

Biomedical research conducted by young researchers

Call for proposals

Deadline: April 13th, 2016

BACKGROUND

A distinctive character of the Italian research system is the lack of support towards young researchers and the absence of training frameworks that successfully elicit their independency and leadership abilities.

A natural outcome of this situation is the well-known “brain drain” phenomenon. Furthermore, young talents trained abroad seldom if ever decide to move back to Italy. The Italian system is thus losing an entire generation of young researchers who are facing a country with limited financial resources, an inefficient turnover, and a failing meritocracy system. Therefore, it has become by now a priority to give back to young talents and worthy researchers the right to contribute to scientific research with original and independent initiatives.

In order to encourage the creativity of young researchers, through a “bottom-up” approach, this call for proposals - within the biomedical research field - aims at clarifying the molecular mechanisms underlying human diseases.

AIMS

This call for proposals is meant to support research projects concerning the identification and understanding of the molecular basis of a human disease. Applicants are requested to carefully specify the disease and the molecular mechanism they intend to investigate. All human diseases are eligible for this call, with the exception of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. (Indeed, funding opportunities for projects focusing on this pathology are provided by ARISLA Foundation - www.arisla.org. Cariplo Foundation has contributed, among others, to found ARISLA Foundation.)

The originality of the research project, its methodological approach and the expected outcomes will be key elements in the selection process. Specifically, applications should be supported by a clear rationale, conceived on the basis of compelling preliminary data.

Through this call, Cariplo Foundation has the objective of offering young researchers the opportunity to develop independent careers, conducting research projects under their own responsibility, without the control of a supervisor. It is thus recommended that a clear leadership of the young principal investigator (PI) emerges from each application, without any ambiguities on his/her effective role in conducting the proposed project.

Also, the Foundation aims at promoting initiatives which envision the accomplishment of activities of communication and interaction with the civil society, fostering Responsible Research and Innovation¹.

GUIDELINES

¹ The European movement on the theme of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) is constantly evolving, as emerges from the debate which has recently led to the so called “Rome declaration on RRI” (http://www.sis-rri-conference.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/RomeDeclaration_Final.pdf). In light of the available literature, it is possible to describe RRI as a dynamic and iterative process which intends to match research and innovation to values, needs and expectations of the society. Moreover, RRI aims at actively involving all the stakeholders taking part to activities of research and innovation, making them mutually responsible with respect to both the research process and its results.

Eligible applicants

This call for proposals is addressed to young researchers who decide to perform their research activities at a hosting institution which is eligible to receive funding from the Foundation. Beyond the general requirements set out in the “*Guidelines for presentation*”, the hosting institution must directly carry out scientific research in the specified field of interest and have adequate staff and equipment for its realization.

Moreover, it is mandatory that the lead hosting institution, and more specifically the operational headquarters of the project, be located within the geographical area of interest of Cariplo Foundation (Lombardia plus Novara and Verbania districts). This requirement does not pertain to potential partners.

The hosting institution must provide the PI with appropriate workspaces, laboratories, equipment, qualified staff (e.g. lab technicians), as well as any other resources needed to adequately carry out the project.

By submitting a proposal, applicant organizations accept the “portability of the grant”. This means that PIs always maintain the rights to require the transfer of the research project to a new eligible institution, for as long as the research objectives are preserved. Any change in the host institution depends on Fondazione Cariplo approval according to the guidelines of this call of proposals.

Finally, Fondazione Cariplo will not accept applications submitted by PIs (both leader PIs and partner PIs) of projects still ongoing and funded in previous calls in the Scientific Research Area (with the exception of calls in partnership with other granting agencies). A project is considered ongoing unless the final grant reports - both the scientific and the economic one - have been uploaded on our website before the deadline of this call.

Eligible projects

The Foundation will select a limited number of projects. To be eligible, proposals must:

- be submitted by a PI with:
 - i) between 2 and 7 years of experience since completion of the PhD²;
 - ii) no more than 40 years old on the deadline of this call;
 - iii) at least one publication as first or last author in a peer reviewed journal;
- guarantee that the PI will dedicate to the proposed research project at least 50% of his/her total working time;
- guarantee that the PI will be last author on all publications derived from the project;
- meet the scientific priorities indicated in this call for proposals;
- prepare a plan of communication activities with the civil society, coordinated by a young researcher within the team. The plan should include the use of multimedia tools (website, social networks) as well as, possibly, other channels (activities in schools, meetings with the general public, conferences, press releases, publications, etc.).

Moreover, any proposal with the following characteristics will be considered ineligible:

- purely descriptive projects;
- studies essentially aimed at developing novel methodologies and/or technologies;
- projects having an exclusive pharmacological and/or clinical focus;

² The call is addressed to applicants eligible for an ERC (European Research Council) starting grant. PIs with 2-7 years of experience since completion of their medical specialty are also eligible. For candidates with both PhD and medical specialty, eligibility will be determined considering the degree they earned first.

- funding requests aimed at setting up new research centres and/or laboratories and/or animal facilities.

In addition, Fondazione Cariplo will not consider eligible a project that has been already submitted to this specific Call twice.

Projects should provide the approval of the Ethical Committee³. In case of animal trial Fondazione Cariplo requires a copy of the Ministry of Health authorization. By all means the authorization has to be notified to Fondazione Cariplo before the final report on the project.

The total cost of the project can only include costs related to the realization of the proposed studies, respecting the eligibility criteria and the thresholds listed below:

- A03 - “Equipment and software”
This entry cannot exceed 20% of the additional costs⁴ and can exclusively include newly acquired equipment and software, limited to the percentage of use which can be ascribed to the project.
- A04 - “Other amortizable costs”
This entry can only include patent costs.
- A06 - “Temporary staff”
This entry can only include research personnel costs. The cost of administrative staff is not allowed.
- A07 - “Sub-contractors and consultants”
This entry should also include audit costs, where applicable⁵.
- A08 - “Materials and supplies”
This entry cannot include costs related to stationery and photocopies.
- A09 - “Overheads”
This entry cannot exceed 10% of the additional costs⁶.
- A10 - “Travel, publication and dissemination costs”
This entry cannot exceed 10% of the additional costs⁷ and can only include travel expenses and conference participation fees for the research personnel involved in the project, scientific publications and activities of communication with the civil society.

The grant will cover 100% of project costs. Requested funding should range from 100,000 to 250,000 euros.

When filling in the forms, note that the total cost of the project will have to coincide with the requested funding.

Evaluation criteria

Projects will be evaluated through a peer review process relying on external, independent and internationally renowned reviewers, in order to guarantee transparency and

³ In case the approval is not available by the Call’s deadline, the leading organization will be requested to send it together with the preliminary fulfillment, penalty the grant revocation.

⁴ “Additional costs” represent the addition of entries A03, A04, A06, A07, A08, A10. In other words, the requested funding minus entry A09.

⁵ With the sole aim of ascertaining whether the obligation to perform a financial audit applies or not, the amount which has to be considered is obtained multiplying the eligible costs detailed in the Budget (sum of entries A06, A07, A08, A09 and A10) by the coefficient 1.25 (which represents an estimate of the co-funding generally guaranteed by the hosting institution, mainly in the form of permanent staff). It is also recommended to refer to chapter 10 of the “Grant management and reporting guide” and to the “Guidelines for audit”; both documents are available on the “Grant management and reporting” page of Cariplo Foundation’s website.

⁶ See footnote 4.

⁷ See footnote 4.

objectivity. At the end of the evaluation process, a feedback containing the reviewers' comments will be transmitted to each applicant.

Besides the overall scientific quality of the proposal, the evaluation will take into account the following elements:

- the level of analysis of the state of the art;
- the robustness of preliminary data;
- the clarity of the project aims and strategies;
- the originality and innovation of the project;
- the adequacy of the experimental plan;
- the expected results and their impact on the scientific community;
- the potential benefits for human health;
- the scientific and managerial leadership of the PI;
- the track record of the PI and the research team;
- the expected impact of the project on the PI's career;
- the adequacy of budget and duration of the project;
- the efficacy of the communication plan, fostering Responsible Research and Innovation⁸.

AVAILABLE BUDGET

The budget available for this call for proposals consists of 4 million euros.

Before submitting a proposal, applicants are kindly invited to carefully read the documents listed below, available on Cariplo Foundation's website at www.fondazioneCARIPLO.it:

- *Guidelines for presentation*;
- *Grant management and reporting guide*;
- *Communication Guidelines*;
- *Acknowledgement guidelines for academic papers*;
- *Intellectual property rights policy*;
- *Open access policy*.

By submitting a proposal, applicants acknowledge, agree and accept that the award of the grant requires the irrevocable acceptance of the aforementioned policies.

In order to apply for a grant under this call for proposals, it is strongly recommended to:

- carefully fill in all the online forms, which specifically include:

- registry of the leading hosting institution (new applicants should fill in the form *ex novo*, while organizations which have already registered should check and update, when necessary, their details);
- project section (in Italian);
- complementary data (in English);
- budget section.

- upload all the requested documents according to the *Guidelines for presentation* and the text of the present call:

⁸ See footnote 1.

- project form phase I (in English)⁹;
- project form phase II (in English)¹⁰;
- detailed budget (in English)¹¹;
- documentation of the hosting institution¹²;
- letter of support from the legal representative of the hosting institution¹³;
- publication[s] having the PI as first or last author, as PDF files.

⁹ Project form phase I can be downloaded from the online section “Complementary Data”.

¹⁰ Project form phase II can be downloaded from the online section “Complementary Data”.

¹¹ Detailed budget can be downloaded from the online section “Complementary Data”.

¹² In case the project involves partners, each hosting institution is required to supply its own documentation.

¹³ See footnote 12.