

The translational research funding line

of the Else Kröner-Fresenius-Stiftung
in Bad Homburg, Germany

OVERVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Martin Zörnig

Else Kröner

- The direct application of new research findings to benefit human health and well-being was always a primary objective of the Foundation's founder, **Else Kröner** (1925-1988).
- Else Kröner was one of Germany's most successful entrepreneurs. She built the global healthcare group Fresenius out of the Hirsch Apotheke (apothecary) and a small pharmaceutical business in Frankfurt.

The Else Kröner-Kröner-Fresenius-Fondation (EKFS)



- The largest private foundation in Germany supporting biomedical research (ca. 50 Mio. € per year)
- Holds more than 26% of all Fresenius shares

History and Development of the Translational Funding Line

Year	Number of Projects (own projects)	Total funding [€]
2016	3 (3)	94,000
2017	6 (5)	2.1 Mio.
2018	9 (2)	3.0 Mio.

Approval rate in 2018: ca. 30%

Average processing time: ca. 4 months

Total funding budget in 2019: 4 Mio. €

Evaluation of the Proposal

1. Submission of the project proposal
2. Request of scientific review from KOL
3. Request of detailed report about the translational potential of proposal from service provider (e.g. *Ascenion*)
4. Forwarding of reviews to applicants
5. Forwarding of applicants' Rebuttal to reviewer
6. Ultimate recommendation of reviewers about funding
7. Ultimate funding decision of the internal EKFS committee for translational funding line based upon external reviews
8. If total amount of funding exceeds 300,000 Euro: approval from EKFS foundation council

Committee for Translational Funding Line

- Members:
 - Rainer Baule (member of the EKFS foundation council, former CEO Fresenius Kabi AG, Bad Homburg, Germany)
 - Prof. Michael Madeja (EKFS management board member)
 - Rudolph Herfurth (EKFS management board member and CEO of ForTra gGmbH, a 100% subcompany of the EKFS)
 - Prof. Martin Zörnig (CEO ForTra gGmbH and chairman of the committee for translational funding line)
- Decides during meetings of personal attendance or by e-mail circulation procedure

Prerequisites for Funding, Aims of the Translational Research Funding Line

- Projects should exhibit an increased potential (attested by reviewers) for successful development of a medical product with chances to reach the market and to contribute to patients' benefit
- Successful commercialization of the products that are being developed is a requirement for investors that should step in after the EKFS funding period – but not for the foundation for which patient benefit is the highest priority
- Support of “high risk” projects during the early phase of translation as long as VC is not yet willing to invest

Funding Line open for external Projects

- The translational funding line was originally established to further support “own” projects that are already supported by the EKFS funding lines “First applications” and “Key Projects”
- However, in 2017, the translational funding line was opened for external projects

Projects - Examples

2 projects from the field of vaccine development:

- Prof. Plachter: HCMV („EKFS-Project“)
- Prof. Conrad: Avian Influenza (produced in plants)

3 cell and gene therapy projects:

- Prof. Stripecke: Advanced genetically-reprogrammed dendritic cell vaccine for AML leukemia patients („EKFS-Projekt“)
- Dr. Richter: Development of therapeutic cardiac telocytes to prevent heart failure after acute myocardial infarction
- Prof. Hauber: Anti-HIV gene-construct for CD34⁺ HSC gene therapy to cure HIV in HIV-associated diffuse large B-cell lymphoma” (HIVCURE)
(fitting to the subject of the International Research Award 2020 – Else Kröner Fresenius Preis für Medizinische Forschung 2020 : “Genome editing and Gene Therapy“)

Funding Line open for external Projects

ForTra cooperations with several organisation, e.g.:

- *High-Tech Gründerfonds (HTGF)*
- *Innovectis* (technology transfer company of the Goethe University Frankfurt)
- *Boehringer Ingelheim Venture Fund*
- Several TecTransfer units of larger research organisations, e.g. EMBL (*EMBL Enterprise Management Technology Transfer GmbH (EMBLEM)*), Max Planck (*Max-Planck-Innovation*), Deutsches Zentrum für Infektionsforschung (DZIF)
- *Bayrische Forschungsallianz GmbH (BayFor)*
- *Life Science Incubator (LSI)* Bonn and Dresden
- *Ascenion*

Measures to increase the awareness for the funding line

Sponsoring in 2018/2019, examples:

- BioVaria 2019 in Munich (EKFS is Silver Sponsor)
- *Science4Life Venture Cup* (EKFS is Silver Sponsor)

Workshops:

- Translation Workshop (every 1.5 years, general educational presentations for scientists)

3. Translation Workshop at the Georg-Speyer-Haus in Frankfurt, 11.-12.11.2018



Dr. Dior Baumjohann (*Ascenion*)



Prof. Dr. Udo Conrad
(*Leibnizinstitut IPK Gattersleben*)



Dr. Thomas Hanke (*Evotec*)



Dr. Claudia Ulbrich (*Cardior*)



Dr. Jörk Zwicker (*ZSP Patentanwälte*)



Prof. Dr. med. Nisar Malek
(*Universitätsklinikum Tübingen*)



Prof. Dr. Magnus von Knebel Doeberitz
(*DKFZ/Universitätsklinikum Heidelberg*)



Dr. Gabriele Dallmann
(*Biopharma Excellence*)



Spectrum of Translational EKFS Funding

Current status:

- The foundation supports biomedical projects from all entities and without restrictions in terms of subject and contents, including medical technology
- “Early“ and „late“ phase projects are supported (we cover the first patent costs, and we also finance phase I clinical studies)

Perspective:

- In 2021, we will focus the funding on a particular area in which our support is making an impact, based on our own experience of the years of funding

Our funding line is flexible, the evaluation is efficient and we usually decide within 4 months – and our decision is - in principle - independent of a future successful commercialization

Support of companies

Current practice:

- Already existing companies cannot be supported by the funding line because of potential conflict with the charitable status of the foundation – contracting party can only be public and/or non-profit organizations (universities, non-profit research institutes etc.)
- The foundations acknowledges the potential of vulnerable startup projects that still require external funding for preclinical studies before VC steps in

Perspective:

- The foundation plans to establish a venture arm– investment into a biotech fund