Call for proposals:

Ophthalmology Research in Low- and Middle-Income Countries
Introduction

1) The foundation funding policy: the path to impact

The foundation aims to contribute to sustainable change and impact for the benefit of humankind. While there are many important and unsolved topics in the supported funding areas, Velux Stiftung focuses on those ideas or challenges which are relevant, but have been neglected by the system, and/or take an interdisciplinary, out-of-the-box approach where other funding opportunities are lacking.

As knowledge entrepreneurs, our grantees should have a clear vision of the impact their research could have and how they can foster the necessary change. We support researchers who have the path to impact in mind and want to actively transfer their newly gained knowledge so it can reach the next level. This ultimate objective determines which audiences need to be targeted, and in which form the results should be transferred to these audiences. This will facilitate that the new knowledge transcends the borders of a single discipline and goes beyond the academic community.

We focus on projects which transfer their discoveries to initiate change and create impact.

Velux Stiftung is a Swiss foundation based in Zurich with a long tradition of supporting ophthalmology research in Switzerland and in Europe.

To learn more about Velux Stiftung: https://veluxstiftung.ch
The path to impact applied to ophthalmology research

Global estimates of visual impairments point to a major challenge with over 300 million people suffering from blindness or moderate to severe visual impairments. Although the large majority of affected people live in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), only a limited research effort is focused on their specific challenges.

To increase the impact of the foundation’s funding in ophthalmology focusing on biomedical research, the board decided in June 2020 to extend its scope and engage in this neglected topic from the perspective of the LMICs for the next 5 years.

Vision, goals and approach of the program

Vision:
Contribute to reducing visual impairments and blindness in LMICs by

• inducing a change of perspective in ophthalmology research, focusing on identifying and working on the specific biomedical knowledge gaps in LMICs.

• supporting research which addresses knowledge gaps in the prevention, diagnosis and management of eye conditions in LMICs.

• developing research capacity in LMICs.
2) **Goals:**

- The knowledge produced is of direct relevance for LMICs.
- The new knowledge can be applied by the scientific community or other stakeholders for the benefit of patients and populations in LMICs.
- The project fosters local research hubs in LMICs through partnerships, capacity building and scientific network development.

3) **Approach:**

The Velux Stiftung wishes to achieve these goals by

- Funding out-of-the-box interdisciplinary research in ophthalmology carried out in partnerships including at least a research group based in a LMIC where researchers join forces and maximize outreach, knowledge and skills transfer (object of this call).
- Supporting structural research capacity building and establishing sustainable research hubs in LMICs to perform locally relevant research (object of future calls).
The call for proposals at a glance:

**Thematic focus:**
interdisciplinary research projects aiming to develop and assess new diagnostic, prevention or treatment methods for eye diseases adapted to the local LMIC context and environment.

**Duration of the projects:**
1 to 4 years.

**Scale of funding:**
up to CHF 100'000 per year with at least 50% to be used in LMICs.

**Partnerships:**
invited to apply are consortia of research groups with at least one partner based in a LMIC. The involvement of a Swiss partner in the consortium is welcome. A partner in a high-income country is however not mandatory. Most of the research should take place in one or several LMICs. To enhance knowledge transfer at least one PI or co-PI has to be an established (R3) or leading researcher (R4) in ophthalmology according to the European Framework for research careers.

**Capacity building for research:**
every research application should entail some research capacity building in LMICs.

**Deadline:**
May 31, 2021

**Final decision:**
November 2021
Requirements for applications

1) Eligibility:
The general eligibility and exclusion criteria for funding by Velux Stiftung apply. Please refer to the corresponding sections on our website (eligibility, exclusion criteria).

In addition to these general criteria, applications that do not contain any elements of research capacity building in LMICs are not eligible. To be eligible, the applicants should also demonstrate that the necessary due diligence is in place to ensure that the project can take place as described in the application. An institution can only submit a maximum of two applications per call as institution of the PI or co-PI (otherwise all applications will be excluded).

2) Geographical requirements:
   a. Our reference for identifying if a country belong to the category of LMICs is the Development Assistance Committee List of Official Development Assistance recipients from the OECD.
   b. Political stability is taken into account.

3) Collaboration requirements
   a. Invited to apply are consortia of research groups with at least one partner based in a LMIC. The involvement of a Swiss partner in the consortium is welcome. A partner in a high-income country is however not mandatory.
   b. In order to maximize outreach as well as knowledge and skills transfer, at least one PI or co-PI of the consortium has to be an established (R3) or a leading researcher (R4) in ophthalmology according to the European Framework for research careers. Further information about the framework can be found here.
   c. The research should mainly take place in one or several LMICs.
   d. In case the PI is based in a high-income country, there must be a clear partnership with, and scientific leadership from, co-PIs based in the LMICs where the project will take place.

4) Thematic focus:
   a. biomedical knowledge gaps in ophthalmology specific to the situation and context of LMICs.
   b. developing and assessing new diagnostic or prevention methods for eye diseases adapted to the local LMIC context and environment.
   c. developing and assessing new treatment methods for eye diseases adapted to the local LMIC context and environment.
d. The priority is set on research addressing neglected issues whose results have a high potential to improve the situation in LMICs.

e. Biomedical, basic, clinical, clinical epidemiology, technology development studies addressing stringently the context, environment and specificities of LMICs will be considered.

f. Developing research capacity for ophthalmology research in LMICs. Will be preferred projects were masters’, PhD students or postdocs based in LMICs will be trained.

5) **Research topics excluded from the call**

Proposals where the main focus lies in health systems / services research, implementation research / intervention science, health economics or community development are excluded from the call and will not be considered.

6) **Contextual solutions required:**

The relevance of the project results to the LMIC context should be convincingly explained. Applicants must ensure that the envisioned innovation/treatment will be affordable, accessible and equitable for the target populations.

The **context** is defined as follows:

a. From the patient side: Nutrition, daily living habits, environmental conditions (light exposure, latitude, pollution, hygiene...), working environment, financial resources, cultural traditions, genetic risk factors that would increase the relevance and acceptance of the solution should be considered.

b. From the eye care provider side: the proposed solution has a realistic chance to be implemented in existing health care systems, e.g., suitably trained eye care personal and infrastructure are available. If not, convincing arguments should be put forward justifying the eye care system development in the future.

c. From the infrastructure side: local availability of electricity, transportation possibilities, internet coverage should be considered for the proposed solution.

d. From the research side: capacities to undertake the proposed research are already in place in the LMIC setting (e.g., facilities, personnel and their skills, research governance), or these capacities will be built during the project.

7) **Use of the funding**

- At least 50% of the budget is used in LMICs.
- Budget of up to CHF 100’000 per year for one to four years. Such budget categories can be requested:
  - Salaries (including university fees for students based in LMICs)
  - Consumables
  - Equipment
  - Knowledge transfer (Travels, conference participation, workshop organisation...)
  - The foundation generally does not support overhead costs.
Application process

1) Call for proposals
A call for proposals will be open every year from 2021 to 2025 with a deadline in spring (for the exact date and further details about the application process please refer to our website). Final decision of the board is expected in November following the deadline. A yearly budget of CHF 2 Million will be dedicated to the program.

If you are unsure about your application’s fit to the call, please contact the foundation management at info@veluxstiftung.ch

2) Selection

a. Selection process

• Formal screening by the foundation management
  Project applications are screened for compliance with the exclusion criteria, and requirements of the call. Applications that do not fulfil these criteria will not be considered.

• Preselection by an international and interdisciplinary scientific committee (the composition will be available on the foundation website).
  The scientific committee (SC) preselects the applications that are promising based on the impact potential and innovation of the approach (see next point).

• Review / prioritisation by the SC
  – All preselected applications are peer-reviewed by one or two members of the SC based on the funding criteria (see next point).
  – In a meeting, the committee discusses their evaluations and establish a shortlist of applications that is presented to the board of the foundation for final selection.

• The board of Velux Stiftung takes the final funding decision among the shortlisted applications.

b. Selection criteria

• Impact (assuming the scientific goals of the project are achieved)
  – Relevance
  – Potential for change
  – Transfer potential

• Scientific quality
  – originality and novelty
  – out-of-the-box thinking.
  – Interdisciplinarity.
• Resources
  – Scientific competence and expertise of the applicants
  – Leadership competence
  – Environment
  – Collaboration
  – Budget

• Local research capacity building: all proposals should include at least one of the following:
  – Training local teams in data collection and data entry
  – Data analysis and/or interpretation
  – Writing for publication
  – Presenting research findings in meetings/conferences

The elements related to research capacity building will be evaluated based on the sustainability of the measures.

See the funding criteria on our website for more information.

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Grant and agreement terms and conditions

The general terms of the foundation apply. Please refer to our website for more information.