



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

A collaborative call for proposals between

**Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR), France
and**

Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF), Germany

in the field of

**“Epigenomics of Common and Age-related
Diseases”**

CALL TEXT

Closing date of submission of letters of interest:

March 29, 2013 at 5 p.m. CET

Link to the letter of interest template and to the guidelines for applicants:

<http://www.agence-nationale-recherche.fr/Epigenomics-2013>

Link to the electronic proposal submission system:

<http://www.pt-it.de/ptoutline/application/EPIG2013>

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Purpose of the call

A widely altered life style and demographic change in developed societies go along with an increased number of patients affected by common and age related diseases. Their socioeconomic impact is immense, especially when it comes to common diseases like cardiovascular, neurological or metabolic diseases.

Improved understanding of the epigenetic mechanisms and processes that may lead to common and age-related diseases will open new doors to innovative approaches in prevention, diagnoses and therapy in many important aspects and therefore may pave the way to a healthy aging.

Recent scientific progress has made it possible to study epigenetics on a systems-level, defining the field of epigenomics. High-quality epigenome reference maps and innovative research concepts in the field of epigenomics are expected to significantly contribute to unravel complex causes of common human diseases.

Epigenomics is a demanding field, both in terms of research infrastructure and regarding the scientific know-how which is necessary to tackle epigenetic questions on a systemic level. As a result of the scales on which it operates, **epigenomics calls for international cooperation** that can pool resources and generate "critical masses" of research capacities and competencies.

In this context, the **Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR)** and the **Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF)** decided to join forces in a bilateral call for proposals to support epigenomics of common and age related diseases. The aim of this joint call for proposals is to **promote synergy and added value through the establishment of high-quality, interdisciplinary bi-national collaborations among researchers in France and Germany**. In a coordinated manner, a bilateral call is published in both countries to fund collaborations among researchers in France and Germany under the title "**Epigenomics of Common and Age- Related Diseases**". This call is published in the German "Bundesanzeiger" and on the internet websites at www.gesundheitsforschung-bmbf.de/de/4679.php and at <http://www.agence-nationale-recherche.fr/Epigenomics-2013>.

Focus of the call

Common and age-related human diseases usually have multifactorial causes and highly specific histories. Many of them are the result of complex processes, based on genetic contributions and epigenetic influences. Age related diseases are illnesses that increase in prevalence with age. Even if their origin can also be genetic, progression of common and age-related diseases is clearly influenced by environmental factors including nutrition, exposure to infectious agents, or life style aspects. These factors in turn influence an individual's epigenetic profile. With increased age, epigenomic marks accumulate and may lead to the occurrence and/or progression of serious diseases.

Research efforts carried out to date have highlighted mainly one major insight: the ways in which common and age related diseases occur and develop cannot be understood completely by considering isolated features and factors. Application of systems-oriented methods and technologies as in epigenomics allows the investigation of numerous factors in parallel and thus contributes to overcome these limitations.

In the context of this call, research consortia shall investigate the multifaceted role of the epigenome in disease occurrence and progression. Epigenomic mechanisms that are relevant for age related and common human diseases shall be deciphered. Proposals should combine high-quality mapping ¹ activities with functional analysis.

Therefore, funding will **not** be provided for the following:

- Focussed approaches that are rather of an epigenetic dimension and not of a systems-oriented epigenomic scope.
- Pure large scale mapping activities.
- Clinical trials.

Due to national funding regulations, proposals on cancer research cannot be funded within this call. Participating consortia must ensure compliance with existing international standards for material collection, data collection and data management as those developed in the International Human Epigenome Consortium (IHEC) – or they must ensure that pertinent new standards are developed within the projects. This is necessary to allow data to be integrated into existing data sets for comprehensive analysis.

The individual consortia shall formulate a central research question and design work packages around this integrative focus. Within such a work package the French or German workgroups must

¹ Such as (but not limited to): large scale DNA- methylation analysis, Histone-modification analysis or transcriptional analysis

clearly describe their respective tasks and correlating funds to be applied for. Animal model systems may be used when necessary to support and implement the above mentioned human disease-oriented research concepts.

Whenever possible, the proposed research should be based on the mutual sharing or combining of pre-existing knowledge, high-throughput-data, technologies and resources in epigenomics (i.e. existing patient and control cohorts, technologies, model systems etc.).

Inclusion of concepts for researcher mobility and knowledge exchange between France and Germany within a consortium shall be encouraged (e.g. through regular meetings of participating work groups, common workshops, exchange of personnel between research groups, etc.); long-term networking among all funded consortia is also encouraged. Thus, adequate funds for exchange and regular meetings shall be included in proposals.

Please note: the call does not follow the aim of funding a mapping project in the frame of IHEC, but intends to promote excellent research in epigenomics, following as much as possible IHEC guidelines.

Funding recipients / Beneficiaries' eligibility

Joint research proposals may be submitted by applicants belonging to one of the following categories, according to relevant national funding agencies' regulations for research funding: higher education institutions (Universities), non-University public research organisations, as well as industry, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The integration of SMEs or other industry into consortia is possible but not mandatory.

This call for collaborative proposals will require applicants based in France and Germany to work in partnership on research projects that will have the France-based component funded by ANR and the Germany-based component funded by BMBF. Each consortium submitting a proposal must **harbour a minimum of three research groups with at least one research group from France and one from Germany**. Research groups from other countries may be associated with proposals if these groups are able to secure their own funding. They must clearly state in the proposal that these funds will be available at the beginning of the project.

The number of participants and their research contribution should be appropriate for the aims of the joint research project and balanced in terms of national participation. Consortia should demonstrate an added value from working together and clearly generate synergy.

Eligibility to apply will be determined by national eligibility rules and the resources requested will also have to fit with national guidelines. **Please note that inclusion of a non-eligible partner in a proposal leads to the rejection of the entire proposal without further review.** While applications will be jointly submitted, individual groups will be funded by the individual funding organisation of their country that is participating in this joint call. The applications therefore need also to comply with the eligibility criteria of individual funding organisations. **Applicants are strongly advised to refer to and contact their national programme manager for information** (see 'contact information' section).

Each transnational consortium must nominate a coordinator of the consortium, who represents the consortium externally and is responsible for its internal management (such as controlling, reporting, intellectual property rights (IPR) issues). The coordinator of a consortium must belong to an academic research organisation from either France or Germany.

Research projects can be funded for a period of up to 3 years.

Funds may be used to cover salaries as well as consumables, equipment, and travel expenses for internal consortia meetings (at least one internal meeting per year), scientific conferences and researcher exchange between France and Germany. All requested salaries must be in accordance with the respective national administrative regulations.

Successful applicants will be required to disseminate the outcomes of their projects and also to attend a mid-term and a final dissemination event which will be organized by the funding bodies. To meet this objective, applicants should therefore include in their proposals travel and accommodation costs for one such meeting in France and one meeting in Germany.

- **Submission Processes & Structure of Joint Proposals**

There will be a two-stage submission procedure for the joint applications: 1) submission of a letter of interest and 2) submission of a full proposal (only for applicants whose letters of interest were positively validated). In both cases, one joint proposal document (in English) must be prepared by the partners of a joint transnational proposal, and must be submitted to the Joint Call Secretariat by the coordinator of the consortium.

Please note: Late applications and applications not fulfilling German and/or French national requirements will not be considered. No legal entitlement can be derived from the submission of a project description.

a. Letters of interest

Joint letters of interest (in English) must be received by the Joint Call Secretariat in an electronic version no later than eight weeks after official publication of this call for applications (March 29th, 2013 at 05 p.m. CET (Paris, Berlin local time)).

The letters of interest must contain the following information:

- Project title (max. 150 characters) and acronym
- Project duration
- Contact details and affiliations of the project coordinator and of the project partners
- Total requested funding (€)
- Keywords (between 3 and 7)
- Summary of the project (max. 2 pages; brief background and present state of the art in the research field; brief description of the working programme including the objectives, the rationale and the methodology, highlighting the novelty, originality, feasibility and potential impact of the project). Please note that it is important to clearly show the relevance to the call (integration of research on epigenome and human diseases, synergistic usage of resources, added value of cooperation)
- Financial plan of the costs for each partner and the costs of the whole consortium project (table, max. 1 page)
- Brief CVs of the partner's principal investigators, together with a list of five recent significant publications

Further information on how to submit letters of interest electronically as well as the form to use for submission will be made available in the "Guidelines for applicants" on <http://www.agence-nationale-recherche.fr/Epigenomics-2013>.

Applicants should take note of individual national rules, and should contact their national contact person for any questions (see "contact information" section).

b. Full proposals

Please note that joint full proposals will be accepted only from those applicants explicitly invited by the Joint Call Secretariat to submit them. Full proposals (in English) must be received by the Secretariat in an electronic version no later than August 29th, 2013 at 05 p.m. CET.

The information given in the letters of interest is binding. Thus, fundamental changes between the letter of interest and the full proposal, e.g. composition of the consortia, objectives of the project must be communicated to the Joint Call Secretariat with detailed justification and will only be allowed by the funding organisations under exceptional circumstances. They will otherwise lead to rejection of the full proposal.

The following structure will be required for the full proposals of consortia:

A. General description of the project proposal (max. 1 page):

- Project title (max. 150 characters) and acronym
- Project duration
- Contact details and affiliations of the project coordinator of the consortium and of the project partners and possibly other personnel participating in the project
- Short overview of the overall costs of the consortium, project costs for each partner and requested budget (table)
- Overview of the project proposal (max. 3,000 characters)
- Keywords (between 3 and 7)

B. Detailed description of the project proposal:

- Background and current state of the art in the field (max. 2 pages).
- Description of the overall scientific concept and work plan, also highlighting the originality, novelty, disease-orientation and added value of the bilateral cooperation (max. 3 pages).
- Description of the different workpackages, together with respective milestones, deliverables and scientific justification of the financial plan (max. 4 pages per work package).
- Detailed financial plan of the costs for each partner and the costs of the whole consortium project (table, max. 1 page).
- Description of management of the project, communication between partners as well as data management and data sharing (max. 1 page).
- Information about possible exploitation and communication of project results (max. ½ page)
- Description of any training activities foreseen within the project, if applicable (max. ½ page).

C. Description of the consortium:

- Brief CVs of the partner's principal investigators, together with a list of recent five significant publications (max 1 page per applicant).

- Description of ongoing projects of each participating partner related to the present topic, indicating funding sources and possible overlaps with other projects / proposal (max. ½ page per group).
- Description of significant facilities and large equipment available to the consortium (max. ½ page).

Further information on how to submit full proposals electronically are available in the "Guidelines for applicants".

Applicants should take note of individual national rules, and should contact their national contact person for any questions (see "contact information" section).

- **Evaluation Process, Selection Criteria and Decision Making**

All collaborative proposals submitted and eligible will be subject to peer review involving external referees, grouped into a peer review panel (PRP). This PRP is a panel of internationally recognised scientific experts responsible for the evaluation of submitted proposals.

The evaluation will be carried out in a two-step process evaluating first the letters of interest and secondly the full proposals.

- a. Evaluation of letters of interest**

The Joint Call Secretariat, together with the national funding partners, will assess all letters of interest to ensure that they meet the call's formal criteria (e.g. date of submission; number of participating countries, at least one French group and one German group; inclusion of all necessary information in English; appropriate limits on length) and that applicants are eligible to submit applications according to national rules. **Projects not meeting the formal criteria or the national eligibility criteria and requirements will be declined without further review.**

Eligible letters of interest will be reviewed by at least two members of the PRP. PRP members will assess eligible letters of interest regarding:

- the relevance to the aims and scope defined in the call for proposals

- the scientific relevance, novelty and validity of the addressed research concept

During a panel discussion the PRP will make the final decisions on which letters of interest pass the first step of the evaluation, and should be invited by the Joint Call Secretariat to submit a full proposal.

b. Evaluation of full proposals

Each full proposal will be allocated to at least two external reviewers and two PRP members who fit the profile of the application. The external reviewers are internationally recognized scientists chosen for their expertise in a particular thematic field related to the topic addressed in the proposal.

All reviewers will be asked to evaluate the proposal's performance, based on the following criteria:

- Relevance of the application to the aims and scope defined in the call for proposals
- Scientific relevance, novelty and validity of the addressed research concept
- Scientific excellence of the full proposal and track record of applicants
- Feasibility of the project (validity of the work plan, adequateness of the financial plan, time schedule, interdisciplinarity / inclusion of all necessary expertises, availability of patient material and / or other resources)
- Compliance with relevant epigenomics standards (e.g. IHEC) and Impact
- Added value of the bilateral collaboration (common interest, synergy, focus on the central research question)

Subsequently, the PRP will meet to discuss each proposal taking into consideration the external reviewers' evaluation. During this discussion, the panel will identify the top-quality proposals suggested for funding and establish a ranking list.

Based on the ranking list, a Call Steering Committee, which is composed by representatives of the two funding agencies, will recommend the transnational projects to be funded. Applicants will be informed in writing of the results of the review and, if applicable, of the subsequent administrative steps according to the respective national regulations.

- **Financial and legal issues**

a. Funding model

ANR will fund the French research groups, BMBF will fund the German research groups of consortia selected for funding, both according to existing national rules, regulations and funding procedures.

The funding rate within the call will be variable up to a maximum of 100% of the funds requested, according to national rules. Prior to submitting a proposal, applicants should verify their eligibility and the rate of financial support with their national funding organisation. (see 'Contact information' and 'Guidelines for applicants').

b. Funding contracts

Each project includes several consortium members called research partners and one project coordinator. Each research partner will have a separate funding contract according to national regulations.

Changes to the composition of the research consortia or to the budget cannot occur during the contract, unless there is a good justification. Any changes have to be well justified and the relevant funding organisations will decide upon the proper action to be taken. The coordinator of a project shall inform the Joint Call Secretariat and the funding organisations of any event that might affect the implementation of the project.

c. Research consortium agreements

The project consortium partners must sign a consortium agreement (CA) for cooperation addressing the issues given in "Guidelines for Applicants" on consortium agreements. The research consortium must sign this CA prior to the first payment. Upon request, this consortium agreement must be made available to the concerned funding organizations.

Results and new Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) resulting from projects funded through this joint call will be owned by the researchers' organisations according to national rules on IPR. If several participants have jointly carried out work generating new IPR, they shall agree amongst themselves (consortium agreement) as to the allocation of ownership of IPR, taking into account their contributions to the creation of those IPR as well as the European guidelines on IPR issues.

The results of the research project and IPR created should be actively exploited and made available for use, whether for commercial gain or not, in order for public benefit to be obtained from the knowledge created.

• **Responsibilities, reporting requirements and dissemination**

The coordinators of all the funded projects must submit an annual progress report and a final (within three months of the end of the project) scientific project report to the Joint Call Secretariat. All reports must be in English and use a common report form that will be provided. The research

partners are jointly responsible for the delivery of the reports, and the joint call secretariat will only accept reports delivered on behalf of the consortium, via the project coordinator.

Funding recipients must ensure that all outcomes (publications, etc.) of these transnational projects include a proper acknowledgement of this joint call and the respective national funding partner organisations.

The coordinators and/or national group leaders will be asked to present the results of their projects at a mid-term and a final dissemination event organized by the joint call secretariat (one in France and the other one in Germany).

- **Contact information**

The applicants are strongly advised to consult their respective funding agencies before submitting an application.

For specific national rules and regulations regarding funding of project parts, please refer to the national calls at www.gesundheitsforschung-bmbf.de/de/4679.php and at <http://www.agence-nationale-recherche.fr/Epigenomics-2013>.

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