

The Flexpool mechanism in iDiv's upcoming 3rd funding phase:

Flexpool call for doctoral research projects

2 July 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:** up to 5 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 (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 (65%, E 13) for one PhD position until 30 September, 2024¹, 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

- Letter of Intent submission deadline: 4 Sept 2020
- Proposal submission deadline: 1 Oct 2020
- Invitation to oral presentation: 30 Oct 2020
- Oral presentation & final decision: 19 Nov 2020
- SSB approval: 1 Dec 2020
- Advertising positions: 17 Dec 2020
- Application deadline for candidates: 27 Jan 2021
- Candidate selection: 28 Jan – 5 Feb 2021
- Inviting candidates: 5 Feb 2021
- Recruitment symposium: 23/24 Feb 2021
- Project start: ~ 1 April 2021

¹ Employment contracts can at first only be offered until 30 September 2021 and are planned to be prolonged to the end of iDiv's third funding phase (30 September 2024) in case of a positive approval of the renewal proposal of iDiv by DFG. Planned starting dates of projects is 1 April 2021, though the contract can start earlier in case the recruitment process is faster than expected.

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. Employment contracts can initially only be offered until 30 September 2021 and are planned to be prolonged to the entire 42 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 (see below (3.) for definition) 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 until September 2024.

In order of a fair distribution of iDiv Flexpool funds, members can only submit one proposal as the main PI (but can be co-PIs or collaborators) in the same Flexpool call.

3. Collaborators and Co-PIs

We ask that applicants distinguish among co-PIs and collaborators for each project.

Co-PIs should be kept to a minimum and only include those that designated responsibilities to ensure that the project runs smoothly and is successful. This is primarily based on their scientific expertise, and their role in mentoring the student, but could also relate to the provision of infrastructure (responsible persons of strategic platforms or other resources such as collections). Co-PIs need to be involved in any decision on changes of the project (content, staff, budget).

Collaborators are involved in the project (as members of iDiv or elsewhere) and will contribute to the project in substantial ways, but are not expected to contribute substantially to co-mentoring the student or in budgetary issues.

4. 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 also core-profs), increase iDiv's visibility at the 11 iDiv partner institutions; please note that more people on the proposal does not necessarily mean more integration, the responsibilities of every Co-PI need to be defined (see above).
- 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)

In addition to these three selection criteria, across proposals and relative to the number of submitted proposals, we aim to strengthen:

- Balance in iDiv's research areas (molecular / complexity / function / society / change)
- Balance in iDiv's partner institutions (based on the main PI)
- Balance in gender (based on the main PI).

5. 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) 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) 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 co-PIs of your project and explain their specific roles. List collaborators.
- e) Mentoring strategy: Please specify how you plan to supervise your doctoral researcher within this project including the role of each co-PI. In case of JGL, please specify if you have an appointment throughout the entire project.
- 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 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.; please list infrastructural and financial contributions of the co-applicants.
- h) Internal / external reviewers: Please suggest at least 4 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.
- i) Bibliography: Please list max. 15 references.
- j) Appendix: Please provide short CVs of main PI and co-PIs (max 1 page each), 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. You may use the CV template included in the proposal template, but this is not mandatory.

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.

6. 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 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.

7. 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.

8. Recruitment

The main PI of pre-approved proposals is obliged to participate in the process of selecting doctoral researchers via the joint recruitment symposium, scheduled for 25/26 February 2021 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.

9. 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 cannot be funded by iDiv money.

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 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; this applies also to projects led by non-university members or members of other universities.

Working space and additional infrastructure has to be provided by the PI's institution. 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 must 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).

10. Monitoring

Annual progress reports, covered by the report for the annual PAC meetings, are needed to be submitted by all doctoral researchers to yDiv. PIs are obliged to provide a written end report (max. 5 pages) not later than 6 months after the project end, with a particular focus on 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 participate with at least a poster contribution at the iDiv annual conference.

By not submitting the annual progress report, the budget of the PI will be cut.

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."

11. Submission and deadlines

A **Letter of Intent** shall be directed to Christa Genz (christa.genz@idiv.de) prior to a planned proposal submission no later than **04 September 2020**. Please use the attached word-document as template.

Proposals shall be directed to Christa Genz as a single PDF-file **no later than 01 October 2020**. **When submitting your proposal, please use the attached word-document as template or download the zip-file from our website to be used with LaTeX.**

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:

Abbreviation	Definition
Applicant (= PI)	Scientifically independent researcher, leader of a research group, PhD-holder, the main supervisor of the project, full iDiv member
Co-applicant (= co-PI)	Any researcher with relevant scientific expertise and experience in supervision / mentoring students, co-supervisor of the project
External scientist	Scientifically independent researcher outside the iDiv consortium, leader of a research group, PhD-holder
Flexpool Evaluation Committee	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
Full iDiv member	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
HPC cluster	High-Performance Computing (HPC) Cluster, for more details please see here
iDiv core professor	Leader (full professor) of a research group established at iDiv (total: 9 groups), for more details please see here
iDiv consortium	Full iDiv members plus partner institutions, universities and supporters, for more details please see here
iDiv strategic missions	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
PAC	PhD advisory committee emphasizing exchange between theoreticians and empiricists
Research Areas (RAs)	Biodiversity Change, Biodiversity and Complexity, Molecular Biodiversity and Adaptation, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functioning and Biodiversity and Society
Science Strategy Board (SSB)	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