

2024 CALL FOR PROPOSALS: HIV CURE

SIDACTION & AIDSFONDS

In this Call for proposals, you will find information about the aim of this program, the conditions for the grant application and how your proposal will be assessed. This is the information you need to submit a grant application.

CONTEXT

Since the beginning of the HIV epidemic, major scientific advances have been made in HIV treatment and prevention, saving many lives and improving the quality of life of people living with HIV (PLHIV). However, major challenges remain. Despite the availability of effective antiretroviral drugs, the persistence of the virus in the body accelerates immune aging and increases the risk of comorbidities. Above all, current treatments cannot eliminate infected cells from the body, which is a major challenge for the long-term management of infection.

Recent advances in research have paved the way for new therapeutic targets to specifically eliminate infected cells. Scientific advances have also led to a better understanding of the individual response to HIV infection, identifying new opportunities for immune intervention. It is therefore important to continue deciphering cellular, genetic and clinical markers to develop new therapeutic targets that could potentially lead to HIV remission if not cure, while keeping people living with HIV at the center of research.

It is against this backdrop, combining new challenges linked to the evolution of the HIV control strategies and the current state of research, that Sidaction and Aidsfonds are pleased to jointly launch a call for scientific proposals for the year 2024, aimed at accelerating advances in HIV cure research. This initiative, the fruit of an unprecedented collaboration between the two organizations, aims to mobilize researchers from France, the Netherlands and African countries around this crucial issue for global health. The goal of this ambitious initiative is to foster collaboration between researchers, institutions, and communities, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary and collaborative research on the cure for HIV.

AIM

The aim of this call for proposals is to fund research projects exploring mechanisms or strategies that will contribute to achieve a cure or a remission for HIV. The candidate projects may explore mechanisms to target the viral reservoir or enhance immune driven control, the development of new therapeutic concepts as well as all the social sciences around HIV cure or remission. With this call, we aim to fund research ultimately leading to biomedical breakthroughs, social acceptance of cure interventions and promotion of an HIV cure available to the maximum of PLHIV worldwide.

This call for proposals is therefore aimed at all parties involved in the development and implementation of HIV cure. Researchers from different disciplines, representatives of PLHIV, HIV counsellors and physicians can submit a letter of intent describing the rationale, objectives, and relevance of their project in the context of this call for proposals. Proposals that pursue the development of a cure (total elimination of infected cells) and those that pursue ART-free control of persistent virus will be considered.

This call is a joint call financed by Aidsfonds and Sidaction. Sidaction will manage the applications and the grants on behalf of both parties.

The call is open to projects including *in silico*, *in vitro*, pre-clinical, social, economic, or clinical research. **Interdisciplinary and collaborative research is encouraged. Larger projects (>300k EUR) should be multidisciplinary (combining basic, translational, and/or social research) and ideally integrate multi-country collaborations.**

Preferential (not mandatory) aspects of the research are:

- interdisciplinary approach involving cooperation between researchers from different specialities (basic science, clinical science, humanities and social sciences);
- research that pursues interventional strategies, even if preliminary stages, is preferred over approaches that are purely descriptive.
- relevance for communities that live with HIV, anywhere in the world;
- impact focused on a combination of insights and interventions that build on existing research on HIV cures and/or by new approaches and insights that have not been used before;

For your describing your impact pathway, please take into account that the development of a cure will require a series of well-planned research steps. For interventional approaches, applicants should provide a detailed series of milestones that culminate in a clinical trial of the cure concept under consideration. For observational studies (including fundamental research), a clear rationale should be provided how the research may contribute to better interventional approaches in the future.

FINANCING ARRANGEMENTS

The available budget for this Call for proposals is a total of €2,000,000.

Research projects could take place anywhere in the world but the researchers that performed the research should be based:

- in France or Netherlands in public sector entities and non-profit organizations whose missions include supporting research, and/or
- in countries with limited resources in the African region, as defined by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee ([see list 2022-2023](#)), provided they are scientifically coordinated and financially managed by a legally registered entity in the country concerned, with recognized experience in managing research funds from international donors (such as ANRS-MIE/European Union/USAID/CDC/Aidsfonds, Sidaction...).

We see creative ideas and experience from outside the academy as important for valuable input to the research project. Therefore, relevant parties from outside the academy who are willing and enthusiastic to contribute to the research project are encouraged to be a collaboration partner. Community based organizations are especially encouraged to participate.

The letter of intent will be reviewed by a scientific committee to ensure the application fits the thematic of the call before receiving an invitation to submit a full proposal on the Synto platform.

Research teams may be funded for a research project lasting a maximum of 36 months. For research projects concerning human samples or clinical studies, funding will be conditioned on the obtention of reglementary and ethical approvals.

A researcher can only be a lead investigator once but can be collaborator researcher on other proposal.

The budget may include:

- Operating costs
- Equipment costs
- Remuneration costs for non-statutory staff
- Knowledge utilisation (publication costs, participation in conferences or congresses, mission's expenses...): At least 2% and up to 10% of the overall project budget)
- Project management
- Overheads

ONLINE APPLICATIONS

The steps involved in writing your application are:

- Submitting a letter of intent describing the background, objective, design and relevance of the project to the HIV Cure. The letter of intent for this international call should be completed in English (French could be acceptable if the principal investigator is from Africa and not fluent in English). The template can be downloaded from Sidaction or Aidsfonds website. The letter can only be submitted by e-mail to aps@sidaction.org
- If the letter of intent is accepted, then you will be invited to submit a full proposal.

Full proposal:

You must write your application in English (French could be acceptable if the principal investigator is from Africa and not fluent in English).

An application can only be submitted via the web application Synto. Applications that are not submitted via Synto will not be taken into consideration.

As the main applicant, you are required to submit the application via your own personal Synto account.

It is important to start with your application in Synto on time:

- To apply for funding, you must have an account on the Synto platform.
- Any account creation or update must be validated by Sidaction.
- The online application is a form made up of a set of independent tabs that can be filled in over several connections.
- Once the form has been fully completed, you will be asked to sign it and send it electronically to Sidaction. Please note once the form has been sent, it cannot be modified.
- If you have any questions or require assistance in creating or updating your account, please contact the Scientific Department by email: aps@sidaction.org

Does a main and/or co-applicant work at an organisation that is not included in the Synto database? You can report this via aps@sidaction.org so that the organization can be added. This will take several days. It is therefore important that you report this at least one week before the deadline.

The applicant must inform the organization where she/he works about the submission of the application, and the organization must accept the granting conditions of this Call for proposals.

SELECTION CRITERIA

An *ad-hoc* committee of international experts recruited from different scientific disciplines will evaluate the projects. Community representatives will be part of the committee.

Proposal will be first reviewed for scientific and impact quality. A minimum threshold for scientific quality should be reached to be eligible for funding. Proposals that pass the threshold will be ranked based on the preferential characteristics:

- Quality of science and method;
- The innovative and integrated nature of the research;
- Feasibility and appropriateness of the proposed research plan;
- Operational and financial choices in the project budget;
- Strong prospects for biomedical, social and economic impact

For larger programs (>300k+) the following additional criteria will be taken into consideration:

- Interdisciplinarity aspects of the research
- Early Career Lead Investigators, defined as a researcher whose career span less than 8 years between the date of the PhD/doctorate (or similar experience) and the date of involvement in the research project and/or involvement of young researchers in the project (PhD students and/or postdoc);
- Collaboration of research teams from Netherlands, France, and African countries
- Project governance, division of tasks and roles within the team
- Connection strategy to engage relevant stakeholders and involve end-users.

Final selection of projects will be based on the ranking and budgetary fit with the available funds.

COLLABORATING PARTNERS AND THIRD PARTIES

Researchers may include one or more collaborating partner(s) which is closely involved in the realization of the research and/or knowledge utilisation. Possible examples are companies, public and private organisations and other institutions. The role that these parties play in the preparation, realization, and translation of the research to society should be described in the research proposal.

Please note: no funding may be requested for salary or research costs as a co-applicant for personnel of organisations that participate as a cooperation partner in the consortium. However, it is possible to remunerate costs by hiring in these organisations as third parties.

TIMELINES

- Submission of Letters of Intent: **16th June 2024**
- Evaluation of Letters of Intent: **June 2024**
- Announcement of pre-selected projects: **July 2024**
- Submission of full proposals: **26th September 2024**
- Selection of winning projects: **November 2024**
- Announcement of winners: **December 2024**

CONTACT

For specific questions about this Call for proposals, please contact:

At Sidaction :

Jennifer Pasquier j.pasquier@sidaction.org

Simon Fretel s.fretel@sidaction.org

At Aidsfonds:

Remko van Leeuwen rvanleeuwen@soaaid.nl

For technical questions about the web application Synto:

Julia Grolère j.grolere@sidaction.org

For budget and eligibility of organization:

Nadia Abid n.abid@sidaction.org