National Research Data Infrastructure (NFDI)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The FAQs will be updated regularly.

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Eligibility

Does the consortium have to provide evidence of its non-profit/public-benefit status in the proposal (e.g. through submission of a legal opinion or statement from the tax authorities)?

➢ No, this is not required, particularly since the specific legal nature of a consortium may only emerge during the course of the project. However, it is required that all organisations that receive funding are non-profit.

How can commercial organisations be integrated into a consortium?

➢ Where necessary, commercial organisations may be integrated into a consortium through a tender process for third-party services. An organisation can only be involved as a participant if an assessment of tax-related aspects has concluded that such an involvement would not jeopardise the non-profit/public-benefit nature of the consortium.

Can Max Planck and Fraunhofer institutes participate in consortia as (co-) applicant institutions?

➢ In general, Max Planck and Fraunhofer institutes have no legal capacity. If such institutes would like to take on the role of a (co-) applicant institution in an NFDI proposal, the Max Planck Society and the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft must be listed along with their specific participating institutes. It is understood that the relevant institute director has the authority to take part in the consortium and enter into obligations relating to its proposed applicant role on behalf of the association in accordance with the relevant by-laws/statutes of the association (Article 28 of the MPG by-laws, Article 21 of the statutes of the FhG).

Can international institutions or facilities based in Germany serve as (co-) applicant institutions in the proposal?

➢ International institutions and facilities that comply with non-profit/public-benefit requirements and are based in Germany are generally eligible to submit proposals. Each case will be examined individually.

Proposal Submission

Who has to sign the various proposal documents?

➢ The proposal must be submitted via the DFG’s elan portal. In addition to submitting the proposal electronically, the applicant institution must print and sign the compliance form generated after the proposal is uploaded in elan and send it to the DFG Head Office. The heads of all co-applicant institutions and all co-spokespersons must each sign the NFDI General Compliance Form (www.dfg.de/formulare/nfdi130). This form should not be sent to the DFG. The compliance forms may be kept on file decentralised at the relevant institutions. In cases of alleged research misconduct, the DFG will contact the spokesperson’s institution. This institution is responsible for providing to the DFG the relevant compliance forms, which are either kept centralised at the applicant institution or decentralised at the co-applicant institutions.

All participants named in the proposal must draft and sign an informal letter of commitment confirming their participation. The letters of commitment must be submitted in the proposal’s appendix.
Data from other sectors

To what extent can data from the private sector be used in the development of the NFDI?

➢ Where it is relevant for a community to incorporate data from the private sector into its research, such data can be incorporated. However, strict compliance with the relevant legal requirements (e.g. tax or civil law) must be ensured.

Funding

Financial contributions

What is considered an “appropriate contribution”? 

➢ The contribution depends on the specific composition of the institutions participating in a consortium and the existing infrastructures and services which a consortium can use during the funding period. As part of the evaluation process, reviewers will assess whether the specified contribution is appropriate in relation to the requested funds. The basic tasks of the applicant institutions do not count as part of their contribution.

The nature and scope of the contribution must be such as to demonstrate a substantial interest in the consortium on the part of the applicant institution. This, too, is assessed during the review.

How does the financial contribution have to be documented?

➢ Information on financial contributions is requested in the interim reports, see DFG form nfdi 140 (Instructions and Template for Consortia Progress Reports National Research Data Infrastructure [NFDI], sections 1.5 “Operating Model” and 4.1 “Description and Summary of Contributions by [Co-] Applicants”).

The consortium’s own contribution does not have to be documented in the proof of use.

Request for funds

Can participants apply for funding themselves?

➢ No. Funding required for the integration of participants can be requested by the applicant institution or a co-applicant institution.

What considerations have to be made with regard to requesting funding for future project tasks and extensions?

➢ The category “direct project costs” can be used to request funding for future project tasks. Funds must be requested for the year of their expected use and justified in the proposal. The anticipated purpose of funding must be described in as much detail as possible.
Such funds may also be used to integrate additional co-applicant institutions and participants. Upon successful review by the DFG, these co-applicant institutions and participants may be incorporated into existing consortia through a cost-neutral grant extension.

**Can consortia request funding to address cross-cutting topics that are to be implemented as part of the overall structure of the NFDI?**

- Yes. Consortia can apply for funding to address cross-disciplinary topics as part of their task areas. Such requests should be coordinated with the Directorate and other consortia.

**Can consortia request funding to coordinate NFDI-wide activities? Or will the Directorate have central funds available to cover such coordination tasks?**

- Funding for collaboration and/or exchange within the NFDI should be requested by the individual consortia.

**Is it possible to submit supplemental proposals?**

- Supplemental proposals are generally excluded in the NFDI context. Unforeseen expenses not originally planned for in the proposal must also be financed from the project funds originally granted to an NFDI consortium.

### Spending of funds

**Are grant funds tied to a particular time period?**

- Yes. Funds are tied to a fiscal year. Only in justified individual cases can a certain portion of the funds be transferred to the next fiscal year. Informal requests may be assessed by a member of the review panel.

**Can unspent project funds be granted for use in a subsequent year?**

- Grants are generally tied to the fiscal year stated in the award letter. In exceptional cases, you may request that unused project funds for a given fiscal year be granted again for use in a subsequent year. Written requests must be submitted to the DFG by 30 September of the relevant fiscal (calendar) year. In your request, briefly describe why this transfer is necessary, explaining in particular what project tasks will be undertaken in the future using these funds.

Please note that due to the limited availability of funds and the resulting lack of financial flexibility, we anticipate that not all requests to transfer funds to a subsequent year can be approved.

Additional information can be found in the NFDI funding guidelines ([www.dfg.de/formulare/nfdi300/nfdi300_de.pdf](http://www.dfg.de/formulare/nfdi300/nfdi300_de.pdf)).
How should increases in staff costs be taken into account? The proposal template refers to DFG staff funding rates for 2020. How binding are these rates?

- When preparing your budget, remember to account for increases in staff costs over the proposed duration of the grant. The DFG staff funding rates provided for 2020 serve as a basis for calculating staff costs during the proposal phase. Anticipated increases in staff costs may therefore be considered in the overall budget request. Note, however, that once consortia grants are awarded, staff cost adjustments can no longer be made, even if DFG staff funding rates increase in future years.

Can the costs of activities such as upscaling, simplifying, merging, migrating or increasing the user-friendliness of existing services and infrastructures be covered by project funds?

- Yes. To receive funding for these and similar cost items, applicants must explain in detail what benefits will be generated for the consortium’s community of interest as a result of the planned changes.

Can the assignment of DOIs be financed from project funds?

- This is possible in principle and is at the discretion of the consortium as long as DOIs are assigned to publications resulting from the work of the consortium.

Is it possible to award contracts for work and services? Who can a contract for work and services be awarded to?

- It is possible to award contracts for work and services provided there is a substantive justification. A contract for work and services can be awarded to a natural person or a legal entity (e.g. GbR, GmbH).

If the proposed consortium will be awarding contracts to third parties: How many quotes should be submitted with the proposal?

- In general, at least two quotes should be submitted for comparison.

What costs for events (e.g. conferences or workshops) can be financed from project funds?

- Funding of events is always based on the regulations of the respective institution that is spending the funds, even if the event takes place at another institution. Costs for room rental are only eligible if they can be directly allocated to the project according to the principles of business management. Catering can be financed, although it must be noted that the maximum eligible costs are those resulting from the catering guidelines applicable at the spokesperson’s institution.

Can project funds be used for further training in research data management?

- Further training cannot be financed from the approved funds, as it is usually not possible to allocate the costs incurred for this specifically to the project.
Can project funding be used for grants?

➢ Project funding can only be used for employment contracts that are subject to social insurance contributions, unless the funding guidelines or the award letter specify something else. The funds may only be used for grants under exceptional circumstances and with the explicit written consent of the DFG.

Which travel expenses legislation (state or federal travel expenses law) has to be observed if different laws apply to the applicant and the co-applicant institution?

➢ In the Funding Guidelines (nfdi300), item 5.2. states: “The provisions of the travel expenses legislation applicable to the grant recipient is to be applied in the settlement of accounts.” If different travel expenses provisions apply to the applicant institution (e.g. state travel expenses law) and the co-applicant institution (e.g. the federal travel expenses law), the co-spokespersons who are obliged to apply federal travel expenses legislation can only have the consortia cover expenses that are eligible under state travel expenses law. The difference between state and federal travel expenses legislation is to be borne by the co-applicant institutions.

Under what circumstances can instrumentation costs be covered by the grant?

➢ Instrumentation can only be funded in exceptional circumstances. Requested instrumentation costs can only be approved if the proposal contains a detailed and convincing explanation of how the requested item is essential to the development of NFDI services and infrastructure; this is assessed during the review. The proposal should also justify why this instrumentation cannot be provided as part of the institution’s core support.

Can CO2 compensation be financed from project funds?

➢ Yes, provided the CO2 emissions relate to business trips undertaken in connection with the funded project.

How is CO2 compensation from project funds calculated?

➢ Part II of DFG form 71.03 – 11/21 applies to the calculation of the costs of CO2 compensation. If the travel service provider has already included a CO2 tonnage in the travel/invoice documents, this information can be used as a basis. If this is not the case, you can use the calculator provided by the Federal Environment Agency www.uba.co2-rechner or www.klimaaktiv.de, or else use the following link to carry out a calculation directly: https://uba-event-free.co2ckpit.de/de_DE/footprint/.

See the following link for more information on submitting expenses for CO2 compensation: https://www.dfg.de/foerderung/grundlagen_rahmenbedingungen/co2_kompensation/index.html

Is a certificate required for the financing of CO2 compensation from project funds?

➢ Certificate acquisition is voluntary. Any CO2 certificate submitted must come from a project that is “certified under UN rules under the Clean Development Mechanism (CMD) or meets equivalent standards” (see section 5.2. NFDI Funding Guidelines, DFG form nfdi300 – 01/23).
See the following link for information on further questions:
www.umweltbundesamt.de/umwelttipps-fuer-den-alltag/siegelkunde/the-gold-standard

Forwarding of funds

How can funds be forwarded to participants?

➢ In general, funds can be forwarded to participants in accordance with the applicable legal (tax) provisions, provided that these are not earmarked funds or funds for temporary positions for principal investigators. Requirements usually include the following:
  o Participating institutions must be universities or non-profit (research) institutions.
  o The intent to forward the funds within the research cooperation was indicated in the proposal and assessed during the review process, thereby constituting part of the grant or this was subsequently approved by the DFG.
  o The forwarding of funds is based on a legal agreement ensuring that the regulations of the relevant funding contract as well as funding guidelines apply to the participant, i.e. the participant receiving funding must observe and comply with all conditions and requirements to which the original grant recipient is obligated vis-à-vis the DFG (e.g. obligation to provide evidence, the DFG’s right to audit).
➢ In principle, funds can only be forwarded to institutions, not to persons.

Does the funding forwarding agreement have to be sent to the DFG?

➢ The funding forwarding agreement is sent to the DFG for information. If necessary, consortia can clarify questions regarding the specific contract arrangements directly with the NFDI Directorate (info@nfdi.de).

What key points should be considered when forwarding funds to co-applicants and/or participants with regard to the programme allowance for indirect project costs?

➢ The programme allowance for indirect project costs may only be forwarded if the receiving institution has set itself institution-specific guidelines for the use of the programme allowance for indirect project costs. For further questions, please consult the following links on the New regulations regarding the DFG programme allowance for indirect project costs and the FAQ on the new regulations regarding the DFG programme allowance for indirect project costs. (see below “New regulations regarding the programme allowance for indirect project costs”)

Programme allowance for indirect project costs

Is it necessary to apply for the programme allowance for indirect project costs?

➢ No. Only direct project costs must be itemised and justified in the proposal. The programme allowance of 22 percent of the approved project funds is allocated automatically.
What key points need to be taken into account with regard to the programme allowance for indirect project costs?

- According to the DFG Funding Guidelines, only those institutions will receive the programme allowance for indirect project costs as of 1 January 2023 that have set themselves institution-specific guidelines for the use of this programme allowance for indirect project costs and have informed the DFG of the existence of these guidelines. Spokespersons must therefore confirm that co-applicant institutions have likewise adopted programme guidelines in order to be able to forward the programme allowance for indirect project costs on a pro-rata basis.

If funds are to be forwarded to participating institutions, the programme allowance for indirect project costs may likewise only be forwarded if the receiving institution has set itself institution-specific guidelines for the use of the programme allowance for indirect project costs.

For further questions, please see the following links to the New regulations on the DFG programme allowance for indirect project costs and the FAQs on the new regulations of the DFG programme allowance for indirect project costs.

Organisation

How should a consortium be internally organised?

- Each consortium is free to choose its own form of organisation. What is important is that the chosen form of organisation optimally underpins the consortium’s objectives and is supported by all co-applicant institutions. The internal structure of the consortium should also take into account integration into the structural elements of the NFDI, such as the Consortia Assembly.

Can the consortia charge fees for the use of services?

- In general, fees may be charged. The Agreement between the Federal Government and the Länder concerning the Establishment and Funding of a National Research Data Infrastructure (NFDI) of 26 November 2018 lists as one of the funding criteria an “operating model which meets the needs of users and suppliers (including reasonable user fees where appropriate)”. The charging of moderate fees can be part of an operating model that enables a consortium to continue performing its tasks in the longer term. The business model must comply with the legal requirements and guidelines within which the consortium carries out its activities.

Where will cross-cutting topics be addressed?

- Cross-disciplinary topics are central to the work of the NFDI and should be addressed in the subject-oriented or method-oriented consortia. Agreement between the consortia on cross-disciplinary topics is necessary and may for instance be part of the coordination process within the NFDI structure – e.g. within the framework of the Consortia Assembly. The NFDI Directorate is responsible for coordinating cross-disciplinary topics.

Roles

What requirements must an applicant institution fulfil?
➢ The applicant institution should have a sufficiently large administrative structure and documented experience in handling larger-scale third-party funded projects. The applicant institution is also required to implement the Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice (gwP). Please see the following link for details: Code of Conduct “Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice”

What requirements must a co-applicant institution fulfil?

➢ A co-applicant institution must be a legally independent entity, which can be an entity under public law or a non-profit organisation. They may not be profit-oriented institutions or based exclusively abroad.

What requirements must a participating institution fulfil?

➢ A participating institution must be a legally independent entity, which can be an entity under public law or a non-profit organisation.

What is the difference between the role of a co-applicant institution and that of a participant?

➢ Co-applicant institutions are responsible for managing one or more task areas and request funding for this purpose. Should a grant be awarded, co-applicant institutions receive their funds through the applicant institution.

The role of the participant is intended for those who have ongoing responsibility for the implementation of the project, but to a lesser extent than a co-applicant institution. One-time or occasional support for the consortium is not sufficient to constitute the role of a participant. Contributions by participants must be described in the proposal.

If more than one task area is being managed by the applicant institution: Do the task areas have to be managed by the spokesperson alone or can the applicant institution appoint co-spokespersons in this situation?

➢ In this situation, the applicant institution can appoint co-spokespersons.

Is only one co-spokesperson allowed at each co-applicant institution, or can more than one co-spokesperson be appointed per co-applicant institution if the institution is responsible for more than one task area?

➢ If the co-applicant institution is responsible for more than one task area, it can appoint more than one co-spokesperson.

What requirements must be met by the applicant institution?

➢ The applicant institution must provide the organisational structure necessary to manage the funds and have significant experience in managing public third-party funds.

Are the coordination duties of the consortium spokesperson organisational and/or financial in nature?

➢ The consortium’s coordination tasks are both organisational and financial. The spokesperson coordinates the proposal and, together with the applicant institution to which he
or she belongs, is accountable to the DFG for the proper management and use of funds.

**What are the duties of the co-spokespersons of a consortium?**

- Co-spokespersons are responsible for task areas within the consortium and therefore have content-related and coordination tasks. They are responsible for forwarding the results of their task area to the spokesperson. They work closely with the spokesperson.

**Can additional institutions and/or facilities and other participants be added after the grant has been awarded?**

- Grants are awarded to consortia on the basis of the structures of the (co-) applicant institutions and participants described in the proposal. In exceptional cases, it is possible to add additional institutions/facilities and participants following the award. In this case, please send a written request to the DFG. The DFG verifies whether the partner to be added fulfils the eligibility requirements.

**What are the key points to consider when a co-spokesperson moves to a new institution and is to retain their role?**

- In order for the DFG to be able to document a move by a co-spokesperson and therefore also the change of co-applicant institution, the DFG requires the following documents:
  - the name of the co-spokesperson(s)
  - confirmation from the co-applicant institution that the co-spokesperson is leaving, regarding:
    - the withdrawal of the institution from the consortium as a result of the move,
    - the fact that the co-spokesperson will retain all tasks relating to the consortium and transfer these to the new co-applicant institution.
    - This confirmation must be signed by both the head of the co-applicant institution which is leaving the consortium due to the move and the co-spokesperson.
  - confirmation from the institution to which the co-spokesperson is moving that:
    - the institution will be joining the consortium and taking on all related tasks (fund management, etc.) as a co-applicant institution
    - the co-spokesperson will carry out the work relating to the consortium at the new institution.
    - This confirmation must be signed by both the head of the co-applicant institution which is now joining the consortium due to the move, and the co-spokesperson.
  - the General Compliance form signed by the institution to which the co-spokesperson is transferring (nfdi130), via DFG – German Research Foundation – National Research Data Infrastructure: Forms and guidelines. The other co-applicant institutions and co-spokespersons are not required to sign this form again. In addition, form 80.02 ([www.dfg.de/formulare/80_02](http://www.dfg.de/formulare/80_02)) must be signed. This remains with the institution and only needs to be made available to the DFG on request.
What are the key points to note when a new co-spokesperson is to be admitted at an institution that is already a co-applicant?

➢ In the case of a new entry of a co-spokesperson, the DFG requires confirmation from the co-applicant institution, signed by the co-spokesperson and the head of the institution, that the new co-spokesperson will assume all tasks for which they are responsible and which concern the respective consortium.

What are the key points to note if a participating person/institution is to be subsequently admitted to a consortium?

➢ The later inclusion of further participants is only permitted in exceptional cases. For this reason, the DFG must expressly agree to the admission of new participants. Three criteria are consistently checked for this purpose:

  o whether the participating person/institution to be newly admitted is eligible to apply to the DFG.
  o to what extent there is an exceptional case justifying participation after the original proposal has been submitted and decided on;
  o in what way a participating person/institution is able to contribute to the consortium on an ongoing basis.

A participating institution must submit a Letter of Commitment signed by the head of the institution. In the case of a participating individual, an informal confirmation is sufficient as no funds can be forwarded to individuals.

Consortia are requested to pass on information on the admission of new participating institutions/individuals to the NFDI Directorate.