

Funding call for research project submissions to the Multidisciplinary Center for Infectious Diseases (MCID) at the University of Bern

The Multidisciplinary Center for Infectious Diseases (MCID) calls for submissions of scientific project proposals on the topic of infectious diseases and pandemic preparedness.

The 2024 call is open to researchers at the University of Bern, the Bern University Hospital/Inselspital and affiliated institutes.

1. Introduction to the MCID Bern

The MCID is a strategic center at the University of Bern, dedicated to the study and mitigation of health, healthcare, societal, ethical, and economic risks from infectious diseases. The promotion of non-tenured academics and of their research to advance the aims of the MCID are a particular priority for the center. The MCID was established in 2021 with the generous support of the Vinetum Foundation.

2. Mission statement

At the MCID, we:

Determine the Origin of Risks

We perform systematic investigations into infectious disease threats and underlying factors for exacerbation using an integrated One Health vision.

Prepare for Risks

We develop and use sentinel and preparedness tools for emerging and future infectious disease risks

Study the Management of Risks

We propose integrated solutions to manage the impact of infectious diseases on animal life, human life, and livelihoods, considering biomedical, social, ethical and economic aspects.

Collaborate

We are a dynamic multidisciplinary community of researchers, integrating scholarship and research excellence to inform effective, protective, and preventive responses to threats from infectious diseases.

Foster Talent

We give dedicated resources to foster the scientific and professional development of the next generation of academic talent on the path to independence.

Disseminate

We carry out training and education of researchers, practitioners, and the lay public to increase the success of effective and coordinated responses to threats from infectious diseases.

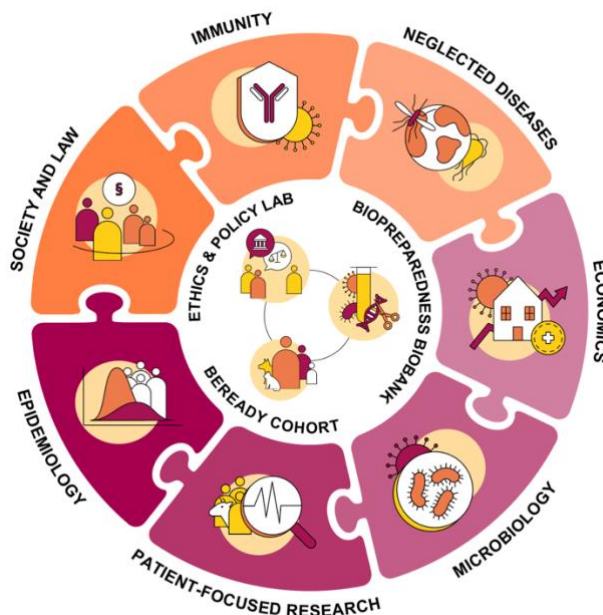
3. MCID academic discipline clusters and core activities

3.1 Clusters

The MCID is composed of [seven specialist, interconnected clusters](#) that bring together subject area excellence in a unique constellation to foster innovative, multi- and interdisciplinary investigations. A list including titles, abstracts, cluster affiliations and project leaders of currently funded MCID research projects, can be found [here](#).

3.2 Core activities

At the heart of the MCID lie its founding three core activities; the BReady Cohort, The BioPreparedness BioBank and the Ethics and Policy Lab. These are envisaged as integral parts of the first MCID funding phase. They pursue independent and long-term research aims in collaboration with MCID clusters, while also offering a service to both MCID and non-MCID research projects.



BReady (Bern, get ready) Cohort

BReady is a population-based pandemic preparedness cohort study. The aim of BReady is improve knowledge about existing infectious diseases at the human-human and human-animal interface and to be prepared to launch research about emerging health threats rapidly. BReady enrolls households, including adults, children and pets, in the Canton of Bern. BReady has completed its pilot phase and aims to enrol 1,500 households by the end of 2025. Participants will be characterised according to demographic, socio-economic, behavioural and health-related factors, and through collection of biological samples for phenotypic and genotypic studies, with yearly follow-up. This research platform uses innovative decentralized data-collection methods and a biobank including human and pet samples. For a detailed description and contacts, [please see here](#).

BioPreparedness BioBank

The MCID BioPreparedness Biobank offers secure storage and controlled access to

highly pathogenic agents following a "One Health" approach. The biobank collection is populated with bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites from diagnostics and research. Additionally, a yeast-based synthetic genomics pipeline is able to produce viral genomes in yeast host. Collaborating with Spiez Laboratory and the Institute of Virology and Immunology, the biobank manages high-risk pathogens, ensuring standardized handling. Services include access to curated pathogen inventory, synthetic viral genome production, long-term storage and regulatory-compliant shipment. With advanced systems and skilled personnel, the biobank guarantees safety, quality, and traceability, supporting MCID research through national and international collaborations. For a detailed description and contacts, [please see here](#).

Ethics and Policy Lab

Tackling infectious diseases requires policymakers and scientists to work together. Policy solutions to address infectious diseases involve trade-offs between values and may lead to ethical dilemmas. The Ethics and Policy Lab's main aims are to foster collaborations between MCID researchers and policymakers and to make ethical dimensions of research and policy decisions transparent. The Ethics and Policy Lab offers a broad range of services to MCID researchers, such as trainings on public policy and ethics, advice on how to engage in policymaking, support in identifying ethical aspects of research or in conducting stakeholder workshops. The Ethics and Policy Lab also conducts research on political and ethical aspects of infectious diseases. For a detailed description and contacts, [please see here](#).

4. MCID Funding Call 2024

Following the outcome of the first funding period starting 2021, with this new call, the MCID launches its second funding period. Similar to the previous call, the MCID aims towards a well-balanced allocation of funding across gender and career stages. These objectives are very important to the MCID since support of a diverse cohort of excellent researchers is a key goal for the center.

4.1 Three Research Themes

In this call for applications for MCID project funding, we seek to fund projects linked to three different themes. Together, these themes align to seek innovative research approaches and developments to tackle and manage infectious disease threats and their consequences.



Investigation of infectious threats and underlying factors for susceptibility using an integrated One Health vision

- Investigation of infectious threats on human and animal health, with a particular focus on:
 - One Health, zoonoses, spillover events, transmission routes, vectors, infections in resource-constrained countries and host-pathogen interfaces, emerging disease threats in relation to climate change.
- Study of the impact of host-specific exacerbating factors, including:
 - Co-infections, co-morbidities, microbiota, immune status, social factors, age, sex, gender, ethnicity, and other demographic factors.
- Improvement of infectious disease tools and knowledgebase, suited to meet current and future threats:
 - Animal disease models and 3R-inspired alternatives, novel molecular targets and approaches, clinical practices, and approaches.

Development of surveillance and preparedness strategies and tools for current, emerging, and future infectious disease risks

- Developing novel tools for pathogen surveillance
 - Epidemiology, and standardization of surveillance methods, phylogenetic epidemiology, hospital data, population dynamics, development of methods for statistics/modelling and data analysis of infectious diseases.
- Preparedness tools
 - Diagnostics, therapeutics, drugs, prophylactic measures, vaccines, clinical practices and models
- Developing policies that seek to:
 - Limit the spread of pathogens to protect both human and animal health, reduce infection burdens, prevent resistance to treatments and that aim to increase the financial incentives to develop prophylaxes and treatments.

Solutions to address the impact of infectious diseases on animal life, human life and livelihoods, considering the multifaceted nature of infectious disease events and their larger impact on communities

- Solutions to combat the social and economic impact of infectious diseases, solutions for healthcare crisis management:
 - Socio-economic impact, society, shocks to the economy, financial incentives, ethical considerations and incentives or controversies
- Policy analysis to address action in the wake of infectious disease threats:
 - Policy, science-policy interface, crisis management
 - Sustainability of policy measures to manage infectious disease threats, social acceptance, ethical considerations
 - Patient care to limit the effect of potentially exacerbating factors, infectious disease susceptibility and severity
- Ethical, political, legislative, and economical consequences from the roll-out of treatment plans for infectious diseases events, considering co-morbidities, age, sex, gender, ethnicity, and other demographic factors. Patient care to limit the effect of potentially exacerbating factors, infectious disease susceptibility and severity

4.2 Submission guidelines for applicants

Submission deadline for all project applications:

Friday, 31st of January, 2025, 17.00 CET

All project funding applications must be submitted in the form of a multi-applicant project proposal, involving at least two applicants. In promoting multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity, multi-applicant submissions must fulfil one or both of following:

- Involve applicants from different scientific disciplines and complementary expertise
- Pursue research lines that span more than one of the MCID discipline clusters

Accordingly, multi-applicant projects may also span more than one theme.

4.3 Overview of eligibility and project scope

Please consult the document “MCID Project Funding Application Guidelines 2024” for details regarding eligibility for funding as well as a detailed description of the application process.

Each applicant can only be included in one application.

- Applicants must be employed at the University of Bern and/or the Bern University Hospital Inselspital, or affiliated institutes OR shall be employed at the University of Bern by latest September 2025.
- Applicants either already lead independent research groups or are on a path towards academic independence (usually at least 2 years post-PhD or equivalent).
- Project duration: 3 years (for permitted exceptions, see Application Guidelines).
- Budget: the maximum total budget for projects is 500'000 CHF, with a maximum request of 200'000 CHF per applicant. The total budget does not need to be evenly divided amongst applicants. For more details, see Application Guidelines.

4.4 Reviewing process and announcement of reviewing outcomes

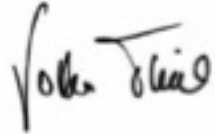
Every submitted proposal shall undergo a preliminary administrative check to ensure that eligibility requirements are fulfilled and that all requested documents have been correctly completed and included. In case of incomplete applications or ineligibility, applicants shall be immediately informed, and their submissions shall not be pursued further.

Viable applications shall be reviewed by at least three expert reviewers and discussed within a multidisciplinary reviewing panel, who shall provide a ranking recommendation for funding. This shall be discussed by a dedicated MCID Research Funding Committee (RFC), which shall then issue a final decision on funding awards, within the scope of available funds.

All applicants will be notified of the outcome of the evaluation of their proposals by 1st of June, 2025.

If you have any questions regarding this funding call or the application process, please contact the MCID Management Office: info.mcid@unibe.ch

Sincerely,



Prof. Dr. Volker Thiel
Co-Chair of the MCID Directorate



Prof. Dr. Carmen Faso
Co-Chair of the MCID Directorate