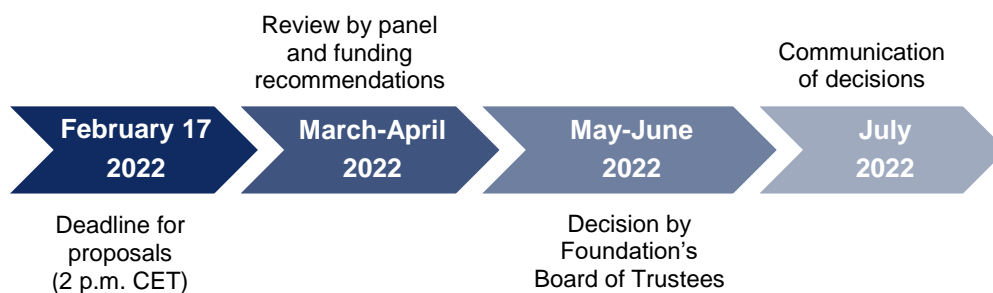


CALL

# INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO ANTIVIRAL DRUG DEVELOPMENT

Next Deadline: February 17, 2022 – 2 p.m. CET

-  area of research: life/natural sciences
-  type of funding: research project
-  up to 700,000 euros
-  3 years (possibly + 2 years)
-  outstandingly qualified group leaders and professors at universities in Germany
-  prerequisite: translational interest of a European company
-  additional benefits: funding for communication of science and research



# 1 OBJECTIVES

The novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 and the associated respiratory disease COVID-19 has been intensively challenging drug research worldwide. However, even beyond the current corona pandemic, innovative approaches are required for the development of therapeutics against underexplored and yet unknown viruses. This call aims at promising approaches for the development of new antiviral agents in an initial phase. The ultimate goal is the translational step into a company or a proof-of-concept for an innovation agency.

The focus of this call is on novel and integrative approaches on little-explored viruses. The practical usability of the results and a translational perspective should be taken into account from the beginning. In this context, the qualification of junior scientists with regard to a translation perspective is considered as an important aspect. The call is open for research ideas from medicinal and synthetic chemistry, biochemistry, pharmacology, virology and virus immunology, veterinary medicine, molecular and structural biology as well as related fields. A cooperation between members from natural and (bio)medical institutes is particularly welcome. Strengthening a diversified and translation-oriented virology and drug research at universities in Germany is an overarching aim of this funding initiative.

# 2 FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The focus is on little-explored zoonotic and non-zoonotic viruses without established effective therapeutics and vaccines. The call aims at original research approaches regarding new, promising classes of active agents for the development of effective drugs. In addition to concepts for drug development against viral diseases, related research on relevant biological and biomedical processes will be considered, including topics such as:

- Processes of a host change between animals and humans from a natural and life sciences perspective
- Characterization of viruses potentially dangerous for humans, including infection mechanisms
- Establishment of suitable model systems (cell cultures, organoids, animal models) for testing of therapeutics, taking ethical guidelines into account (e.g. dual use, 3R principle i.e. replacement, refinement and reduction of animals in research)
- Innovative antiviral drug development with promising translational potential

**Excluded from funding are:**

- Viruses that have been widely researched for many years, like HIV or herpes, as well as viruses for which effective vaccines or therapies are already available such as SARS-CoV2
- Immunization approaches and the development of vaccines
- Gain of function experiments
- Topics covered by programs of the EU, ERC, BMBF, and DFG; a clear delineation of the project from ongoing and recently terminated funded projects is expected

# 3

## WHAT WE OFFER

**General Conditions**

- The motivation for the research should originate from academia. Thus, eligible are outstandingly qualified scientists at universities in Germany at all career levels after the PhD, who ideally have spent longer stays abroad or have had experience in a company.
- For interdisciplinary approaches, a maximum of two other outstandingly qualified scientist from a university or an extramural research institution in Germany or abroad can optionally join as co-applicants.
- Funding for a three-year research project is offered with a maximum budget of 700,000 euros. Funds can be made available for the following types of expenses: salaries for scientific, technical, and administrative personnel according to the regulations of the home institution; recurrent costs: consumables, acquisition of data, services; equipment and other

non-recurrent costs; travel and publication costs; Institutional overhead costs cannot be covered.

- The Foundation strongly encourages that scientific results will be published open access and data generated will be made available for the scientific community at appropriate databases or repositories, if an approach is deemed unsuccessful.

#### **Involvement of a company**

- A support letter by a biotech or pharmaceutical company must demonstrate a translational interest and willingness for collaboration.
- The Foundation expects that project co-workers will be given an opportunity to learn about translational research, e.g. via lab rotations, internships, networking and regular contact with company researchers.
- The supporting company should be located in the European Economic Area (EU, EFTA, Switzerland, and UK).
- It is the responsibility of the applicant to initiate contact with a company.
- Questions regarding the handling of intellectual property should be clarified in advance between the university and the company.
- The Foundation can award funds to scientific institutions only.

#### **Follow-up proposal**

- In case of a successful course of the project, a translation-oriented follow-up application containing a strong involvement of a company is possible with up to 1 million euros for another 2 years.
- If highly promising results are not yet of interest to a company after the first three years, the Foundation is ready to accept a follow-up application for further 2 years with up to 500,000 euros. In this case, the purpose should be a proof-of-concept for an innovation agency. The specifically notified funding programs are to be named in the follow-up application.
- A new composition of cooperation partners from academia as well as from industry is then possible.

# 4 APPLICATION AND TIMELINE

In the first step, the Foundation will check the eligibility and formal criteria. Applications, that do not meet the requirements, will not undergo peer review. An international and interdisciplinary reviewer panel with expertise in virology, medicinal chemistry, and translational research will evaluate the eligible proposals during a meeting at the Foundation. No written reviews will be collected. The decisions will be made by the Foundation's Board of Trustees based on the panel's recommendations. The review process is expected to take 5 to 6 months from the submission deadline.

## **Relevant assessment criteria**

- Innovative character and chances for success of the chosen approach
- Involvement of and support by a company, translational potential
- Chances to gain translation-oriented experiences for the project's staff
- Scientific excellence of the applicants and of the team
- The central review criterion for follow-up application will be: the scientific quality of the results achieved during the first three years, a convincing translational perspective as well as potential and quality of collaboration with the company

# 5 CHECKLIST

A template for the proposal is ready for download on the Foundation's website. The application language is English. Please submit your proposal electronically via the Foundation's electronic application system. A co-applicant has to be 'invited' by the main applicant and should 'accept' the invitation before registering in the electronic system. Please enter all necessary information regarding applicants, their institution(s), and the budget online.

The following documents are required as single PDF files for upload:

- **Project description**  
12 pages max. incl. references, Arial 11 pt.; please use the template
  - › Project title
  - › Up to 5 keywords
  - › Project team (titles, names, institutions or company)
  - › Scientific and lay summaries in German and English (max. 200 words)
  - › Proposal (including international state of research, translational potential and practice cooperation, methodology, work plan and time schedule, references)
- **Justification of budget** for each position or item in a tabular form; please differentiate the budget per applicant.
- **Ethical implications** must be discussed in the application (e.g. dual use, animal welfare). If available, a copy of the statement of the responsible ethics committee should be submitted.
- **Support letter** by a company (upload as institutional declaration)
- **Data management plan** for data generating projects (forms from own institution or the repository of choice are possible)
- **CV(s)** of the applicant(s), already known project co-workers and significantly involved collaborators (max. 2 pages per person, incl. list of up to ten project relevant publications – please indicate open science publications)
- **List of current and recently completed projects** with a clear delimitation, if necessary (upload as other enclosure)
- **List of relevant infrastructure** (S3, S4 laboratories, animal facilities etc., upload as other enclosure)
- **Quotations** for equipment items above 10,000 euros including VAT (if applicable)

The Foundation will not process applications that have been submitted to another funding institution in identical or similar form. Applications that do not follow the formal requirements are likewise excluded from the review process. No applicant may be involved in more than one proposal. The Foundation can award funds to scientific institutions only.

# 6 CONTACT AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Program Director:

Dr. Pavel Dutow

Phone: +49 (0)511 83 81 396

[dutow@volkswagenstiftung.de](mailto:dutow@volkswagenstiftung.de)

Administrative Assistance:

Catharina Altevogt

Phone: +49 (0)511 83 81 397

[altevogt@volkswagenstiftung.de](mailto:altevogt@volkswagenstiftung.de)

- › [Initiative Homepage](#)
- › [Application Template \(rtf\)](#)
- › [Electronic Application System](#)
- › [Electronic Application System – Instructions and Tips](#)
- › [Personnel Rates for Academic Staff](#)
- › [Personnel Rates for Non-Academic Staff](#)

Please inform yourself about the electronic application system of the Volkswagen Foundation prior to submitting your application. Information can be found in the document 'Electronic Application System – Instructions and Tips'.  
For technical questions regarding the application system, please contact [support@volkswagenstiftung.de](mailto:support@volkswagenstiftung.de)