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

*Expected future calls: PD call (end of 2020), PD call (2021 / 2022)

20 February 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 iDivs’ “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 PhD positions
- **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, integration, activity
- **Flexpool Evaluation Committee:** Science Strategy Board (SSB) members and their deputies not included as main PI or co-PI in any of the proposal and additional members or other scientists to represent expertise in underrepresented research areas.

Funding:
The call includes salary (65%, E 13) for one PhD position for ~ 3 years + 11 months, consumables, travel and publication costs. Consumables must be specified and as a rule are expected not to exceed a budget of 10 k€ per year. Justified exceptions may be considered.

Deadlines and important dates:
- Proposal submission deadline: 30 April 2020, 11:59 hours (a.m. – afternoon!) CET
- Decision step 1: 14 May 2020
- Invitation to oral presentation: 15 May 2020
- Oral presentation & final decision: 28 / 29 May 2020
- SSB approval: 03 June 2020
- Advertising positions: 04 June 2020
- Application deadline for candidates: 10 July 2020
- Candidate selection: 17 July 2020
- Inviting candidates: 17 July 2020
- Recruitment symposium: 31 August / 01 September 2020
- Project begin: ~ 15 October 2020 (or as soon as possible after 01 October 2020 – please note that Flexpool funding will end by September 2024, and the later a PhD student starts, the shorter the funding period).

Proposals shall be submitted to Christa Genz (christa.genz@idiv.de) as a single PDF-file. In case of positive approval of the renewal proposal by DFG, positive evaluation of a project and the recruitment of a suitable candidate, funding can begin as soon as possible after the beginning of the 3rd funding period (01 October 2020).
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 can act as co-applicants (co-PIs).

The main PI must be employed at one of the 11 iDiv partner institutions. JGLs acting as main PI need to have an appointment that lasts at least ~ 3 years + 11 months from the start of the PhD student; they also should have supervision rights at their university or a close contact that will serve as such.

Members who have already received Flexpool staff-funding in the last funding phase 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

B- Integration (40%)
   - Strengthen integration among iDiv members, 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 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 members serving as main PIs who have not received Flexpool funding in the last funding phase.

Each proposal will be evaluated based on these 3 aspects: A - excellence, B - integration, C - activity. A, B and C weigh as 40, 40 and 20%, respectively. In addition, across proposals and relative to the number of submitted proposals, we aim to strengthen:
   - Balance in research areas
   - 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)-f)):
   a) Science 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) 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

d) 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

e) Mentoring strategy: Please specify how you plan to supervise your doctoral researcher within this project. In case of JGL, please specify if you have an appointment that lasts long enough for the project and indicate whether you have supervision rights at your university; if not, please indicate a close contact that will serve as such

f) Previous Flexpool staff-funding: Please indicate which previous Flexpool staff-funding as main PI has been obtained so far

g) Budget plan: Please state which amount of funding are 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 / lab visits / workshops etc. for PhD student (these are strongly encouraged to attend at least one conference per year - successful proposals will receive a fixed amount of money for networking activities); please list infrastructural and financial contributions of the co-applicants

h) Internal / external reviewers: Please suggest at least 3 names of potential reviewers who could evaluate your proposal; while indicating the names, please choose preferably full members or otherwise non-member scientists that are employed at one of the 11 iDiv partner institutions

i) Bibliography: Please list max. 15 references

j) Appendix: Please provide short CVs of main PI and co-PIs, list abbreviations used in the proposal and provide short report from the previous Flexpool project.

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 people and composed of:
   a) All SSB members and their deputies that are not included as main PI or co-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).

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. This can be done by keywords and summary statements included in proposals. Suggestions for internal / external reviewers can be made by applicants.

Evaluation procedure:
   • Step 1: All 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 taken by the Flexpool Evaluation Committee. 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 pros and cons of the proposal in the different areas (e.g. criteria A, B and C, scientific content, feasibility, work plan etc.). 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 and if possible co-PI(s) of pre-approved proposals are obliged to participate in the process of selecting doctoral researchers via the joint recruitment symposium, scheduled for 31 August / 01 September 2020 (at iDiv) 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 qualities of iDiv.

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 doctoral candidate during the recruitment process and is depending on the funding approval for iDiv’s third phase by the DFG.

All doctoral researchers (65%, E 13) are members of the graduate program 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 (enrolment is possible in other universities).

Flexpool scientists are considered as full members of one of the PI’s working groups and will be offered working space and additional infrastructure by the PI’s institution. iDiv provides 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 and have 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 programmes (e.g., female career fund).

9. Monitoring:
Annual progress reports, covered by the report for the annual PAC meetings, are needed to be submitted by all doctoral researchers. PIs are obliged to proactively contribute to the writing of the DFG end report in 2024. 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. Failure to complete a project successfully for unjustified reasons and non-compliance with iDiv’s data sharing agreement will typically result in banning a PI from submitting proposals to project calls for a time period specified by the SSB. By not submitting the annual progress report, the budget of the PI will be cut. In extreme cases (e.g., failure in supervision of the PhD students), the PhD student will be reallocated to one of the core groups.
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."

Each proposal may only request one scientific position. Proposals shall be directed to Christa Genz (christa.genz@idiv.de) as a single PDF-file no later than 30 April 2020, 11:59 hours (a.m. – afternoon!) CET. When submitting your proposal, please use the attached word-document as template. Documents mentioned in this call (i.e., yDiv rules, iDiv regulations and iDiv data policy) are available at the iDiv intranet. For further information, please visit the Flexpool website or contact Christa Genz.

*Please note that the funding can only begin if the DFG positively evaluates the renewal proposal of iDiv.

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

<table>
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<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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<tr>
<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) All SSB members and their deputies that are not included as main PI or co-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>PAC</td>
<td>PhD advisory committee emphasizing exchange between theoreticians and empiricists</td>
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<td>PD call</td>
<td>Flexpool call for postdoctoral researchers</td>
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<td>Research Areas (RAs)</td>
<td>Biodiversity Change, Biodiversity and Complexity, Molecular Biodiversity and Adaptation, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functioning and Biodiversity and Society</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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