Aidsfonds’ call
for research proposals 2019

The Netherlands to zero new HIV-infections

Grant round 2019

For further information please contact research@aidsfonds.nl

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Aidsfonds is convinced that it is possible: The Netherlands as the first country with zero new HIV infections!

We are well on our way to stop the HIV epidemic in the Netherlands, but now we have to persevere. Every year there are hundreds of new HIV-diagnoses. Every day two people are told that they have HIV. More than two thousand people don’t know they have HIV. Aidsfonds in convinced that it possible to reduce the number of HIV-infections, which is why it is one of the five strategic goals of Aidsfonds.

The Netherlands to zero new HIV-infection is possible by stopping HIV transmission, finding HIV-infections earlier, treating them faster and suppressing them. We can only achieve this by paying attention to the wellbeing of people with HIV, because successful treatment contributes greatly to the health of people with HIV. We also need to effectively communicate the fact that when the virus is no longer detectable, it is no longer transmittable.

Scientific research is essential to drastically reduce the number of HIV-infections

It all boils down to reaching and supporting the right people at the right time in order to prevent new HIV-infections: we must gain better insight into what the challenges are. There where we know what the challenges are effective interventions must be (further) developed in a systematic way. In the case where existing interventions are used, these must be improved and guaranteed.

Together we must search for focus and improvement of our approach, ranging from custom interventions to a smarter use of available data and other methods of analysis.

In 2019, Aidsfonds makes €825,000 available for research projects that bring the number of new HIV-infections in the Netherlands to zero.

With this budget we enable the Dutch research community to fulfil an important role in stopping the HIV-transmission. We realise that this is an ambitious goal and requires good collaboration between different parties and disciplines in the Netherlands.

We are looking for projects that can lead to an improvement of prevention, stop HIV-transmission, find HIV-infections earlier, and treat and suppress HIV-infections faster. This also includes projects that contribute to supporting people with HIV to ensure that the virus is and remains undetectable, and projects that contribute to the quality of life of people with HIV, provided that the projects demonstrably contribute to the 'zero new HIV infections' objective.

The focus of the project must be on gaining new insights and knowledge, which are transformed into effective and guaranteed interventions in practice, with the aim of bringing the Netherlands to zero new HIV-infections within the shortest possible time.

Duration: 18 to 48 months
Budget: €150,000 - €275,000 per project, of which max € 60,000 material costs.

Earlier this year, Aidsfonds published a call for proposals themed "HIV-cure". Cure-research is therefore excluded from the current call.
The Netherlands to zero new HIV-infections: Our vision

Elements that may be of importance for ‘the Netherlands to zero new HIV-infections’

Optimal use of data and knowledge:
- Make optimal use of available data, knowledge, and existing interventions in the Netherlands;
- Make optimal use of new developments in the field of technological / digital innovation concerning behavioural influence.
- Development of interventions based on theory, knowledge, and data (evidence-informed) from different disciplines;
- Taking biomedical, social psychological, and behavioural aspects into account.

Cities and regions:
- Recognition of regional differences and similarities in the Netherlands regarding issues, methods, and capacity;
- Collaboration between cities and/or regions, including sufficient funding of regional partners.

Implementation:
- Early involvement of various disciplines, stakeholders, practice partners, and people with HIV, with sufficient funding for these partners;
- Taking into account in advance that the implementation will be broader than one’s own practice, for example to other regions if the intervention is successful;
- The intervention is accompanied by a thorough effect / validation study;
- Implementation research into ways to increase the (broader) use and assurance of successful interventions.

Our procedures

Application assessment process
- In consultation with the chair of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB; in Dutch “Wetenschappelijke Adviesraad”), Aidsfonds assesses the eligibility and admissibility for further assessment, based on the below mentioned admissibility criteria.
- (Inter)national external referees will peer-review the applications based on the assessment criteria (see below). We aim for a minimum of two and a maximum of four referees per application. A panel of representatives of PLHIV will review the applications based on relevance and involvement of PLHIV in research.
- The applicant has the opportunity to submit a rebuttal to the anonymized review reports.
- The quality of the review reports will be assessed by the SAB after the rebuttal has been received. The board is free to divert from the reviewer’s assessments.
- (A selection of) applicants of the “Next generation program” will be invited to give a presentation to explain their proposal. A selection based on the assessment criteria may
be made by the SAB depending on the number of applications. Applicants who are not invited to give a presentation will be informed by e-mail. This also means the Scientific Advisory Board will give a negative grant advice to the Executive Director of Aidsfonds for these projects.

- The presentations will take place Thursday Nov 14th 8:30 – 13:00 at the Aidsfonds’ office in Amsterdam. The applicant is obliged to explain their research proposal in person. If they are not able to do so, the applicant is ineligible for funding.
- The SAB including representatives of PLHIV weighs and internally discusses the applications, making use of the application, reviewer reports, rebuttals, Aidsfonds’ previous experiences with the applicants, the aim of this call, and Aidsfonds’ organisational strategy.
- The SAB will formulate a grant advice for the Executive Director of Aidsfonds.
- Based on the advice of the SAB, the Executive Director of Aidsfonds decides whether an application is eligible for a grant. In principle, the Executive Director of Aidsfonds has discretionary power to decide which proposals are funded.
- Each applicant will receive a message about the decision taken along with a copy of SAB’s grant advice in the last week of December 2019.
Our criteria
We kindly ask you to take note of the criteria mentioned below, as they will be applied strictly.

a) Admissibility criteria
For this call the grant regulations (“voorwaarden)” and Terms and Conditions as listed on the Aidsfonds’ website apply.

Applicant
• An applicant is allowed to be the main applicant only once. In cases where a person makes more than one application, the one we receive first will be dealt with.
• The applicant (project leader) must (soon) be employed at a widely recognised Dutch institute for scientific research.

Application
• The research’s main focus must be directed towards reaching zero new HIV-infections in the Netherlands.
• Research must be conducted in the Netherlands.
• The application must be written in English;
• The application must be submitted via our online application form, following the guidelines and before the given deadline;
• The application must be co-signed by the financial manager of the section or department and by the competent authority of the institute where the applicant is working (based on the valid mandate arrangements);
• The project must start before the 1st of March 2020. If not, the project grant will be withdrawn;
• Projects that have been awarded High Risk, High Gain-grants in 2016 or 2018 can only enter this Aidsfonds grant round after their completion and approval.

Budget
• You can request a minimum of € 150,000 and a maximum of € 275,000 per project
• The budget that is applied for consists of staff costs and material costs, which includes a maximum of € 60,000,- for non-personnel costs. Aidsfonds follows the Agreement Funding Scientific Research. The collective labour agreement rates (CAO) apply to personnel costs that are not covered by the 2008 Scientific Research Funding Agreement;
• Take into account (if relevant) sufficient funding from cooperation partners: reserve time and budget for cooperation partner and people with HIV;
• Applications requesting financial support for research facilities and equipment will not be considered eligible by Aidsfonds for further assessment;
b) **Assessment criteria**

The following aspects play a role in the assessment process:

**Relevance and impact**
1. The project makes a substantial contribution in the short term to reducing the number of new HIV-infections in the Netherlands.
2. The proposal is relevant and has potential in terms of impact within the context described.
3. The project has a measurable end goal and the proposal also describes how the goal is measured.
4. The project contains a realistic implementation plan.

**Project rationale**
5. The chosen approach is based on sound theoretical substantiation
6. The approach has clear added value compared to the current situation.
7. The proposal builds on existing knowledge.

**Project approach and implementation**
8. The proposal is formulated clearly and concisely.
9. The project is feasible within the set project duration: this also includes the quality of the work plan, adequacy of the chosen method(s) and parties involved, realistic planning, identification of risk factors.
10. The applicant and the project group have sufficient expertise to make this project successful and have involved the most relevant cooperation partners. The quality of the projects that have previously received a subsidy from Aidsfonds may also be taken into account.
11. There is substantial cooperation with stakeholders and other disciplines, including the target group and people with HIV.
12. The intervention is accompanied by a thorough effect / validation study.
13. Implementation research is conducted into ways to increase the (broader) use and assurance of successful interventions.

**Funding**
1. The budget is in proportion to the quality of the project and the expected contribution to the objective.
2. Sufficient budget is reserved for implementation and assurance.
3. The budget is proportional to the number of people that will be reached.

a) **Relevance for Aidsfonds**
This means relevance to the aim of this call and Aidsfonds’ organisational strategy. We also look at the diversity of the portfolio of all submitted projects. For this, we take into account what projects have previously been awarded (e.g. the 2018/2019 “the Netherlands to zero” call for activity-based projects), variation in approaches and geographical spread.

The project must be inspiring and clearly explained to Aidsfonds donors: why does this project bring us closer to the goal?
Projects that are a continuation of a 2016 or 2018 *High Risk, High Gain* project will be preferred over other submitted projects - provided it is of equal merit and provided the initial project was completed successfully.