Guidelines for FreeNovation Applicants 2018

1. What kind of proposals are considered?

FreeNovation provides funding opportunities for innovative, substantial-risk projects that have the potential to open up novel research directions and aim beyond incremental innovation and discovery.

Proposals need to be particularly original and hard to fund by conventional funding programs due to the “unorthodox” character of the idea or absence of a long-standing academic reputation held by the researchers.

Projects should be relevant to biomedical research with an ultimate aim to provide innovative healthcare solutions for patients.

In this year’s call, proposals in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) will be accepted, namely:

- AI in drug discovery
- AI in clinical development and medical practice
- AI and the patient

2. What are the overall objectives of FreeNovation?

With this program, Novartis wants to encourage unconventional thinking and enhance the attractiveness of Switzerland as a center for research.
3. **What are the general terms of the grants?**

**Grants are for a period of 18 months and up to a maximum of CHF 180’000.**

If positively evaluated, a grant award is further conditioned on reaching a written agreement between the Novartis Forschungsstiftung, the applicant and his/her institution (i.e. reputable healthcare or healthcare-related organization, incl. universities or universities of applied science) on the following terms and conditions:

- Applicant’s institution endorses the project and administers the grant amount.
- Applicant shall publish all results suitable for publication. In the spirit of FreeNovation, the results shall be made available to the public without restricting use and free of charge (with the exception of access fees of journals), and no patent application will be filed for the results from the research conducted with the grant.
- The grant activity shall include neither commercial activities nor be influenced by commercial interests, and the planning and execution of the grant activity shall be consistent with the principles of good scientific practice.
- All required notifications and required permissions, licenses, consents and/or approvals to perform the grant activity have to be obtained.
- Applicant provides a written and, if requested, an oral report including positive and negative results at the end of the funding period.

4. **How many projects will be funded?**

A maximum of 15 projects will be funded, depending on the quality of the proposals as judged by the review committee.

5. **Who can apply?**

Applicants are eligible to submit a proposal if they fulfill all requirements below:

- The applicant has a completed doctoral degree or equivalent qualification,
- The applicant is an employee of a reputable healthcare or healthcare-related organization, incl. university, university hospital, or university of applied science, in Switzerland, for the duration of the project, and
- The applicant has the agreement of his/her institution to apply for this grant and carry out the project if it is funded.

It is possible to submit a proposal together with a Co-Applicant who also fulfills these requirements.
6. How do I apply?

Applications must be submitted online at https://novartis-grants.fluidreview.com.

Applications must be written in English and include:

• Summary of the research project (max. 200 words)
• Background and motivation (max. 400 words)
• Hypotheses and specific aims (max. 400 words)
• Novelty and potential application if successful (max. 400 words)
• Description of “truth telling” experiments, i.e. hypotheses testing experiments that will be conducted within the funding period and that will indicate whether the original idea is valid or not (max. 400 words)

7. What is the application deadline?

The submission deadline is 14th April 2018, 23:59h.

8. What are the selection criteria and how does the review procedure work?

Applications that comply with these guidelines will be evaluated by an international review committee chaired by Prof. Gerd Folkers, ETH, with six external and three Novartis scientists, who are experts in the field.

The review committee decides on funding based on the following criteria:

ORIGINALITY:
• Is the proposal creative, unprecedented and does it have the potential to open novel research directions?
• Even though unproven, is the concept plausible? Or are there reasons to assume upfront that the hypotheses are invalid?

POTENTIAL:
• If successful, does the proposal enable innovation and discovery beyond incremental changes?
• Are the proposed evaluation criteria appropriate to draw conclusions on the validity of the concept at the end of the funding period?

The following criterion will not be considered:
• Scientific track record of the applicant. Reviewers will not see the CVs; the project evaluation will be anonymous.
9. When will the decisions be communicated? What kind of feedback can I expect?

Applicants will be informed of the decision mid June 2018. No reasons for acceptance or rejection of the project proposal or comments made by the reviewers will be communicated.

If accepted by the review committee, a written agreement will be negotiated between the Novartis Forschungsstiftung, the applicant and his/her institution, based on the terms and conditions described above, see point 3.

10. What happens after the grant is approved?

Towards the end of the funding period a FreeNovation Science Forum will be organized at the Novartis Campus in Basel. Project leaders will be invited to present their results orally or on posters. This supports networking with Novartis scientists and exploring collaboration opportunities.

11. What if I have further questions about FreeNovation?

General information: https://www.novartis.ch/freenovation

Submit your proposal: https://novartis-grants.fluidreview.com

If you have any questions, contact: hans.widmer@novartis.com