The Flexpool mechanism in iDiv’s upcoming 3rd funding phase:
1st Flexpool call for postdoctoral research projects

8 May 2020

1. Mission:
The main purpose of this Flexpool call is to instigate innovative research projects that integrate across the wide expertise of the iDiv community and increase the visibility of iDiv’s “integrative” character across all member institutions. Successful projects should specifically focus on topics integrating within and across the five research areas (RAs): Biodiversity Change, Biodiversity and Complexity, Molecular Biodiversity and Adaptation, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functioning and Biodiversity and Society.

At first glance:

- Available positions: 10 PD positions, including 4 for PD positions for the areas i) evolution and molecular diversity and ii) bioinformatics and data-intensive research
- Components of the call: Eligibility, selection criteria, submission process, evaluation, pre-approval, recruitment, funding, monitoring
- Applicants: Full iDiv members including junior group leaders (JGLs) but excluding iDiv core professors and their / other iDiv staff who are full members
- Co-applicants: Full iDiv members including iDiv core professors and external scientists heavily involved in the development of the proposal
- Selection criteria: Excellence (40%), integration (40%), activity (20%)
- Flexpool Evaluation Committee: Science Strategy Board (SSB) members and their deputies not included as main PI in any of the proposals. If needed, additional members or other scientists will be consulted to provide expertise.

Funding:
The call includes salary (100%, E 13) for one PD position for 2 years, consumables, travel and publication costs. Consumables must be specified and are expected not to exceed a budget of 10 k€ per year. Justified exceptions may be considered.

Deadlines and important dates:

- Proposal submission deadline: 7 June 2020
- Invitation to oral presentation: 9 July 2020
- Oral presentation & final decision: 14/ 15 July 2020
- SSB approval: 5 August SSB
- Advertising positions: 6 August

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1 Biodiversity is more than meets the eye. It also extends to molecular, chemical and genetic diversity underpinning evolutionary processes in all organisms. This ‘hidden’ biodiversity came to the light thanks to recent technological developments, ranging from deep sequencing to remote sensing. This allowed scientists to generate enormous datasets relevant to biodiversity research. Innovative bioinformatics and computer science approaches in data management and analysis are needed to fully leverage the potential of these datasets. As an integrative biodiversity centre, iDiv must include these research areas to stay at the forefront of biodiversity research. In this call, we specifically motivate applicant to submit projects focusing on evolution and molecular diversity and bioinformatics and data-intensive research.

In order to qualify we ask you to describe how your project contributes to the advancement of either of these two research fields and how integrative biodiversity research at iDiv would benefit from this.

2 Employment contracts can at first only be offered until 30 September 2021 and are planned to be prolonged to the entire 24 months in case of a positive approval of the renewal proposal of iDiv by DFG.
Application deadline for candidates: 10 Sept
Candidate selection: 14 Sept
Inviting candidates: 14 Sept
Recruitment symposium: 28 / 29 September 2020
Project start: ~ 15 November 2020 (or as soon as possible after 01 October 2020).

Proposals shall be submitted to Christa Genz (christa.genz@idiv.de) as a single PDF-file. In case of positive evaluation of a project and the recruitment of a suitable candidate, funding can begin as soon as possible after the beginning of the bridge funding period (01 October 2020). Employment contracts can initially only be offered until 30 September 2021 and are planned to be prolonged to the entire 24 months in case of a positive approval of the renewal proposal by DFG in 2021.

2. Eligibility:
Eligible to submit proposals as main PI are all full iDiv members, including JGLs, except for: (1) iDiv core professors and their staff, (2) other full members with a position funded by iDiv. Full iDiv members including iDiv core professors and external scientists heavily involved in the development of the proposal are encouraged to participate as collaborators and/or co-applicants (co-PIs).

The main PI must be employed at one of the 11 iDiv partner institutions. The main PI needs to have an appointment that lasts at least 2 years from the start of the PD researcher.

Members who have already received Flexpool staff-funding in the last funding phases are encouraged to step back from applying as main PI.

3. Selection criteria:
A- Excellence (40%)
- Scientific excellence: Research quality and potential of research team and PI to lead this specific project
- Support iDiv’s strategic mission 1: Provide a scientific basis for the sustainable use of our planet’s biodiversity, including visibility and importance of planned activities for regional, national, or international public and/or policy makers
- Support iDiv’s strategic mission 2: Develop a new research field: Integrative Biodiversity Research, including visibility and importance of planned activities for the international scientific community
- Strengthen iDiv’s underrepresented research areas evolution and molecular diversity and bioinformatics and data-intensive research (4 out of 10 positions are reserved for the underrepresented areas).
- Successful projects may include high risk / high gain projects, that may lead to further research proposals, though this is not a prerequisite.

B- Integration (40%)
- Strengthen integration among iDiv members including core-profs, including iDiv visibility at the 11 iDiv partner institutions; please note that more people on the proposal does not necessarily mean more integration!
- Strengthen integration within and/or among research areas (molecular / complexity / function / society / change)

C- Activity (20%)
- Strengthen and support member participation within iDiv (activity in the past and in the future)
- Support active members serving as main PIs who have not received Flexpool funding in the last funding phase.
In addition to these three selection criteria, across proposals and relative to the number of submitted proposals, we aim to strengthen:

- Balance in research areas, especially by targeting 4 PD positions to the underrepresented areas evolution and molecular diversity and bioinformatics and data-intensive research
- Balance in iDiv’s partner institutions (based on the main PI)
- Balance in gender (based on the main PI).

4. Submission process:
Submitted proposals are evaluated in a 2-stage process. The reviews will be available to the applicants after step 1.

**Step 1:** Full proposal (max. 5 pages for a), plus max. 2 pages for b)–g):

a) Scientific part: Summary, state of the art, research questions / hypotheses, work plan
b) Project related own publications (max. 5): While listing these, please specify how they relate to and why they are important for the proposal.
c) Please indicate whether or not your proposal fits to one of the underrepresented areas evolution and molecular diversity and bioinformatics and data-intensive research. In cases of doubt, please consult the chair of the SSB committee on underrepresented areas at iDiv, Henrique Pereira.
d) Project fit to the iDiv strategy: Please indicate which research areas (molecular / complexity / function / society / change) are linked to the project and how the research questions may join the research areas; summarize how your project links to existing themes or member networks, fills gaps in iDiv research and what key contributions will be provided to fulfil the iDiv strategic missions.
e) Commitment plan: Please specify how the PI contributed and / or will further contribute to iDiv’s activities (here please indicate when member status started); define collaborators (co-PIs) of your project and explain their specific roles.
f) Mentoring strategy: Please specify how you plan to supervise your postdoctoral researcher within this project. In case of JGL, please specify if you have an appointment throughout the entire project.
g) Previous Flexpool staff-funding: Please indicate which previous Flexpool staff-funding as main PI has been obtained so far.
h) Budget plan: Please state which amount of funding is requested with respect to personnel and consumables and explain why the funds are needed and how they will be used; please also specify attendance in conferences / workshops etc. for PD researchers (these are strongly encouraged to attend at least one conference per year and include a certain amount of money for networking activities within the iDiv community); please list infrastructural and financial contributions of the co-applicants.
i) Internal / external reviewers: Please suggest at least 3 potential reviewers who could evaluate your proposal; while indicating the names, please choose preferably full iDiv members or otherwise non-member scientists that are employed at one of the 11 iDiv partner institutions.
j) Bibliography: Please list max. 15 references.
k) Appendix: Please provide short CVs of main PI and co-PIs, list abbreviations used in the proposal and provide a short report in case you were PI in a previous Flexpool project in the 1st or 2nd funding phase of iDiv.

**Step 2:** If shortlisted, main PIs will be invited for a 10 min. oral presentation (plus 10 min. for questions); presentation should include:

a) Summary of project objectives and approaches
b) Reply to reviewer comments.
5. Evaluation:

Evaluation committee:
Evaluations will be made by a Flexpool Evaluation Committee consisting of at least 5 scientists and composed of:

a) SSB members and their deputies that are not included as main PI in any of the proposals,

b) if needed, additional iDiv members to represent an expertise in research areas not covered by a),

c) if needed, external non-members to represent an expertise in research areas not covered by a) and b).

To define whether expertise on all research areas is present in the committee, all committee members will indicate for each proposal whether they consider themselves knowledgeable.

Evaluation procedure:

- **Step 0:** For proposals that target the underrepresented areas evolution and molecular diversity and bioinformatics and data-intensive research, the SSB committee for underrepresented areas at iDiv (chair: Henrique Pereira) will verify whether the proposal fits.

- **Step 1:** The Flexpool Evaluation Committee members will rate all full proposals based on the selection criteria and write a short summary review, after which a summary ranking will be made. The committee will discuss and adjust the ranking according to the across proposal selection criteria. A selection of proposals will be invited for step 2 (oral presentation).

- **Step 2:** Flexpool Evaluation Committee members will adjust the ranking from step 1 based on the oral presentation. The final recommendation for funding will be presented and agreed on by the SSB members.

6. Pre-approval:

Decision on Flexpool projects pre-approved for funding is suggested by the Flexpool Evaluation Committee and taken by the SSB. The evaluation grades used to assess the proposal’s excellence, integration and PI’s activity are taken as a basis for the pre-approval. All decisions are communicated in a written form. Reviewers are obliged to provide a concise review and summary statement reflecting the rank based on strengths and weaknesses of the proposal in the different areas. The review will be anonymously forwarded to the applicant; this is valid for both pre-approved and rejected proposals. Information on successful proposals is published on the iDiv website.

7. Recruitment:

The main PI of pre-approved proposals is obliged to participate in the process of selecting postdoctoral researchers via the joint recruitment symposium, scheduled for 28 / 29 September 2020 (remotely) and should be committed to attend the joint recruitment symposium. The idea behind the symposium is to give candidates the opportunity to present their suitability for the role, create an early partnership feeling and promote the qualities of iDiv to the candidates.

8. Funding:

The call includes salary and consumable costs. Consumables must be specified and should not exceed the budget of 10 k€ per year. Within the 10 k€ per year, max. 1 k€ can be allocated for publications and min. 1 k€ should be allocated to conferences / lab visits / workshops. Investments and basic equipment (incl. IT-equipment, software) required for the project should be provided by the main PI.

Final project approval requires positive proposal evaluation and a selection of an excellent postdoctoral candidate during the recruitment process.

Each proposal may only request one scientific position.
All postdoctoral researchers (100%, E 13) have the opportunity to participate in the iDiv Postdoc Career Support Programme of yDiv - graduate school for young biodiversity researchers, and - depending on the PI's affiliation - are employed via one of the three universities (Halle, Jena, Leipzig), the UFZ, or the University of Leipzig for projects led by non-university members or members of other universities (enrollment is possible in other universities).

Working space and additional infrastructure has to be provided by the PI's institution. iDiv may provide working space for short-term visits. Co-applicants being members in the iDiv building act as hosts for visiting Flexpool researchers. Employees of the Flexpool are fully integrated into iDiv with access to general iDiv resources (library, HPC, car park etc.) and are, in turn, requested to adhere to general iDiv regulations. They are expected to contribute to synergistic activities within the centre and adhere to the iDiv data policy. Flexpool employees are eligible to use iDiv support units (e.g., General IT Support Unit) and participate in institutional programs (e.g., female career fund).

9. Monitoring:

The postdoctoral researchers have the opportunity to participate in the iDiv Postdoc Career Support Program and in iDiv events. Part of this is the annual personal employee development meeting of the postdoctoral researcher and the project PI and Co-PIs. This should be documented and a copy of the confirmation should be submitted to iDiv.

PIs are obliged to provide a written end report (max. 5 pages) 6 months after the project end. Evaluation criteria include the quality of publications as well as other forms of output (proposals, exhibitions, media coverage, technical reports). Flexpool employees and their PIs are expected to keep a close communication and interaction with their Co-PIs. We encourage short term visits and other means of information exchange if regular personal meetings are hard to organize. Flexpool employees are expected to deliver a short written annual report (2 – 3 pages) and to participate with at least a poster contribution at the iDiv annual conference.

All Flexpool employees and their PIs are obliged to use iDiv affiliation and mention Flexpool funding on scientific papers and publications arising from their projects. Following wording may be used: For iDiv: “X.Y. gratefully acknowledges the support of the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) Halle-Jena-Leipzig funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – FZT 118”; for Flexpool: “This paper has been conducted in the framework of the iDiv Flexpool – the internal funding mechanism of the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) Halle-Jena-Leipzig, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – FZT 118.”

Proposals shall be directed to Christa Genz (christa.genz@idiv.de) as a single PDF-file no later than 07 June 2020. When submitting your proposal, please use the attached word-document as template. Documents mentioned in this call are available at the iDiv intranet. For further information, please visit the Flexpool website or contact Christa Genz.

Short glossary can be found at the end of the call.
**Glossary:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Applicant (= PI)</td>
<td>Scientifically independent researcher, leader of a research group, PhD-holder, the main supervisor of the project, full iDiv member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-applicant (= co-PI)</td>
<td>Any researcher with relevant scientific expertise and experience in supervision / mentoring students</td>
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<td>External scientist</td>
<td>Scientifically independent researcher outside the iDiv consortium, leader of a research group, PhD-holder, co-supervisor of the project</td>
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<td>Flexpool Evaluation Committee</td>
<td>Committee conducting evaluation and decision-making processes on submitted Flexpool proposals, at least 5 people composed of a) SSB members and their deputies that are not included as main PI in any of the proposal; b) If needed, additional members to represent an expertise in research areas not covered by a); c) If needed, external non-members to represent an expertise in research areas not covered by a) and b), represent the expertise of the five research areas of iDiv</td>
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<td>Full iDiv member</td>
<td>Scientist at one of the 11 iDiv partner institutions, involved and mentioned in the iDiv proposals as a founding member, university teacher newly appointed to conduct research at iDiv, leader of a junior research group established at iDiv</td>
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<td>HPC cluster</td>
<td>High-Performance Computing (HPC) Cluster, for more details please see <a href="#">here</a></td>
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<td>iDiv core professor</td>
<td>Leader (full professor) of a research group established at iDiv (total: 9 groups), for more details please see <a href="#">here</a></td>
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<td>iDiv consortium</td>
<td>Full iDiv members plus partner institutions, universities and supporters, for more details please see <a href="#">here</a></td>
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<td>iDiv strategic missions</td>
<td>1) Provide a scientific basis for the sustainable use of our planet’s biodiversity, including visibility and importance of planned activities for regional, national, or international public and/or policy makers; 2) Develop a new research field: Integrative Biodiversity Research, including visibility and importance of planned activities for the international scientific community</td>
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<td>Science Strategy Board (SSB)</td>
<td>Decision-making body of iDiv, composed out of all core professors, 9 full iDiv members, 1 JGL representative, sDiv coordinator and chief operating officer; main tasks are: a) Strategic and budgetary discussions enabling cutting-edge scientific advances and opportunities, b) Discussing, planning and supporting the strategic missions of iDiv, c) Delegation of tasks to committees and task forces</td>
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