
OBJECTIVE NR. 10: FUND RAISING

CALL FOR IDEAS 2009

The objective of the fund raising promoted by the Vialli and Mauro Foundation is **to finance a research project on ALS**, chosen among those selected and considered as top scientific excellence research projects by the International Scientific Committee of AriSLA (Agency for Research on Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis).

In June 2009 AriSLA launched its first call for research projects, namely Call for ideas – AriSLA 2009. Projects submitted for this first call for proposals have been unexpectedly numerous.

The assessment process is currently going on and will be concluded in March 2010. **The ranking list of the research projects will be published approximately between the end of March and the beginning of April.**

On the basis of the projects submitted, which are summarized hereafter, we can safely say that the research project that will be financed by our Foundation thanks to the funds obtained through the text donation campaign (SMS SOLIDALE) 2010, will be:

- selected in April 2010, awarding the project that ranks first in the ranking list published by AriSLA
- deal with clinical, basic, technological or translational research.

In order to guarantee the excellence of the project that will be funded thanks to text donations, the objectives, the research fields and above all the assessment criteria adopted in the call for proposals are clearly stated hereafter.



1. Objectives and topics of the call for proposals

AriSLA – Agency for Research on Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) – was established in December 2008 to make ALS research investments more effective and efficient, to speed up the clinical application of the research projects and to provide patients with better care, improved conditions and longer life expectancy.

To this end and thanks to the financial support provided by its founding members, AriSLA launched its first call for research projects in the field of ALS, namely Call for Ideas, with the purpose of enabling scientists and researchers to carry out high quality projects that can provide an important contribution to bridge the gaps in the knowledge about the causes and the potential treatments for ALS. At the same time the call for proposals aims at establishing a long-term and fruitful partnership with the main stakeholders in the field of research on ALS in Italy, as well as at identifying and recording the main research fields and areas at national and international level.

The choice not to focus the first call for proposals on specific topics and research fields aims at avoiding to place constraints in an aprioristic way to the projects of scientists and researchers in order to collect, in the broadest possible way, all the research proposals that can be considered interesting and topical. Therefore all highly innovative projects that the applicant deems of great scientific importance can be submitted, without any limitation.

In compliance with the statute of AriSLA, the fields for research projects are the following:

1. Basic research
2. Translational research
3. Clinical research
4. Technological research

Special attention will be given to integrated and multidisciplinary projects, as well as to highly innovative research projects. The due attention will be also paid to projects that are able to explain to enterprises the potential role that the results of the funded research can play on the market, that is their immediate transferability (translational research).

Hence in the biomedical field the research areas considered a priority in compliance with the objectives pursued by AriSLA are the following: research on pathogenetic mechanisms, search for specific biomarkers of disease and disease progression; the development of new therapeutic approaches underpinned by a strong background. Particular attention will be also paid to technology-related projects with the aim of developing devices able to improve the quality of life of ALS patients.

2. Guidelines for the submission of projects

(translation of an extract from the publication of the call for proposals of June 2009)

Eligible applicants

Applications to *Call for ideas - AriSLA 2009* can be submitted by Italian Universities and non-profit public or private research institutes, whose core activity is consistent with the statutory objectives of AriSLA. To be eligible to submit proposals, the researcher in charge of the project and the partners, if any, must be exclusively researchers with proven scientific independence, that is able to carry out the proposed project (or a project component) autonomously.

Also foreign research teams are eligible, if they submit a project to be carried out in partnership with an organization registered in Italy that acts as lead partner. Nevertheless the foreign partner will have to be compliant with the eligibility criteria set out for the Italian applying bodies.

For-profit or business partners, if any, are entitled to take part in research programmes and partnerships, but they are not eligible for research grants provided by AriSLA.

In order to present the **letter of intent** accompanying the project, the formalization of the partnership agreements between the parties is not required.

The submission of proposals does not imply the formal application for a research grant provided by AriSLA.



Procedure for the submission of research projects

The submission of the applications takes place in two phases.

In the *first phase* (**ended at 1 p.m. on 16 September 2009**) a short **letter of intent** has to be presented, which outlines the research project (see the forms “*Letter of intent*” and “*Guide to the presentation of the letter of intent*” available on the website www.arisla.org).

In the *second evaluation phase* (**started on 16 November 2009 and scheduled to be concluded at 1 p.m. on 15 January 2010**) the researchers and partnerships that have successfully passed the first selection phase are evaluated. They will be asked to submit a **full proposal**, in which the research project/programme is described in detail in all its components (technical/scientific aspects, work plan, expected results, budget, etc.)

All applications must be submitted in English and sent in electronic format using the specific forms available on AriSLA website.

3. Assessment of the projects and selection criteria

The submitted proposals will be evaluated by AriSLA with the support of an *ad-hoc* International Scientific Committee established **to guarantee the transparency and the scientific objectivity of the assessment process**.

The assessment of the submitted proposals will take place in two phases:

In the **first phase, the screening phase**, the International Scientific Committee of AriSLA will assess the research projects submitted on the basis of the letter of intent.

At the end of this phase, a list will be drawn up of the proposals that have successfully passed the first selection phase and have been admitted to the second one.

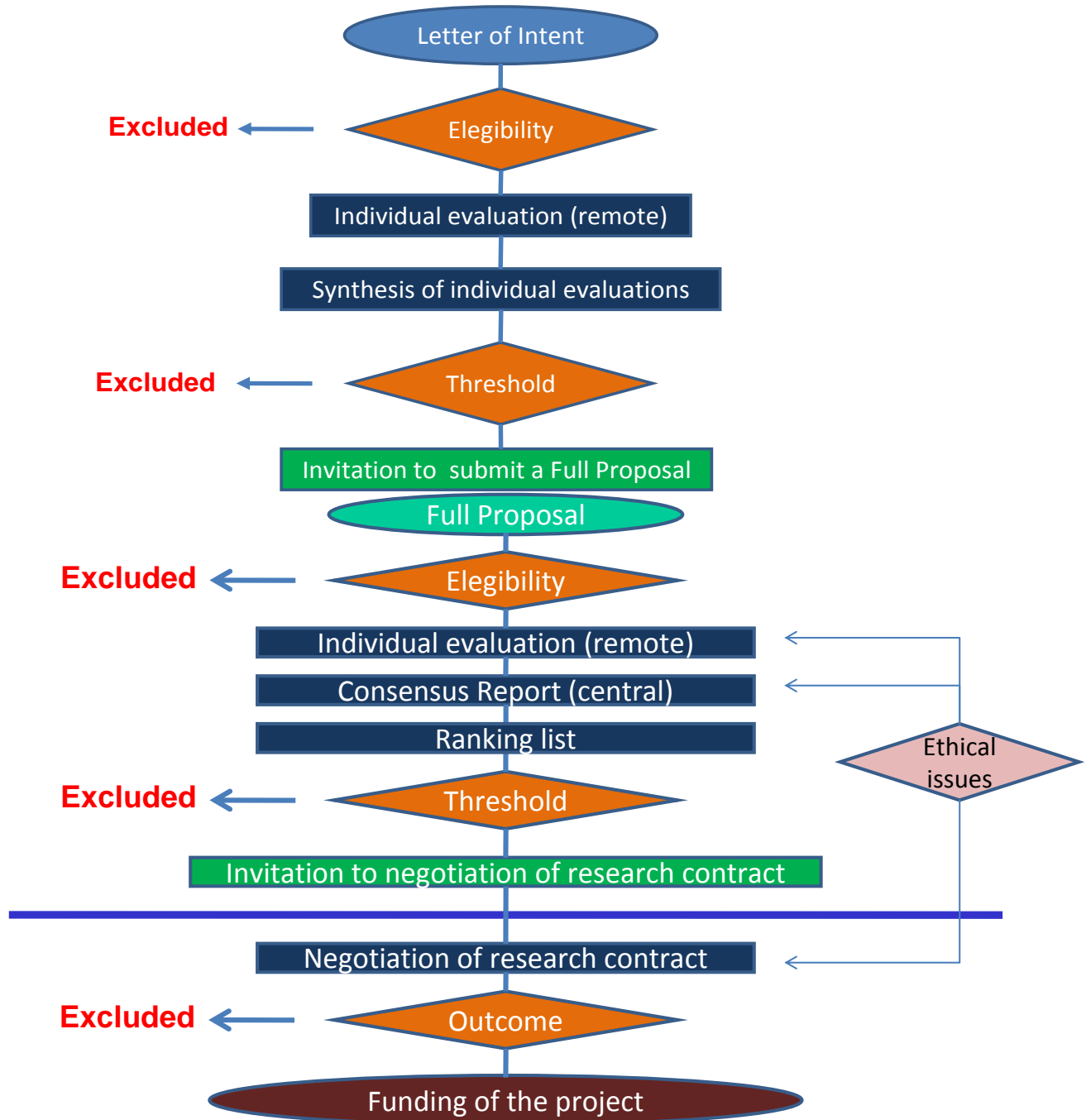
During the screening phase, in the case of proposals deemed particularly interesting and upon request of the Scientific Committee, AriSLA will be entitled to contact the applicants to require further information that can be useful in the assessment process. Moreover already in this phase, if deemed appropriate, AriSLA will carry out direct interviews with the research team in order to discuss possible improvements of the submitted projects or to assess the opportunity of combining different projects if potential synergies are identified.

In the **second assessment phase**, which **will be concluded by 31 March 2010**, the grant applications will undergo an overall and comparative analysis carried out by the International Scientific Committee of AriSLA.

This phase will end with the selection of the projects that will be awarded the grants provided by AriSLA 2009.

To sum up: within Call for Ideas 2009, AriSLA has adopted a peer review evaluation process thanks to the support of approximately **50 international experts, not residing in Italy, to prevent** the evaluation process to be influenced by **potential conflicts of interest with the research teams** that have submitted the proposals. All the members of the International Scientific Committee of AriSLA in charge of the assessment are experts working in the four research fields of the call for proposal: basic, clinical, translational and technological research. In particular, as regards the basic research, there are geneticists, epidemiologists, experts of history of the disease, pathogenetic mechanisms and development of new therapeutic approaches.

The graph below summarizes the peer review evaluation process approved by the International Scientific Committee:





4. Projects submitted to the Call for Ideas – AriSLA 2009

As stated in the document issued on 22 December 2009, at the expiry date of the AriSLA 2009 Call for proposals (September 2009), 105 letters of intent have been submitted, which have already undergone the first phase of the evaluation process. Following the first screening phase, 33 projects have been selected and the research teams responsible for the selected projects have been invited to submit a Full proposal: **the second selection phase is scheduled to be concluded by 15 January 2010.** Thereafter there will be the second phase of the evaluation process.

5. Assessment criteria:

The evaluation and the judgment on the overall quality of the project, which will be issued by the International Scientific Committee, guarantor of the transparency and objectivity of the assessment process, will take into particular account, already in the first phase, the following elements:

- focus of the research project on a sufficiently specific topic;
- proposal of basic research projects that are not in a too early development stage;
- actual ability of the applicant (or of the consortium) to carry out the proposed research program;
- degree of innovation compared to the state of the art;
- originality of the approach;
- multidisciplinary nature of the research;
- actual prospects of transferability of the research results to the industrial sector and/or to the medical practices;
- participation of SMEs or firms in the research program;
- availability of public or private sources of co-financing (in cash or in kind);
- expectation of results entitled to protection in terms of intellectual property.

In the case of a partnership, the following elements will be also assessed:

- composition and expertise of the applying network;
- integration of the operating units and added value provided by each partner in the implementation of the project.

Non-eligible projects

The following types of projects are not eligible for AriSLA funding:

- projects regarding the mere management of the activities carried out by the applying research centres;
- grant applications for the establishment/creation of facilities, laboratories, research or coordination centres;
- projects allocating more than 10% of the budget for operating expenses (also known as *overheads* or current expenses)

Results of the research projects funded by AriSLA

AriSLA is willing to ensure that the knowledge gained through the projects funded is promptly and broadly disseminated and applied to the benefit of the ALS patients. Therefore the applying bodies are highly recommended to specify how the results of their project will be disseminated and enhanced and to highlight the potential participation of enterprises in the research programme.

Should the funded research project yield results entitled to patent protection, it is recommended to read very carefully the paper “Intellectual Property Policy” issued by AriSLA.