooperation must be provided by at least two project partners. Cooperating partners may apply for funds to conduct the work planned at their institute for the doctoral degree. How the workloads are shared between the respective cooperation partner is freely selectable. In order to rule out any charges of double funding, demarcation from already existing funding must be made.

Applications may be submitted for funding for a three-year doctoral position, usually E13, 65%, plus 15.000 euros travel and equipment costs per year (including funds for joint work). In addition, 5.000 euros per year in funding for networking activities can be applied for. In exceptional and justified cases, institutions abroad may be involved in the project, but will not receive funding in accordance with BMBF guidelines.

The duration of the project shall not exceed 36 months.

Application process

Applications for project funding are to be made in accordance with the following procedures.

1. Submission of project application to the administrative office in Münster

Project applications can be submitted to the office of the German Research Platform for Zoonoses in Münster at any time, but no later than 14 days before the respective meeting of the Internal Advisory Board. Applications can be submitted in electronic form. To help compare and assess the project applications submitted, the standardized application documents of the Zoonoses Platform are to be used. A template can be obtained from the administrative office or from the website www.zoonosen.net.

The project application should describe the planned project in detail. It should also present the research question to be addressed, its scientific innovativeness, the added value for zoonoses research, as well as its interdisciplinarity. The application is limited to ten pages (without appendices). An informal letter of support for the research project from the respective research institution must be included as an attachment to the application.

The administrative office checks the documents for formal correctness and sends them to the members of the Internal Advisory Board for further evaluation. If the formalities are not met, the applicant is given the opportunity to submit the relevant documents at short notice. The administrative office is entitled to reject formally incorrect applications at its own discretion. Applications are dealt with by the Internal Advisory

Board in the chronological order of their submission to the administrative office. There is no entitlement to be invited to a specific meeting of the Advisory Board.

2. Appraisal by the Internal Advisory Board

Applicants are invited by the administrative office to a meeting of the Internal Advisory Board within a reasonable period of time. There, the applicants or a nominated representative presents the project application. Representatives of the funding ministries are expressly invited to participate in the review process. Members of the Internal Advisory Board discuss and evaluate the application according to the following criteria:

- Expertise of the applicants as scientists and with regard to the project idea, necessary prior knowledge beyond the project idea, and networking competence
- Supervision concept
- Scientific novelty and originality, existence of a conclusive research hypothesis
- Feasibility of the project and realistic probability to successfully complete a doctoral thesis with the project results
- Added value and usability of the project or the project results for interdisciplinary zoonoses research
- Appropriateness of the temporal and financial framework presented
- Networking between different research institutions and inclusion of human and veterinary medicine within the project

After examining the project application in terms of content and form, the Internal Advisory Board can decide as follows:

- a) The project proposal is evaluated positively.
- b) The project application is rejected.

A project application is accepted or rejected by a simple majority of the Internal Advisory Board. All members of the Internal Advisory Board are entitled to vote, provided that they do not have a conflict of interests.

Conflict of interests

If members of the Internal Advisory Board have a conflict of interests, they must leave the room during the discussion and voting on the project application. A member of the Internal Advisory Board is deemed to have a conflict of interests if she or he is involved financially or substantively in the planned project, or if she or he is a member of the same institute or working group as the applicant. In addition, members of the Internal Advisory Board are requested to give truthful declaration of close cooperation or competition with the applicants in thematically related projects, and where relevant to identify a conflict of interests. Employment in the same superordinate institution alone does not constitute a conflict of interests.

3. Final review by the project funding ministries/ agencies

For the final funding decision, the administrative office forwards the application documents, the results of the vote, and the minutes of the appraisal by the Internal Advisory Board to the supporting ministry or its named project management agency. The necessary application form is completed and submitted by the applicant herself/himself.

A binding approval for funding can only be issued after a final review of the documents by the respective project management agency/funding ministry. Funding is granted in the form of a notice of funding issued directly to the project coordinator by the funding ministry or its project management agency.

4. Follow-up applications

Follow-up applications are in principle allowed. However, on the basis of the description of project type, they can only be submitted as cross-sectional projects. They shall be treated in the application procedure in the same way as new applications.

5. Duty to report

There is an obligation to report to the funding party, which is indicated in the respective notice of funding and which is independent of the Zoonoses Platform. The Internal Advisory Board is entitled to request written or oral interim or final reports on the projects. It is desirable that short project reports be given as part of the annual International Symposium on Zoonoses Research.