

Procedures for awarding interdisciplinary doctoral projects

Preamble

The German Research Platform for Zoonoses is an information and service network for all research groups active in Germany in the field of zoonoses. 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 Platform for Zoonoses supports scientific and infrastructural work in the field of zoonosis 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.

Funding to implement projects recommended by the Internal Advisory Board of the Platform for Zoonoses is provided in line with specialist responsibility by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), and the Federal Ministry of Health (BMG), with the amount of project funding that each can provide being limited. Further information can be obtained from the administrative office.

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 respective sponsor, grants can only be awarded within Germany.

Types of project

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

Hence, the Platform for Zoonoses supports interdisciplinary doctoral projects in the field of zoonosis research in order to qualify doctoral students at a very early stage in their academic careers in line with the One Health guiding principle. At the end of the interdisciplinary doctoral project, the One Health Certificate is to be presented as further proof of qualification. The requirements detailed in the [Guidelines on obtaining the One Health Certificate](#) apply with regard to obtaining this 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 programme 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 zoonosis research. For this purpose, **at least two disciplines** (e.g. veterinary medicine, human medicine, biology, climate research) with relevance for zoonosis 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. For the cooperation partners, funds can be requested to carry out the work planned there for the doctorate. How large the share of the work must be for the respective cooperation partner is not specified. In order to rule out any charges of double funding, demarcation from already existing funding must be made.

Applications can be submitted for funding for three years for a 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. In exceptional and justified cases, foreign institutions 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 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 application documents of the Platform for Zoonoses are standardized. A template can be obtained from the administrative office or from the website www.zoonosen.net.

The project application should describe the planned procedure for the project in detail. It should also present the research question to be addressed, its scientific innovativeness, the added value for zoonosis research, as well as its interdisciplinarity. The application is limited to ten pages (without appendices).

The administrative office checks the documents for formal correctness and sends them to the members of the Internal Advisory Board. 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 a particular date for a meeting.

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 and the sponsors are expressly invited to participate in the

appraisal. 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
- Scientific novelty and originality, existence of a conclusive hypothesis on the object of research
- Feasibility of the project
- Added value and usability of the project or the project results for interdisciplinary zoonosis 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 applicant is requested to incorporate the recommended modifications to the project and to resubmit the application.
- c) The project application is rejected.

The forwarding of 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.

If members of the Internal Advisory Board have a conflict of interests, they must leave the room during the discussion and voting on the 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 with the applicants in thematically similar projects or of competition, 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 sponsors or the funding ministries

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 DLR project management agency, which identifies in consultation with the various federal ministries the ministry responsible for funding the project. The necessary application form is completed and submitted by the applicant herself or 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, and 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 sponsor, which is indicated in the respective notice of funding and which is independent of the Platform for Zoonoses. 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 zoonoses symposium.