



**Call for projects:
Interdisciplinary collaborative research on key areas of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic in Lower Saxony.**

The course of the COVID-19 pandemic so far has emphatically shown that a coordinated bundling of interdisciplinary and complementary expertise is necessary to decipher the manifold aspects of the biology, pathology and epidemiology of SARS-CoV-2 and to apply the gained knowledge clinically for the treatment of patients as well as for the modelling of infection courses in the population. In order to be able to perform and implement such a holistic approach, the federal state of Lower Saxony with its internationally renowned scientific locations offers ideal conditions. In order to advance collaborative research in Lower Saxony more strongly, a COVID-19 Research Network of the State of Lower Saxony (COFONI) was founded and is funded by the Ministry of Science and Culture.

The COFONI research network is based on a content-related and a structural pillar. In terms of content, the existing scientific core competencies in the Lower Saxony metropolitan region of Göttingen-Hanover-Braunschweig are combined to form four key areas that are of crucial relevance to pandemic response:

1. epidemiological modelling: pandemic intervention.
2. antiviral strategies: Active agents and vaccines
3. digital infectious medicine: individualized patient care
4. pathophysiology: immune modulation and control

The exact funding objectives of the four key areas are explained in more detail on the COFONI homepage. The logistical core for the four thematic research directions is formed by a central technology platform that provides overarching methods and animal models as well as data and biobanks with maximum efficiency for all participants to share (see attachment Technology platforms). The networked grouping of complementary site expertise around a common infrastructure lays the scientific foundation for interdisciplinary research projects that were previously only possible to a very limited extent due to financial and technical limitations.

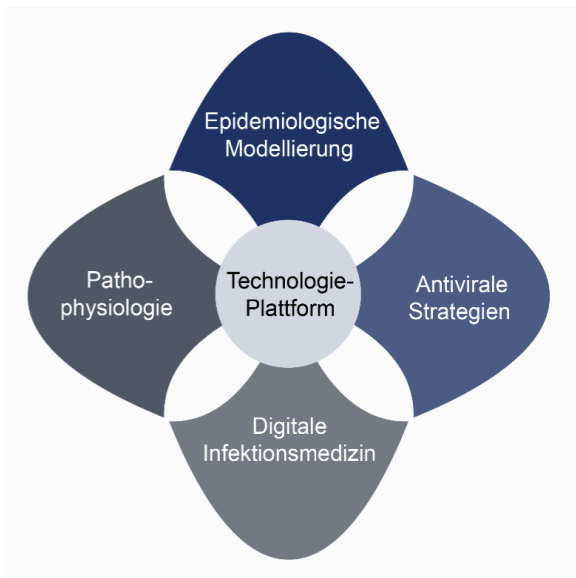


Figure 1: Contents and structure of the COVID-19 Research Network Lower Saxony: (technology platform, pathophysiology, digital infection medicine, antiviral strategies, epidemiological modelling)

Project funding by COFONI

All research institutions in Lower Saxony can apply for funding from the so-called FlexFunds the COFONI funds for project proposals in the four key areas. Seeking funding from industrial partners by the state is not envisaged. In addition to the scientific originality and thematic fit of the applications, the cross-location cooperation of the applicants and the inclusion of the central technology platforms (1) Animal Models and Test Systems, (2) Research Biobank and (3) Research Databases (see Annex Technology Platforms) are prerequisites and mandatory for funding. For the integration of the central technology platforms, the respective local contact persons of the institutions have to be contacted in advance (see attachment Technology Platforms). In consultation with the persons responsible for the central technology platform, it must be clarified to what extent additional costs for the services must be included in the project application. Extensive services of the technology platforms beyond consulting and provision of basic infrastructure (e.g. use of high performance/ GPU clusters for data analyses, FAIR-compliant modelling and tuning of new data models beyond the German Corona Consensus Dataset GECCO or performance of project-specific animal experiments) must be included in the budget planning of the projects after consultation.

Concept for the FlexFunds including quality control: Project funding within the framework of the FlexFunds serves as start-up financing for future third-party funding. Accordingly, FlexFund-funded research projects should meet high scientific standards, be internationally competitive, and be awarded in a correspondingly quality-assured

manner. The selection process is carried out in accordance with German Research Foundation (DFG) regulations. For this purpose, the Steering Committee consults at least two external experts per application, who prepare a written statement. Proposals for reviewers can be submitted by the applicants. The governing body may consult an external advisory board when making decisions. In exceptional cases, such as highly competitive and very urgent project proposals, or in case of delays in the review process, a decision by the Steering Committee may waive the requirement to seek external advice. In these cases, however, a unanimous endorsement by the governing body and the approval of the external advisory board are required.

Project durations: Depending on the working hypothesis and the objectives, the project duration should be flexible. For example, shorter projects of about six months for the immediate testing of a working hypothesis or "classical" doctoral projects with a correspondingly longer duration can be applied for. The latter variant represents the envisaged maximum duration of three years. For the required personnel and material resources, the subject-specific (DFG) rates apply as maximum rates. The work programme and the necessary costs must be justified in detail for each project. In exceptional cases, costs in the amount of a postdoctoral fellow/scientist (e.g. E13 100%) or special equipment/animal costs may be approved upon presentation of justification. However, the maximum volume per project should not exceed €500,000.

Fast-Track procedure: In a shortened procedure, funds amounting to 10% of the project budget (= € 500,000 total funding volume) will be allocated to smaller Fast-Track projects. These Fast-Track projects are to be based on preparatory work on already ongoing projects, which are about to be completed and can be further developed in a second phase.

Application: More information incl. application templates for the normal procedure as well as the Fast-Track procedure are available on the homepage: <https://www.umg.eu/forschung/corona-forschung/cofoni/>

Project applications in the **Fast-Track procedure** should be submitted according to the Fast-Track templates available on the homepage to the following address: cofoni@med.uni-goettingen.de

Deadline Fast-Track Procedure: May 15, 2021

The start of the approved projects in the Fast-Track process is planned as soon as possible.

Project applications in the **normal procedure** are to be submitted via the Internet portal in accordance with the templates available on the homepage.

Deadline Normal Procedure: June 15, 2021

The start of the approved projects under the normal procedure is planned by 1.1.2022 at the latest. An additional call is planned for beginning of 2022.