



# **UGent Fund Alzheimer and Neurodegenerative Diseases**

## **Proof-of-concept Projects for Young Investigators**

Guidelines, regulations and criteria (version-1 September 2021)

### **Purpose**

In 2019 a generous donor initiated the creation of the UGent Fund Alzheimer and Neurodegenerative Diseases. The core mission of this Fund is to promote research in the field of Alzheimer's disease and related neurodegenerative disorders including frontotemporal dementia, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and rare adult-onset inherited neurodegenerative diseases. One of our aims is to provide support for original research projects in the neurodegeneration field at UGent, UZ Gent, and VIB-UGent. Therefore the Fund Alzheimer and Neurodegenerative Diseases provides proof-of-concept project grants for young postdoctoral researchers to initiate creative, potentially innovative and multidisciplinary research projects related to neurodegenerative disorders.

The purpose of these grants is to increase the success rate of future larger project applications through other funding agencies, to maximize chances and to build further on the project (novel collaborations, increased output, valorization potential, concrete benefit for the patient, ...) and to help establish a broad and inclusive 'neurodegeneration research network' across UGent, UZ Gent and VIB-UGent.

## Guidelines, regulations and criteria

### 1. Eligible applicants

1.1. Applicants must meet following criteria:

- Employment (at least 50%) at UGent, UZ Gent or VIB-UGent
- PhD holder (for maximum 10 years)
- No professorship/ZAP mandate (neither partial nor fulltime)
- The applicant and the host lab declare not to have received any other funding to perform the project.

1.2. Each applicant can only submit one project proposal per application round.

1.3. Researchers can only apply if no other Fund Alzheimer and Neurodegenerative Diseases granted project is ongoing.

1.4. Guidelines for re-submission

- Applicants who have submitted a project proposal in a prior application round are allowed to re-submit (a modified version of) their project proposal in the subsequent application round.

However, re-submission is **only allowed once**.

- Re-submission applies for projects in which the research question(s) and/or a significant part of the experimental setup or methods were submitted before.
- Applicants who re-submit a project proposal must complete an extra section in the project proposal template, in which they extensively motivate how the new version has been modified as compared to the proposal that was originally submitted in the prior application round. The applicants have to take the feedback into account that was provided by the jury on the prior project proposal, respond to it, and explain the adapted modifications in the new proposal.

### 2. Promotors on Fund Alzheimer and Neurodegenerative Diseases project applications

2.1. On each application, **1 or maximum 2 promotors must be included** who support the project proposal. This creates opportunities for coaching, networking and collaborations with other researchers, and additional support that maximizes the chances for success.

Furthermore, these promoters are strongly encouraged to support future project applications to other funding agencies on the basis of the generated proof-of-concept results.

Despite the inclusion of 1 or 2 promoters on the application, it should be understood that **the applicant will be in charge of writing and executing the project** and will autonomously manage the funding (see further).

2.2. Promoters have to meet the following criteria:

- Principal investigator / group leader of a research group at UGent, UZ Gent or VIB-UGent
- ZAP mandate (full or partial professorship)
- The promotor can be the direct supervisor or head of the lab of the applicant, but can also come from a different research group or faculty.
- For each Fund Alzheimer and Neurodegenerative diseases project application round, promoters can support **max 2 project applications**, of which 1 as promotor of a researcher from his/her own research team and 1 as promotor of a researcher from another research team.

2.3. In case the direct supervisor or head of the lab of the applicant is not included as promotor (which is perfectly possible), he/she should declare to be aware of the project proposal.

2.4. Applications supported by a promotor from another research group are encouraged, as the Fund Alzheimer and Neurodegenerative diseases aims to stimulate multidisciplinary neurodegenerative disease research and networking.

### **3. Scope (eligibility) of the projects**

Fundamental, translational or clinically oriented projects in the field of neurodegenerative diseases are eligible.

### **4. Frequency of project calls and budget**

4.1. One application round per year is planned (timing is communicated by mail)

4.2. Duration of a project: maximum 9 months (see further)

4.3. The total yearly budget for these projects is currently max. 60.000 EUR per year.

4.4. Budget that can be applied for **per project proposal: min. 5 000 EUR – max. 15 000 EUR**

- In the project proposal, applicants have to include a financial plan and description of the required budget for the project (prices should include all relevant taxes).
- If the jury (see further) believes that more budget was requested than actually required for the proposed project, **it can be decided to reduce the requested budget accordingly.** The requested amount does not influence the chances of a particular project to be awarded, and is not a selection criterion.
- Budget not spent on the project within the agreed timeframe must be refunded to the Fund Alzheimer and Neurodegenerative diseases.
- If the young investigator (granted applicant) leaves UGent, UZ Gent or VIB-UGent prior to the start or during the project execution, the budget that is not spent must be refunded to the Fund Alzheimer and Neurodegenerative diseases.
- Both the applicant and the promotor must declare **not to have budget from other sources** (funded research projects) that is already available to perform the specific study described in the application!

4.5. The budget can only be used to cover direct project-related expenses:

- Reagents, consumables, animals, other direct costs
- Certain services (e.g. outsourcing, costs for service/core facilities, ...)
- If well-motivated, the budget can also be used for travel and lodging costs in case the research can only be performed in a collaborating lab.

In this particular case, applicants should still try to apply for funding via external or internal channels (e.g. FWO travel grants, FWO short visit grants, or the faculty mobility fund). The Fund Alzheimer and Neurodegenerative diseases can thus in advance cover the costs, which could be recuperated later upon successful application of funding elsewhere.

- The budget **cannot be used to cover equipment** (and related expenses such as service or maintenance contracts) **or personnel costs** (no salaries, fees, ...), or overhead costs (e.g. publication costs, ...)

4.6. Important note: **only outstanding projects will be granted.** The quality of all submitted projects is assessed by the jury (see further). In case the number of high quality applications Fund Alzheimer and Neurodegenerative Diseases proof-of-concept project guidelines and regulations call 2021

is too low, the review board reserves the right to grant fewer applications than foreseen based on the available budget.

## **5. Application procedure**

### **5.1. Submission of a project proposal**

All information should be provided in English. Use the separate application form that is provided.

Project proposals should be **submitted by email** to **Elke.Debackere@ugent.be** (in cc: **Bart.Dermaut@ugent.be**)

- Part I: Title project, applicant details, current position and affiliation, promotor(s) linked to this project, collaborating researchers.
- Part II: Project outline (max 1 page, references not included): research question, project description
- Part III: Financial plan
- Part IV: Advancement in the field (max 1 page): convince jury about the novelty, feasibility, leap forward, and cross-disciplinary nature of your project proposal, and why you are well-qualified to execute the project
- (Part V – motivation for re-submission; if applicable)
- Part VI: Date and signatures of the applicant, promotor(s) and/or PI of the applicant

### **5.2. Timeline**

- December 24<sup>th</sup> 2021: deadline for submission.
- January 24<sup>th</sup> 2022: announcement of results.
- February 1<sup>st</sup> 2022: start of the projects.

## **6. Review and selection criteria**

### **6.1. Review**

- Project applications will be reviewed by a jury consisting of UGent/UZ Gent/VIB neurodegeneration experts and at least one external jury member.
  - Each member of the jury will score all submitted projects. Jury members who are promotor on a particular submitted project, or heading the research lab of the applicant, cannot
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score this project. The scores by all voting jury members per project will be averaged. Projects will be ranked according to scoring.

6.2. Following selection criteria will be used by the jury

- **Novelty** of the project
- **Feasibility** of the project - as the duration of a project is limited to 9 months, the described planning and expected results should be feasible within this time frame; feasibility does not mean guaranteed successful outcome; high-risk (high-gain) projects are perfectly acceptable.
- Leap forward or **potential** to use the results as proof-of-concept in future larger grant applications, to build larger collaborations, to generate impactful output (valorization, benefit for the patient, ...)
- Cross-disciplinary research is a bonus

The track record of the applicant is not a selection criterion. The Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases aims to support researchers with good ideas, regardless of prior research or track record. The quality of the submitted project proposal (first selection round) and the presentation/discussion (second selection round) of the project by the applicant are the most important criteria.

## **7. Regulations and guidelines for researchers that are granted by the Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases**

7.1. The granted **young investigators manage their own budget**, and are responsible and accountable for this budget

The granted postdoctoral researchers (thus not the promoters of the applicants) will independently manage the Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases budget that is provided for their project (postdoctoral researchers at Ghent University can function as budget holder). The granted researchers thus take full responsibility for the granted budget.

7.2. On each publication or presentation that includes data generated in the framework of the Alzheimer granted project, the support by the 'Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases' must be acknowledged.

7.3. Within nine months after the start of the project, the budget should be spent and research completed. Exceptions (e.g. request for prolongation) are possible but have to be motivated.

7.4. Granted researchers are encouraged to undertake public outreach activities, and communicate about their research projects and results to other scientists as well as to the broad public. Granted researchers will also be contacted by the Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases in this context, and are expected to collaborate in outreach activities that are organized and supported by the Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases (such as the making of short movies on the projects).

7.5. At the latest 11 months after the start of the project, the granted researcher must to **submit a report** :

- Description of the results (1 page) with clear indication if the project was not/partially/completely successful and what advancement was achieved.
- Overview and motivation of the expenses (max 1 page). In addition, an export from SAP (the UGent accountancy system) must be provided, including a detailed overview of all the expenses that were booked on this budget, with allocation to the different work packages (if any).

**Attention:** failure to comply with these regulations could result in exclusion from future application rounds, or request by the Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases for refunding of expenses that could not be motivated in the context of the project outline. Deviations from the project outline are only possible upon prior written request to and approval by the Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases steering committee.

- Future perspectives: planned applications at other funding resources, follow-up of the project, collaborations, ... (max 1/2 page)
- In addition, the laureates should also write a brief paragraph in layman's terms (for a broad audience).

7.6. Granted researchers - and their promotors - who successfully generated proof-of-concept data during the Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases project, engage themselves to apply for (larger) funding from other funding agencies

(maximum 18 months after the end of the Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases project).

- Submission of these future project applications (with referral to proof-of-concept generated during the Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases project) should be reported to the Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases at any time
- In case this is not possible (for example due to failed experiments, or weak results), it should be reported and motivated to the Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases. In case of no (or insufficient) motivation, applicants (and their promotor) could be excluded to future the Fund Alzheimer and neurodegenerative diseases project application rounds.