

## Transatlantic Networks of Excellence in Cardiovascular and Neurovascular Research

### Program Description 2014-2015

#### I. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Fondation Leducq is a private foundation, based in Paris, France, dedicated to improving human health through international efforts to combat cardiovascular and neurovascular disease. Recognizing the potential of international collaboration to enhance research efforts in cardiovascular and neurovascular disease, the foundation created the *Transatlantic Networks of Excellence in Cardiovascular and Neurovascular Research Program*. The principal aim of this program is to bring together teams of researchers with complementary expertise and resources so that they can accomplish together what the members could not do individually. The networks supported by the foundation should advance the science of cardiovascular and neurovascular disease, apply the knowledge gained through research towards the development of technology and therapeutics to improve human health, and support early-career investigators in cardiovascular and neurovascular disease. The Fondation Leducq currently awards up to four *Transatlantic Network of Excellence* grants per year, each for an amount not to exceed U.S. \$6,000,000 over five years.

#### II. NETWORK CHARACTERISTICS

##### Structure and organization

Each network is built around a transatlantic research alliance involving two network coordinators, the *European Coordinator* and the *North American Coordinator*. Fondation Leducq recognizes the two coordinators as the leaders of, and representatives for, the network. The coordinators are jointly responsible for the design of the research program, the composition of the network, the execution of the research plan, and the oversight and allocation of the budget. They are given considerable flexibility in their management of the network, and together, subject to the conditions of the research agreement, may modify the research program, make budgetary changes, and add or remove members from the network, over the course of the five-year term.

Each network includes other member investigators who may participate in the scientific program, and in the administration of the network, to varying degrees. Any investigator with an independent budget from the Fondation Leducq for the network program is considered a network member, and that member's affiliated institution must sign the research agreement before the member can receive funding. Non-funded investigators may also participate in network activities, and the Fondation Leducq does not require that their affiliated institution sign the research agreement for them to be permitted to do so. Other investigators, such as early-career investigators, may participate in the network research program under the supervision or support of one or more members. The role of each member is described in the application; it may vary over the duration of the grant. Network membership is not fixed. Network members may be added to or removed from the network, as mutually agreed by the two coordinators, and approved by the Fondation Leducq.

### Size

The size of the network may vary depending on the theme and on the type of research, and may not be determined fully at the outset. Care should be taken in organizing the network to ensure that it does not get so large as to become unwieldy. As a general recommendation, the total number of institutions should not be greater than six. (INSERM units are considered separate institutions if they are at different universities and/or are administered by different INSERM *délégations régionales*.) All network applicants must demonstrate, in the application, how the composition of the network advances the scientific objectives of the research program. Applicants proposing to include more than six institutions in the network should discuss directly how the administrative and governance challenges associated with a larger network will be addressed.

### Activities and Integration

With the objective of creating a *virtual center of excellence*, each network implements a *joint program of activities*, a research plan that capitalizes on the resources and multidisciplinary expertise in the network by coordinating an integrated, multi-centered approach to the thematic research questions. Networks should strive to advance knowledge on a defined theme, by pooling a critical mass of competence and skills. The theme of a network may cover a variety of interrelated topics or subjects. Network activities are oriented towards long-term goals, not at producing pre-defined results.

Collaboration and integration should provide demonstrable benefit for the research program, including:

- Increasing efficiency by promoting the participation of members with complementary specialization and skills;
- Catalysing creativity through multidisciplinary interaction;
- Expanding access to resources, such as genetically modified animals, specialized techniques, supplies, equipment, etc.;
- Enhancing information sharing and communication, particularly with regard to virtual and interactive working methods, and access to databases of mutual interest;
- Promoting personnel exchange, especially for early-career investigators, over the short, medium and long term. Training positions may be made available to researchers from other network member institutions;
- Developing joint research infrastructures and adapting existing equipment for shared use;
- Optimizing the use of support staff and associated personnel among members of the network.

### III. APPLICATION EVALUATION AND SELECTION

#### Application Process

Fondation Leducq evaluates applications to the *Transatlantic Networks of Excellence Program* in a two-stage process. Interested applicants must first submit a **letter of intent** describing the composition of the proposed network and the general research plan. For the 2014-2015 application cycle the Fondation Leducq will use the web-based service provided by Altum proposalCENTRAL for the submission of all applications. Instructions for applicants, and information about the application process, are posted on the foundation's website, [www.flcq.org](http://www.flcq.org). The Fondation Leducq Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) will review the letters of intent, and request a **full proposal** from a select number of network applicants. In previous years the number of such requests has ranged between 8 and 12 out of approximately 100-120 letters of intent. Full proposals are then evaluated by the SAC at the spring meeting, and up to four per application cycle are recommended to the Board of Directors for funding.

#### Eligibility

Participants in a Fondation Leducq *Transatlantic Network of Excellence Program* must have expertise in cardiovascular, neurovascular disease, or a related field, and must be affiliated with an academic research center. The North American Coordinator must be based geographically in North America, and the European Coordinator in Europe. In the consideration of whether a

country is or is not a part of Europe or North America, conventional geographic boundaries will obtain. Accordingly, for example, Israel is not considered part of Europe. In past years the Fondation Leducq limited participation in the *Transatlantic Networks of Excellence Program* to investigators from North America and Europe. The program is now open to investigators worldwide, with the exception of the coordinator role, as described above. Participation in a *Leducq Transatlantic Network* is contingent upon the commitment of the participants' affiliated academic institution to abide by the financial and intellectual property provisions, and the reporting requirements, found in the *Fondation Leducq Research Agreement* (a copy of which is available on the foundation's website, [www.flcq.org](http://www.flcq.org)).

Transatlantic Network grants are not renewable. Members of concluding networks who wish to reapply with a team that consists of largely of the same participants, and with a theme similar to that of the existing network, are urged to present a new and original direction for research. All applications are considered on a *de novo* basis.

The Fondation Leducq has established the following rules for investigators who may wish to participate in multiple *Leducq Transatlantic Networks*:

- **Network coordinators** cannot participate concurrently in any other Leducq network, in any capacity. Following the conclusion of the program of which they were the coordinators, they are ineligible to apply again to the *Transatlantic Networks of Excellence Program* as a network coordinator, although they are eligible to participate as a member of another network. An exception is made for network members who, for whatever reason, have taken up the responsibility of network coordinator during the term of the network grant; they may apply to the foundation as the coordinator of a new network.
- **Network members** may not participate in more than two *Leducq Transatlantic Networks* concurrently. (This rule applies only to the 5-year term of the grant, and not to the no-cost extension period that networks may wish to pursue.)

**Investigators are not permitted to submit more applications in an application cycle than the number in which they are allowed to participate if all applications were successful.** Practically, this means that in any given year:

- Applicants for the role of coordinator cannot have their name on any other application submitted to the foundation.
- A member of a current Leducq network, which is expected to continue the following year, can be included in only one application to the foundation.

- An investigator not currently participating in a Leducq network can submit a maximum of either one application where his/her role will be that of coordinator, or two applications for that of member.

### Evaluation Criteria

There are five general evaluation criteria employed by the Fondation Leducq in assessing *Transatlantic Network of Excellence* applications:

- **Science:** The quality of the scientific work to be pursued, including the originality and innovativeness of the proposed research, the value of the knowledge to be gained, and the potential for improving human health;
- **Network Members:** The excellence of the network as a whole, of its members, and of its joint program of activities, as assessed based on the materials (publications, patents, international activities) provided by the applicants. Network members are generally well-established investigators with a successful track record of independent research;
- **Early-career Investigators:** The role and participation of early-career investigators in the network, and the commitment of network resources to the training and promotion of these investigators within the network's joint program of activities. (While the foundation does not have a strict definition for early-career investigator, this generally refers to stages up to and including recently appointed faculty.)
- **Collaboration:** The case for the added value of the collaborative enterprise to the overall research program; the extent and depth of the collaborative effort, and of the integration of research teams into the network;
- **Feasibility:** The capacity of the network to implement its joint program of activities successfully, in terms of resources, composition, and managerial experience and skill.

## IV. IMPLEMENTATION

### Flexibility, autonomy, and accountability

Networks are granted a high degree of flexibility and autonomy in the implementation of their joint program of activities, including:

- Discretion in network structure and governance
- Capacity to modify the joint program of activities
- Ability to reallocate financial resources

Some part of the funds available under the grant may be designated at the outset as uncommitted, with the coordinators determining how they should be used as work progresses. Significant changes over the term of the grant in the scientific direction of the program, the composition of the network, or the budget, are possible, but will require Fondation Leducq approval.

Face-to-face meetings are vital to the success of the network collaborative enterprise. Networks should plan to meet more than once per year, especially in the first several years of the program.

Network coordinators are accountable for the progress made by the network on its research aims. The foundation will conduct formal reviews over the course of the five-year term, and can terminate support in the event of significant problems (See section VI. *Fondation Leducq Oversight*).

## V. CONTRACTUAL AND FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

### Research Agreements

A single research agreement, based upon the proposal that was accepted by the Fondation Leducq, is signed between the foundation and the network institutions. The agreement outlines the responsibilities of all parties, the expectations of the Fondation Leducq, the conditions for modifying the original research agreement, the budgetary allocations, the terms of Fondation Leducq oversight, and the requirements for continued funding. A template for this agreement is available on the foundation's website ([www.flcq.org](http://www.flcq.org)).

### Financial arrangements

Networks are awarded up to U.S. \$6,000,000 over 5 years. Two different arrangements for the distribution of funds are available. A graduated distribution is recommended where time will be needed to develop the collaborative research program. Annual payments on the graduate distribution run as follows:

- US\$ 500,000 for year 1
- US\$ 1,000,000 for year 2
- US\$ 1,500,000 for year 3-5
- Total . US\$ 6,000,000

Networks with a strong collaborative history and an infrastructure already in place may choose a more even distribution over five years, with the maximum available being US\$ 1,200,000 annually.

Networks with any unspent funds remaining at the conclusion of the five-year grant may request a no-cost extension for up to one year, which will be granted at the foundation's discretion.

Budgets should be justified based upon the extent to which funds are needed to develop the network and to put into action the joint program of activities. Fondation Leducq funding should not be the sole source of support for the research program; indeed it is important that applicants be able to demonstrate other competitive peer review funding sources for some of the basic research. It is expected that Fondation Leducq funding will be used in large part, though not exclusively, to create and support the network. *The commitment to early-career investigators demonstrated in the budget will figure importantly in the evaluation process, and applications with budgets weighted disproportionately to paying salaries of senior investigators will be viewed unfavorably.*

Fondation Leducq funding cannot be used for the following:

- Work that has been completed or is near completion;
- Duplicate funding for any activity;
- Construction or infrastructure projects;
- Supporting research at a for-profit company.

The Fondation Leducq will consider supporting on-going projects that as a consequence of transatlantic collaborative opportunities may take a new direction.

At the time of the submission of the full proposal, coordinators will submit a detailed budget in U.S. dollars. Should the application be successful, all institutional budgets will be converted to the local currency, using a favorable rate of exchange to be provided by the Fondation Leducq, which is based on the three-year rolling average with respect to the U.S. dollar. The Fondation Leducq staff, with the help of the Scientific Advisory Committee, will review all budgets, and may request additional clarification or line item changes. One research center will assume primary responsibility for the financial organization of the grant. This center will submit quarterly financial reports to the foundation. Grant payments are made directly by the Fondation Leducq to each institutional member, by wire transfer, in the local currency.

## VI. FONDATION LEDUCQ OVERSIGHT

Network coordinators are responsible for submitting progress reports to the Fondation Leducq, on a regular basis. This report, the contents of which are

described in the *Research Agreement*, includes, among other items, a summary of the scientific work completed to date, a statement of expenditures for the term, plans for future work, and proposals for changes to the budget.

Fondation Leducq will:

- Formally review the progress of the scientific work and the management of the network;
- Monitor the finances of the network through quarterly reports;
- Consider changes to the original research design and budget in a timely fashion;
- Conduct a financial audit of the network's expenditures during the five-year term;
- Decide during the term whether to renew the support of the network based upon a satisfactory evaluation of that network's scientific progress and finances, as described in the *Research Agreement*.

Further information about the Fondation Leducq, and its grant program, is available on the website ([www.flcq.org](http://www.flcq.org)).

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