



INTERNATIONAL CALL FOR COLLABORATIVE PROPOSALS IN COVID-19 RESEARCH

Guidance for Applicants

Call status: Open

Closing date for Applications:

16:00 o'clock Beijing Time, September 15, 2020

17:00 o'clock Sofia time, September 15, 2020

17:00 o'clock Minsk time, September 15, 2020

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I. Summary

On March 11, 2020, the coronavirus outbreak was declared a global pandemic by the WHO. The spread and potential lasting existence of the COVID-19 pose severe threats to the world. In face of the global challenge, joint efforts of science funding agencies, based on the principles of equality, openness and mutual benefits, are urgently needed to accelerate the R&D activities against the novel coronavirus. To mobilize scientific communities and facilitate research responses to COVID-19, National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC), Belarusian Republican Foundation for Fundamental Research (BRFFR) and Bulgarian Science Fund (BNSF) are opening a call for collaborative proposals in COVID-19 research.

The purpose of the call is to build on the combined strengths of academic research groups within China, Belarus and Bulgaria to work together on collaborative research that will advance the understanding of the coronaviruses (SARS-CoV-2) and the illness it causes (COVID-19), in order to contribute to the global response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Applicants are invited to submit **bilateral** or **multilateral** collaborative research proposals comprising eligible researchers from China, Belarus and Bulgaria. All proposals will be required to have a Chinese Principal Investigator, in addition to a Principal Investigator from one or more of the partner countries. This call for proposals will require applicants to work together in partnership within transnational teams on research projects where each country's component is funded by participating funding agencies in their respective countries. Eligibility to apply is determined by each agency's eligibility rules and the nature of the resources requested must also adhere to each agency's guidelines. Further information is presented below and within **Annexes**. Applicants wishing to apply to the call must use the specific **Joint Project Description (JPD) Template** associated with this call (Annex 2).

Project duration is 2 years.

We envisage funding a number of projects with each funding partner under this call.

The deadline for receipt of proposals is: September 15, 2020 for applicants.

II. Scope of the Call

Based on the research agenda defined by the WHO¹, the priorities identified by the participating funding agencies, as well as the research capacity in China, Belarus and Bulgaria, the scope of bilateral or multilateral collaborative research between researchers from China, Belarus and Bulgaria will include:

- Screening and development of broad-spectrum anti-coronavirus drugs;
- Research and development of anti-coronavirus vaccine;
- Etiology and pathogenic mechanisms of action of animal-derived viruses and protective immune mechanisms against virus;

¹<https://www.glopid-r.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/who-2019-novel-coronavirus-global-research-roadmap.pdf>

- New technologies for rapid and precise diagnosis of coronavirus

The funding agencies wish to develop and strengthen transnational collaborations across the countries involved and to support collaborations which will have a real impact in this field. Applicants must successfully demonstrate the sustainability of the collaboration and the potential impact of the activities proposed.

III. Funding available

The applicants from the above-mentioned countries will be funded by their respective funding agencies (**NSFC, BRFFR and BNSF**). The projects will be supported with grants in accordance with the respective national funding regulations. Details are set out in the relevant country annexes.

NSFC: Chinese teams can receive up to 1,500,000 RMB for each project. NSFC-funded costs of each grant will be issued and managed by NSFC according to its funding guidelines and procedures.

BRFFR: Belarusian teams can receive up to 120,000 - 240,000 Belarusian rubles/project.

BNSF: Bulgarian teams can receive up to 200 000 BGN for each project.

IV. Eligibility

Each collaborative research proposal must involve at a minimum one eligible Principal Investigator based in the China and one eligible Principal Investigator based in Belarus and/or Bulgaria.

All applicants must adhere to national eligibility rules for research proposals as set out in the relevant country annexes and national call guidelines. Any queries concerning eligibility should be addressed to the contact persons of the respective funding agencies.

Principal Investigators need to ensure that they, and any Co-Investigators included on the application are eligible. **Applications involving any ineligible applicants** (from China, Belarus or Bulgaria) **will result in the whole application being rejected.**

V. Application

For each proposal, the Chinese PI must apply using NSFC's ISISN system (<http://isisn.nsf.gov.cn/egrantweb/>) by completing a standard NSFC grant application along with the JPD in English. The applicant(s) from other countries must apply to their country's funder respectively. Details are set out in the relevant country annexes.

Please note the JPD must be jointly composed by all the consortia. The applicants must submit the JPD to their country's funder respectively. The JPD will be the most important material for evaluation. A template of the JPD is presented at **ANNEX 2**.

Additional specific instructions for collaboration among China, Belarus and Bulgaria are provided in the individual Annex for each country. Please ensure you read the annexes of the countries concerned.

Collaboration Agreement

As the research projects will be carried out by multiple project partners, the basis of collaboration between the project partners, including ownership of intellectual property (IP) generated during the project and rights to exploitation, and IP management is expected to be set out in a collaboration agreement between the Principal Investigators involved. It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigators to put such an agreement in place **before the research begins**. The terms of collaboration must not conflict with the funding agencies terms and conditions and national law.

Arrangements for collaboration and/or exploitation must not prevent the future progression of academic research and the dissemination of research results in accordance with academic custom and practise and the requirements of the funding bodies.

Details of key issues included in the Collaboration Agreement, for example management of IP, should be described in JPD. The full Collaboration Agreement must be available to be shared with the funders once the project is approved.

VI. Evaluation

Each funding agency will carry out eligibility and internal checks and agree which proposals will go forward for assessment. Only proposals that fit to the call topics mentioned in Part II of this call will be evaluated and funded.

Eligible proposals will be subject to the independent evaluation by the funding agencies to which the proposals are submitted. Each funding agency will first establish its respective ranking list of proposals according to the evaluation result. Then a common ranking list will be developed based on a joint panel meeting organized by NSFC with panellists recommended by funding agencies involved. The final decision on projects to be funded will be made based on the common ranking list and within available budget of respective funding agencies. Each funding agency will have one administrative panel member and a certain number of panel members experts in the call thematic areas. The number of experts from each country will be determined by the funding agencies depending on the number of proposals

Assessment Criteria

To be funded, proposals must be internationally competitive and at a standard equivalent to that normally expected to be supported by each funding organisation.

For further information about the assessment process, please refer to Annexes.

In addition to the assessment criteria, applicants should carefully demonstrate within the JPD that their projects:

- Represent true collaborative partnerships between transnational research teams; the added value of such collaborations should be clearly highlighted within the proposals.
- Contain an integrated work plan and an equal commitment to the project (in terms of hours dedicated to the project rather than project costs). Projects that appear to be working in parallel with little interaction between countries will not be supported.

Applicants who receive funding from this call must be prepared to contribute to workshops and/or other networking activities associated with this call.

VII. Additional Considerations

Ethical issues

Proposals that involve experiments on animals and/or human must be conducted in such a way that is in accordance with the laws and regulations that is applicable in each country.

All countries where research will be undertaken should be identified. The following special issues should be taken into account:

- If the project involves ethical content, the applicant must provide the Ethical Approval from Ethics Committees of their own or relevant authority as the attachment to the proposal.
- If the project involves Informed Consent Form, the relevant regulations must be followed.

Data management and transfer of materials

Collection and exchange of data and materials must be in strict compliance with the funding agencies terms and the legislation in effect in the respective countries.

VIII. Reporting

The projects will be monitored through progress reports and the final report by respective funding agencies for its content and progress.

Interim and final general seminars for the call will be organized in the beginning of 2022 and 2023 where all supported projects will be required to report their results to representatives of all funding agencies and possible interaction between different project teams will be discussed. The seminar will be organized either remotely or onsite depending on the situation.

IX. Timetable

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| Call Opens | July 30, 2020 |
| Call Closes | September 15, 2020 |
| Grants start | January 1, 2021 |

X. Contacts

| Funding Agency | Contact |
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| NSFC | Mr. ZHONG Qi Email: zhongqi@nsfc.gov.cn Telephone: +86 10 6232 7005 |
| BRFFR | Katerina Grigorieva (Ms) Email: fond@it.org.by Telephone: +375 17 284 09 24 |
| BNSF | Mrs. Lyubomira Hristova Email: l.gyneva@mon.bg Telephone: +359 884 222 393 |

Annex

Additional guidance for Chinese applicants

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| Funding Agency | National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) |
| Eligibility | <p>Standard NSFC eligibility conditions apply to this call.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have a senior academic rank (title) 2. Have/had been the Principle Investigator of on-going or completed NSFC research project with the duration of no less than 3 years 3. One application per year: Applicants (as the Principle Investigator) shall only apply for one International (Regional) Joint Research Program in a year. 4. Principle Investigator of a running NSFC-funded international joint research project shall not apply for one new international joint research project. 5. Have a supporting institution: The Chinese applicant should submit the application through the supporting institution 6. Other restrictions in the 2020 Guide to Program |
| Budget | Chinese partners that are eligible for funding can receive up to ¥1.5 million for projects of 24 months. NSFC-funded costs of each grant will be issued and managed by NSFC according to its funding guidelines and procedures. |
| Eligible costs | <p>It is expected that applications to this call will be International (Regional) Joint Research Projects as defined in the call notice, and NSFC will fund the Chinese component(s) of any successful bilateral or transnational collaboration. The eligible costs are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Purchase b. Trial c. Modification and rental • Materials and supplies • Test/calculation/analysis • Power consumption • Travel/ Conference/ International cooperation • publication/Reference/ Dissemination of info/Intellectual Property • Labour Cost • Consulting • Miscellaneous |
| Documents required | <p>The Chinese PI must apply using NSFC's ISISN system (http://isisn.nsf.gov.cn/egrantweb/) by completing a standard NSFC grant application. The following documents must be uploaded to ISISN by the Chinese PI as the attachments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The JPD in English jointly prepared by all partners. • Ethical Approval from Ethics Committees of their own or relevant authorities if applicable. |
| Submission process | After submitting the proposal and all attachments in the ISISN system, the Chinese Principal Investigator must inform his/her host institution to confirm the application in the ISISN system and finish the entire submission process to NSFC. There is no need to submit any hard copy of the proposal to NSFC. |
| Assessment | <p>There will be a two stage evaluation process.</p> <p>At the first stage, each proposal will be reviewed by at least 5 peer reviewers.</p> <p>At the second stage, a joint panel will develop a final ranking list of all proposals based on the evaluation results of all funding agencies.</p> |

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| Contact | Mr. ZHONG Qi Email: zhongqi@nsfc.gov.cn Telephone: +86 10 6232 7005 |
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Additional guidance for Bulgarian applicants

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| Funding Agency | Bulgarian Science Fund (BNSF) |
| Eligibility | The eligibility conditions are defined in the General Guidelines for Bilateral Calls of BNSF and the Specific Guidelines for this call (in Bulgarian). |
| Budget | Bulgarian partner can receive up to 200 000 leva (BGN) for a project of 24 months. |
| Eligible costs | <p>The eligible costs are as follows:</p> <p>Direct eligible costs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personnel costs 2. Travel costs 3. Costs for material and immaterial assets, including equipment 4. Costs for external services, directly connected with the implementation of the project 5. Costs for materials, consumables and other eligible costs <p>Indirect eligible costs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Costs for administrative service of the project by the applying organization and partner organizations 7. Costs for financial audit of the project <p>Maximal percentage of the budget apply for each cost category. The direct eligible costs should be justified in the proposal.</p> |
| Documents required | <p>The following documents must be submitted to BNSF:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The JPD (Annex 2) in English jointly prepared by all partners. • Addition to the JPD for Bulgarian team • Other documents, described in the General Guidelines for Bilateral Calls of BNSF and the Specific Guidelines for this call. |
| Submission process | The submission procedure is described in the Specific Guidelines for this call. |
| Assessment | <p>There will a two stage evaluation process.</p> <p>At the first stage, each proposal will be reviewed according to national procedure for evaluation.</p> <p>At the second stage, a joint panel will develop a final ranking list of all proposals based on the evaluation results of all funding agencies.</p> |
| Contact | <p>Mrs. Lyubomira Hristova e-mail: l.gyneva@mon.bg, Telephone: +359 884 222 393</p> |

Additional guidance for Belarusian applicants

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| Funding Agency | The Belarusian Republican Foundation for Fundamental Research |
| Eligibility | The Belarusian participant submits a national application to the BRFFR in accordance with the accepted rules described in guidelines “Call requirements” (in Russian). |
| Budget | Up to 50,000 \$ for each project of 24 months. 120,000 Belarusian rubles (BYN)/project |
| Eligible costs | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Salary of scientific and technical personnel 2. Fiscal charge to the budget and State Insurance Company from labor remuneration funds 3. Travel costs 4. Costs for materials, purchased semi-finished products and components 5. Direct costs (for external services, directly connected with the implementation of the project) 6. Indirect costs |
| Documents required | An application is prepared in accordance with certain requirements (including project description, CV, estimates and other) and submitted through AIS “BRFFR” in Russian (Belarusian). |
| Submission process | After submitting all necessary information to the NSFC from the Belarusian side and confirming all attachments in the ISISN system by the Chinese Principal Investigator the Belarusian applicant will submit a national proposal through the supporting scientific organisation. The applicant must prepare both an electronic form and a hard copy of a project. |
| Assessment | <p>There will be two-stage evaluation process.</p> <p>At the first stage, each proposal will be reviewed according to a national procedure for evaluation.</p> <p>At the second stage, a joint panel will develop a final ranking list of all proposals based on the evaluation results of all funding agencies.</p> |
| Contacts | <p>Dr. Elena Titova Email: fond@it.org.by e_titova@fond.bas-net.by Telephone:+375 17 294 92 17</p> <p>Ms. Katerina Grigorieva Email: fond@it.org.by Telephone:+375 17 284 09 24</p> |