

## Aim of the NFDI4Microbiota Flex Funds

The NFDI4Microbiota consortium aims to realize the dynamic adaptation of services and support of further data types, development of new training programs, and improvement of the ability to react to unforeseen technical challenges. Therefore, within the NFDI4Microbiota project work, flexible funding (so called 'Flex Funds') for small projects within the research community are available for the years 2023 to 2026. To implement a dynamic system that stays on track with new trends in the field, the Flex Funds will support small projects and active Use Cases from the community as they arise over time. In the following, a guideline regarding the application and allocation process is provided.

## Eligibility Requirements

Eligible projects must be related to the field of microbiology **and** must contribute to [the objectives of NFDI4Microbiota](#). Projects must be related to a specific task area or measure of the NFDI4Microbiota work program. Details of the NFDI4Microbiota work program can be found on our [web portal](#). **Purely scientific research projects without the described infrastructure components are not eligible.**

### Eligible topics

Applications must address services to be developed and deployed that are related to the NFDI4Microbiota proposal. This could include, but is not limited to, the following topics

- **Data Brokerage:** Establishing data broker functionalities facilitating the submission of high quality FAIR (**F**indable, **A**ccessible, **I**nteroperable, and **R**eusable) microbial datasets to public databases such as ENA, following suggested metadata standards, e.g. in collaboration with sequencing facilities.
- **Infrastructure/Services** to support the analysis of microbiology research data to gain new knowledge. These must fit well into the existing infrastructure and service plans of the consortium and be complementary to ongoing activities, close coordination and a letter of support from the respective measure leads is required (for contact mediation please write to [contact@nfdi4microbiota.de](mailto:contact@nfdi4microbiota.de) under indication of the measure number.).
- **Data storage and workflow execution:** Technical solutions facilitating the integration of workflow system outputs with the [ARUNA Object Storage](#), as well as systems orchestrating successive workflow executions. These must fit well into the existing plans of the consortium and be complementary to ongoing activities, close coordination and a letter of support by respective measure leads is required (for contact mediation please write to [contact@nfdi4microbiota.de](mailto:contact@nfdi4microbiota.de) under indication of the measure number.).
- **Training** including topics of research data management, metadata and other standards relevant for microbiology research.
- **Community engagement and outreach**, like workshops, events, hackathons and other activities related to the work of NFDI4Microbiota.
- **Establishment of local data stewards** who e.g. support to curate available and new data following best practices in larger research networks.

- **Use Case connection or an active Use Case.** For more information check our Use Cases section on our [web portal](#).
- **Generation and/or curation of large, high quality data sets.** The generation of high quality data sets which serve as relevant resource and/or show cases for the community e.g. for benchmarking or validation data is welcomed. During the process best practices in terms of metadata standard must be followed and the data sets must be immediately made openly available to the community.

## Prerequisites to receive funding

Certain administrative and financial requirements must be met to be eligible for funding.

### Administrative:

- Only **non-profit legal entities** can receive funding.
- In case, a (co-)applicant is eligible to receive funding, but neither a partner nor a participant of NFDI4Microbiota, its institution **must become a participant of NFDI4Microbiota**. The procedure is as follows:
  - i. Providing a letter of commitment from the applicant institution and a short application form by the applying person. Both have to state the tasks the participant is conducting in the NFDI4Microbiota work program and its relation to the measures
  - ii. Approval by the NFDI4Microbiota General Assembly
  - iii. Approval by the DFG

All documents can be requested in advance from the NFDI4Microbiota Administration Unit via [contact@nfdi4microbiota.de](mailto:contact@nfdi4microbiota.de).

- A **maximum of four co-applicants per application** is eligible.
- Projects will **need to be able to start immediately at the beginning of their funding period**. Therefore, the project should be carried out with existing personnel with the respective experience.

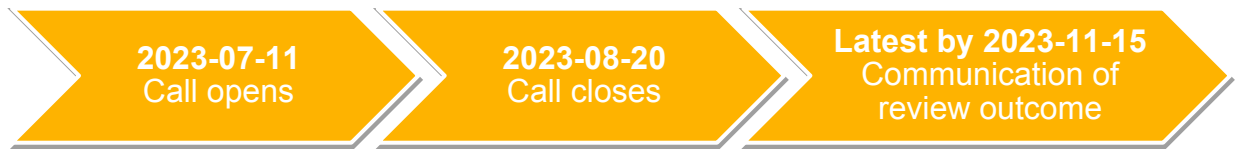
### Financial:

- In case an applicant receives funding, they will be obliged to sign a **funds transfer agreement**. If a consortium of more than one applicant applies, this will be combined with a **consortium agreement**.
- The [usage guidelines for NFDI consortia by the DFG](#) apply. Eligible budget categories are: **Personnel and direct costs**. Basic equipment and instruments are not eligible.
- Funds are only **granted for a duration of one year max. (January to December 2024)**. The funding period can be **4 to 12 months** (each funding year ends on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December).
- The **minimum/maximum budget** per project per year is **40.000 - 100.000 €**. In case you are planning a project with less funding, please get in contact with us via [contact@nfdi4microbiota.de](mailto:contact@nfdi4microbiota.de).

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- In case of a project approval, **cuts regarding the financial planning might apply**. If this changes the project outline, this has to be reported and an update project plan has to be handed in.
  - Funding is not eligible for international (co-)applicants, **only national (co-)applicants can receive funding**.
  - If the applying institutions have a **guideline for the use of the program allowance**, the program allowance of 22% (State of July 2023) can be disbursed ([more information here](#)). The program allowance does not have to be included into the budget, it is automatically added.

## General Procedure

### Timeline



### Application process

- 1) The **call opens 2023-07-11** and **closes 2023-08-20**.

By then, applicants can send the filled **word and excel files (.docx and .xlsx)** to [contact@nfdi4microbiota.de](mailto:contact@nfdi4microbiota.de).

This includes:

1. the **application form** (*2023-07-10\_N4M\_Flex\_Funds\_Application\_form.docx*)
  2. the **budget calculation** (*2023-07-10\_N4M\_Flex\_Funds\_Budget\_template.xlsx*) and
  3. a **data management plan** (if applicable) (*2023-07-10\_N4M\_Flex\_Funds\_DMP\_template.docx*)
  4. **If an active NFDI4Microbiota Use Case applies**, please also hand in a **recommendation letter** by your supervisors at NFDI4Microbiota (contact Maja Magel, RWTH Aachen).
  5. If you address the topics 'Infrastructure/Services' and 'Data storage and workflow execution' a letter of support by the respective measure is required. Please write to [contact@nfdi4microbiota.de](mailto:contact@nfdi4microbiota.de) for the contact mediation under indication of the respective measure number. All measure goals are briefly described on the [web portal](#).
- 2) Projects are evaluated and ranked by the NFDI4Microbiota Project Review Board (PRB) based on a set of predefined criteria **until 2023-10-31**. These criteria are as follows (each one is rated by reviewers on a scale of 0-5 (5 being the most)):
    1. Linked to the NFDI4Microbiota proposal ([Objectives](#) and [task areas/measures](#))
    2. Related to NFDI4Microbiota topics
    3. Synergies with consortium activities
    4. Relevance and benefits
    5. Quality of the proposed work
    6. Approach, work plan and feasibility
    7. Overall evaluation

These criteria may be further refined and modified in subsequent calls. In the case of a conflict of interest of a reviewer, they will be excluded from the process.

- 3) The NFDI4Microbiota General Assembly and/or the Board of Directors will select eligible projects for funding. Results of the review process will be communicated until **2023-11-15**.

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- 4) Funded projects and their personnel are expected to take up their work immediately with the beginning of their funding period.

## Selection procedure

The Flex Funds will be awarded annually through a process with external peer reviewers with a diverse background on the topics NFDI4Microbiota addresses. For this purpose, a **Project Review Board (PRB)** – an external body whose members were selected based on suggestions made by the **Scientific Advisory Board (SAB)** – was implemented. It consists of renowned scientists in changing compositions, based on the topics required for review and excluding members with potential conflicts of interest.

The PRB will:

- 1) be convened as needed to review proposals for innovation and implementation projects, and
- 2) provide an unbiased review of innovation and implementation projects.

Based on these reviews, the NFDI4Microbiota General Assembly and/or Board of Directors will select projects that best serve the overall mission of NFDI4Microbiota.

## Reporting and controlling

After a project time of six months, the work and progress of the funded projects have to be presented to and discussed with the NFDI4Microbiota consortium. A final project report (max. 5 pages, template will be provided) needs to be handed in by the 31<sup>st</sup> of January of the following year. Financial controlling will be specified in the funds transfer agreement.

## Contact details

In case of further questions you can get in touch with the Administration Unit of NFDI4Microbiota via [contact@nfdi4microbiota.de](mailto:contact@nfdi4microbiota.de).

Your contact persons are Barbara Götz, Dr. Carmen Paulmann and Dr. Cordula Hege.