



Key points for the second funding period of the NFDI consortia

NFDI Expert Committee

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1. Focus of the second funding period

The overarching objective of the National Research Data Infrastructure (NFDI) according to the underlying agreement between the federal government and the federal states (BLV)¹ is to establish and advance comprehensive research data management. In order to achieve this objective, the NFDI consortia provide demand-driven services for the target groups they address, thereby laying the foundation for a community-driven, networked information infrastructure. In collaboration with other consortia and other actors, the NFDI consortia also establish essential communication processes on content-related, organisational and technical issues and in this way drive forward the emergence of a common architecture for cross-disciplinary research data management. In order for the consortia to be able to achieve both of these objectives in the long term, they must ensure both the ongoing operation and the demand-oriented further development of their services. For this reason, the NFDI Expert Committee considers consolidation of the consortia the necessary focus of the second funding period. In addition, the consortia should be able to work on new and innovative tasks, providing these are justified by current developments and the needs of potential users.

1.1 Consolidation as the basis for the long-term operation of services

According to the “Leipzig-Berlin Declaration on NFDI cross-cutting issues of infrastructure development”, the success of an infrastructure must always be measured by the added value it provides for users². Infrastructures generate such added value through the reliable provision of needs-based services that support users in their research. For this to succeed in the long term, the consortia need to consolidate.

1.2 Consolidation as the basis for demand-oriented further development

In order to be able to meet the constantly changing needs of users in the long term, the NFDI consortia must continue to evolve in line with demand. In order to do so, they must be in a position to meet newly emerging demands and be capable of incorporating target groups that were not previously represented, though without impacting on existing services and structures.

¹ Cf. Joint Science Conference (GWK). (2018). *Bund-Länder-Vereinbarung zu Aufbau und Förderung einer Nationalen Forschungsdateninfrastruktur (NFDI)* of 26 November 2018, p. 1. URL:

<https://www.gwk-bonn.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Dokumente/Papers/NFDI.pdf>.

² Cf. Maik Bierwirth, Frank Oliver Glöckner, Christian Grimm, Sonja Schimmler, Franziska Boehm, Christian Busse, Andreas Degkwitz, Oliver Koepler & Heike Neuroth. (2020). Leipzig-Berlin-Erklärung zu NFDI-Querschnittsthemen der Infrastrukturentwicklung. Zenodo, p. 1. DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3895209>.

This is all the more important given the fact that the second funding period only provides for an evaluation of the consortia funded to date, not for the inclusion of new consortia in the NFDI. Therefore, new needs and target groups have to be integrated through involvement in existing consortia. Consolidation creates the basis for user-oriented further development of both the services and the structures of consortia.

1.3 Tasks of the consortia in the NFDI renewal period

The point of departure for renewal proposals is provided by the essential tasks of the NFDI consortia in the first funding period. In order to be able to systematically align these key tasks with the objective of consolidation for the second funding period, the funding criteria defined in the BLV must be specified with a view to consolidation. Here, it is possible to derive eight relevant tasks:

- a) (Further) develop research data management for the target group(s) addressed and, leading on from this, identify the core tasks for which long-term funding is required beyond the period of project funding.
- b) Expand inclusion of target community/communities, intensify feedback, increase the use of services beyond the consortium partners themselves, integrate new (sub-)communities where appropriate.
- c) Consolidate and expand the relevant structures in order to be able to continuously meet both the evolving requirements of the target groups and the NFDI as a networked infrastructure with a common architecture.
- d) Stabilise, advance and promote a quality-assured service portfolio with regard to the communities addressed to date and also new communities yet to be addressed where relevant.
- e) Expand relevant information and further training programmes in a targeted manner.
- f) Implement an organisational model that is sustainable in the long term and ensures a consortium's capacity to engage in participatory processes as well as its sustainable use of human resources.
- g) Develop a sustainable model that ensures the continued operation and ongoing funding of services relevant to the target groups as well as NFDI-wide activities in the long term, while at the same time incorporating strategies and measures for innovation.
- h) Expand and deepen local, regional, national and international collaborations so as to increase networking within and outside the NFDI, achieve synergies and increase cross-consortia (re)use of data and services.

The pursuit of these eight tasks is to be the subject of the renewal proposals for NFDI consortia.

2. Assessment of the consortia given the differing backgrounds and levels of development

The consortia carry out various measures to achieve the objectives justified in detail in their respective (initial or renewal) proposal. These measures must take into account the needs and subject-specific methods of the target groups addressed, as well as the degree of maturity that the individual communities – and therefore the NFDI consortia representing them – have achieved in research data management. For this reason, there may be significant differences not only between the different measures adopted by the consortia but also between the outcomes resulting from these measures.

In order to achieve a balanced assessment of the development status of a consortium, three elements must therefore be considered:

- the specific conditions of the consortium at the start of the funding;
- the progress made by the consortium in implementing the measures set out in the (initial) proposal;
- the objectives projected in a renewal proposal.

The interim reports submitted by the NFDI consortia will mainly contain qualitative information that provides a basis on which the first two elements in particular can be reliably assessed. For a better understanding and assessment of the different levels of maturity of outcomes, however, these qualitative explanations must be supplemented with quantitative information. This is also relevant for gaining a clear impression of the status of consolidation during the course of the second funding period or at the end of it. For this reason, the consortia are to submit data sheets along with the renewal proposals in which predominantly quantitative information on the work results is recorded in a structured manner. Thus, it is possible to distinguish different stages of development. A comparison of the information documented in the data sheets at different points in time – renewal proposal, interim report on the second funding period, possibly renewed evaluation for inclusion in sustained funding – will allow clear conclusions to be drawn as to what has been achieved in each case and how these achievements have developed over time.