

# Flex Funds Call for 2025

## 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, infrastructure, **and** must contribute to the [objectives of NFDI4Microbiota](#). Projects must be related to one of the eligible topics (described below) and the work program of NFDI4Microbiota. Details of the NFDI4Microbiota work program can be found in the [project proposal](#).

**Purely scientific research projects without the described infrastructure components are not eligible!**

## Eligible topics

Applications must address topics 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](#) (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) microbial datasets to public databases such as the European Nucleotide Archive (ENA), following suggested metadata standards, e.g. in collaboration with sequencing facilities.
- **Workflow development:** Development of workflows of interest for the microbiology community in nextflow. The workflows will be integrated in the Cloud-based workflow management system ([CloWM](#)) by NFDI4Microbiota which will soon be available to the public (for contact mediation please write to [contact@nfdi4microbiota.de](mailto:contact@nfdi4microbiota.de)).
- **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.).

- **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.). Details on the measures can be found in the [project proposal](#).
- **Training** including topics of research data management, metadata and other standards relevant for microbiology research. [Training offered by NFDI4Microbiota](#).
- **Community engagement and outreach**, like workshops, events, hackathons, and other activities related to the work of NFDI4Microbiota. [Events offered by NFDI4Microbiota or participated in](#).
- **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](#).
- **Deposition of high quality data sets in public repositories in cooperation with NFDI4Microbiota data stewards**. The generation of high quality (meta)data sets which serve as relevant resource and/or show cases for the community e.g. for bench-marking or validation data is welcome. During the process best practices in terms of [metadata standards](#) must be followed and the (meta)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:

- 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.
- The proposal shall have a **max. length of 15 pages**.
- Only **non-profit legal entities** can receive funding.
  - In case, the (co-)applicant(s) institutions are **neither a partner nor a participating institution of NFDI4Microbiota, its institution must become a participating institution of NFDI4Microbiota if the funding was granted**. This means that applicants that are no partner or participating institutions yet, can become participating institutions after the funding was granted (if they are a non-profit legal entity).
- **Funding can only be received by participating or partner institutions**.
- The **procedure to become a participating institution** is as follows:
  - 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. The participating institution will have to constantly participate in the work of the consortium (e.g. organize [training](#), contribute to the [NFDI4Microbiota Knowledge Base](#), participate in surveys, send a representative to the [NFDI4Microbiota Ambassador program](#), etc.)

- **Approval by the NFDI4Microbiota General Assembly** (2-3 weeks).
- **Approval by the DFG** (1-2 weeks).
- An OPEN access/OPEN data/OPEN Source published [scholarly work](#)/data/software as an output of the project is mandatory. For example, a report, a conference presentation or poster, code, and/or other scholarly works can be published to the [NFDI4Microbiota Zenodo community](#).
- **Participation in the NFDI4Microbiota annual conference** is mandatory for presenting the results/progress report (tba for 2025).

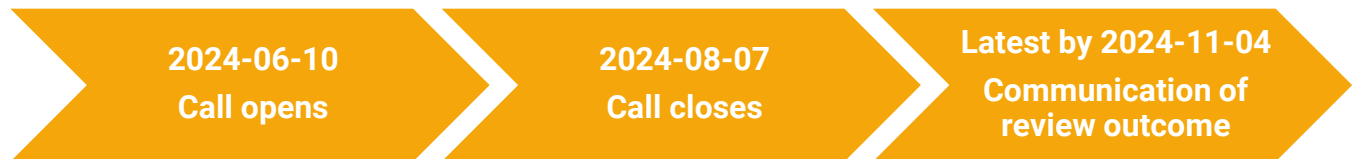
All documents can be requested in advance from the NFDI4Microbiota Administration Unit via [contact@nfdi4microbiota.de](mailto:contact@nfdi4microbiota.de).

### Financial:

- In case a proposal will be granted for funding, the (co-)applicants 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 fundable.
- Funds are only **granted for a duration of one year max. (January to December 2025)**. 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 **20,000 – 80,000 €**. In case you are planning a project with less funding, please get in contact with us via [contact@nfdi4microbiota.de](mailto:contact@nfdi4microbiota.de).
- 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-)applicant institutions, **only national (co-)applicant institutions can receive funding**.
- If the applying institutions have a **guideline for the usage 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 2024-06-10 and closes 2024-08-07**. By then, applicants can send the filled files to [contact@nfdi4microbiota.de](mailto:contact@nfdi4microbiota.de).

This includes:

- the [Application Form](#)
  - the [Budget Calculation](#) and
  - a [Data Management Plan](#) (if applicable)
  - **If an active NFDI4Microbiota Use Case applies**, please also hand in a **recommendation letter** by your supervisors at NFDI4Microbiota (contact Maja Magel, RWTH Aachen).
  - 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 work programs and goals are found in the [project proposal](#).
2. Projects are evaluated and ranked by the NFDI4Microbiota Project Review Board (PRB) based on a set of predefined criteria **until 2024-10-31**. These criteria are as follows (each one is rated by reviewers on a scale of 0-5 (5 being the most)):
    - Linked to the NFDI4Microbiota proposal ([Objectives](#) and [task areas/measures](#))
    - Related to NFDI4Microbiota topics
    - Synergies with consortium activities
    - Relevance and benefits
    - Quality of the proposed work
    - Approach, work plan and feasibility
    - 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 **2024-11-04**.
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:

- be convened as needed to review proposals for innovation and implementation projects, and
- 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 approx. 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 January 31<sup>st</sup> 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 administrative unit of NFDI4Microbiota via [contact@nfdi4microbiota.de](mailto:contact@nfdi4microbiota.de). Your contact person is Barbara Götz.

## Files for download:

1. [Download 2025 Flex Funds Application Form \(.docx\)](#)
2. [Download 2025 Flex Funds Budget Template \(.xlsx\)](#)
3. [Download 2025 Flex Funds DMP template \(.docx\)](#)