



Call for proposal

Research projects leveraging on the GIHSN platform

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The Foundation for Influenza Epidemiology contributes to the worldwide efforts in monitoring respiratory viruses by supporting the **Global Influenza Hospital Surveillance Network (GIHSN <https://www.gihsn.org/>)**. The GIHSN was set up 9 years ago to generate yearly epidemiological and medical evidence on influenza and other respiratory viruses and currently has about **100 sentinel hospitals in more than 20 countries**. Clinical and virologic data collected through the platform are shared with World Health Organisation (WHO)/ Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID) and other policy makers to improve vaccine strains selection and the understanding of influenza circulation and virus evolution.

Data availability: At each site, patients hospitalized with severe acute respiratory illness, based on pre-defined criteria, are identified at admission. Patients are interviewed (demographic and epidemiologic features) and followed up through hospitalization to gather key clinical outcomes (e.g. admission to the intensive care unit, use of mechanical ventilation, in-hospital death). Respiratory specimens are collected and tested for influenza. Some sites also test these specimens using multiplex that cover a range of viral pathogens (such as respiratory syncytial virus, adenovirus, bocavirus, parainfluenza, rhinovirus, metapneumovirus, human coronaviruses and SARS-CoV-2). Whole genome sequencing (WGS) of influenza viruses and SARS-CoV-2 (since 2020-21) are done in a subset. Clinical, epidemiology and laboratory data are aggregated in a centralized database. Most sites also store a subset of respiratory specimens at -70° C for future use, reflecting both positive and negative laboratory results. There are over 80,000 patients enrolled so far in GIHSN, these are patients of all ages hospitalized due to respiratory illness from countries of all economic groups, included in the Southern and Northern Hemispheres, and represent varying levels of influenza vaccination coverage, including countries without a vaccine policy.

The Foundation wishes to support research projects and analytical proposals focused on influenza and others respiratory viruses that leverage the GIHSN platform.

Projects and proposals could include:

- **novel analyses of existing GIHSN data,**
- **the use of respiratory specimens (from selected participating sites) for pathogen discovery or other relevant studies,**
- **the engagement of site-specific investigators (one or more sites) to collect more/new data to further improve our understanding of influenza and other respiratory viruses and related vaccines**

To comply with regulations of data access and privacy, the Foundation has set up **a data warehouse and a data access framework** which will allow **GIHSN site investigators and not-for-profit institutions** to collaborate on analytical proposals and publications.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Any GIHSN site investigators or not-for-profit institutions is eligible for the call for research projects. Applicants should submit a proposal, completing a dedicated application form (please download the Word template attached), which presents the idea for the research project in detail, including:

- requester capacity and experience and affiliation
- research question, rationale, objectives and expected outcomes,
- define whether the request is for having access to dataset (if analytical proposal), use of specimen bank, or for collection of new data in collaboration with site investigators to complement already existent information
- description of the planned analysis,
- expected impact of the research /public disclosure-publication,
- timelines and status of the project preparation (e.g. full protocol, IRB, funding, training,)

The Foundation for Influenza Epidemiology may be able to provide grants to supplement the research project proposal funding. The applicant needs to provide a detail budget, indicating other sources of support.

The **GIHSN data catalogue** (see Excel document attached) aims to provide a high-level fingerprinting of the GIHSN database including:

- references to the generic protocols and related patient questionnaires developed along the nine influenza seasons
- an excel sheet summarising the sites characteristics, vaccine policy in country, case finding specificities, samples selection and testing procedures, tested virus, and cumulative number across seasons of severe acute respiratory illness (SARI) and laboratory confirmed influenza (LCI) and other respiratory viruses (ORV) cases in the GIHSN database per site.
- the list of variables/database codes

The applicants should use this data catalogue to make a **first assessment of the feasibility of their proposal before its submission to the Foundation.**

SELECTION PROCESS

Applications meeting the eligibility criteria will be reviewed and evaluated by the **Independent Scientific Committee of the Foundation which will assess the scientific merit and data sharing requirements of the research projects proposals.** If needed, a feasibility evaluation will be conducted by Impact Healthcare, the company coordinating the network and hosting the database. The **Executive committee of the Foundation will then select the research projects proposals based on strategic relevance and budget availability and then authorise dataset access** (through a secured GDPR compliant IT system).

Sites remain owners of their data and they will be informed of the selected proposals and invited to contribute. Sites will also review and comment upon the final approval.

Applications that involve requests for access to respiratory specimens or need new data collected should preferably engage specific sites in advance, involve the local investigators, and/or include their support letter in the submission package.

The maximum yearly envelope for this optional grant support is 200,000 euros. This amount may be shared across several projects or allocated to a single project as decided through Executive Committee review of proposals. The Foundation reserves the right to not award the entire yearly budget.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications to this call are welcomed all year long. Please download the Word application template on the GIHSN website and send your application by email to contact@gihsn.org. **The formal review outcome will be communicated twice a year (April and October).** It is advised to submit proposals at least 1 month before the review months to be considered.

A formal letter from the Foundation describing the project and optional grant payment milestones will be sent to the selected applicants.

Requirements for funding applicants:

To be eligible for grants allocation, applicants should be not-for-profit public institutions and the following documents should be provided along with the proposal to attest the above status:

- Last annual and financial reports (administrative documents of the institution)
- Bank account number (official bank document – with swift number)
- List of the members of the board of governors (i.e. group of people who jointly oversee the activities of the institution)
- Statutes and Copy of the decree of creation