INCF POLICY DOCUMENT ON EXTERNAL PROJECTS

The INCF priorities and directions are based solely on the collective benefit of science and research, with global brokerage being an important function of the INCF. Activities in the INCF build on the Memorandum of Understanding and the Business Plan. According to these documents, the INCF is expected to seek funding in addition to the contributions made by Participants. The Business Plan describes approaches for how INCF could pursue funding to become self-sustained, direct grants from funding, philanthropic and not for-profit organizations. Whatever the source, funding shall be in accordance with the mission and values of the INCF and shall not compromise the independence or impartiality of the organization. The INCF strategic goals, mission and values for 2011-2015 are the following:

- The INCF mission is to foster scientific interaction for discovery and innovation and facilitate the flow of information and knowledge between researchers in both academia and industry; to serve as a credible and sustainable global network for developing, maintaining, to evaluate internationally coordinated neuroinformatics activities and infrastructures for standards, guidelines and references; and to facilitate training for producing highly skilled neuroinformatics researchers worldwide.

- INCF values are: Openness – INCF activities are open to all researchers who can contribute to neuroinformatics at the international level; Neutrality – INCF priorities and directions are based solely on the collective benefit of science and research, with global brokerage being an important function of INCF; Stability and Lasting Accountability – INCF participating countries value and directly invest in sustainable products, services, and programs; Result Orientation – INCF criteria for action are results and deliverables to fulfill the mission; Global Excellence – INCF benchmarks for all activities are state-of-the-art and best-practice in both academia and industry; Leadership and Innovation – INCF innovative approaches help to gain and maintain international leadership in supporting neuroscience research.

Strategic guidelines on how to leverage these options in the best interest of INCF’s mission are the subject of a separate document. This document describes recommended policies for the participation of INCF in external research projects.

In seeking external research support the INCF must be mindful of the costs, risks, and benefits of such activities. The following points to consider are meant to guide the INCF in determining its role, the value in, and purpose of seeking grant funding opportunities. These points should be considered when requesting approval from the INCF Governing Board, or appropriate INCF deciding body, in pursuing research initiatives and activities.

**Key Principles**

An INCF core value is neutrality therefore it will only participate in funding applications for activities that serve the collective benefit of the neuroinformatics community. Toward that end, all results and products developed through its research efforts must be “open access” and be made broadly available to the research community.
Additional research activities must not impact ongoing coordinating initiatives and staff responsibilities and therefore should not result in increased costs to the organization beyond those received from grant support. If such a case arises, and node membership funds are needed to finance the secretariat’s research efforts, these costs need to be justified in accordance with INCF’s strategic goals. In exceptional circumstances the Governing Board or the appropriate INCF committee may agree to contribute core resource to an externally funded research project, where a core contribution is a condition of external funding and the research will add value to INCF’s ongoing activities.

In seeking external funding the INCF GB or appropriate INCF committee will consider and determine the appropriate balance of its coordinating efforts relative to its research efforts. This will be guided by an implementation plan that will describe each research project in terms of its financial and management needs, priority relative to other ongoing activities and role in delivering INCF’s strategic goals (as defined by the 2011-2015 strategic plan or other INCF documents describing its strategic guidelines).

When applying for research support, the INCF secretariat may be competing with other organizations with which it coordinates activities, with Governing Board members themselves, the organizations they represent, or with researchers and organizations from the informatics community it serves. This potential source of conflict and real or perceived conflict of interest should be considered and addressed through whatever means that fit the particular circumstance. Possible measures include: (1) Participate as a collaborator or consultant with node country researchers rather than the primary or principal investigator (PI); (2) If PI is the appropriate role, establish a research arm of the secretariat and install an external advisory subcommittee that is independent of and not directly influenced by or involved with the coordinating efforts of INCF.

INCF staff and Governing Board member participation in external funding applications, should be made public with individual conflict of interests (COIs) managed appropriately and publicized.

INCF’s research role will not impact or inappropriately influence its coordinating activities.

**Policy on seeking external funding**

The yearly contributions of Participants are aimed to fund core INCF activities. Funds from external projects are used for their specific purpose and need to be kept in a separate budget line.

After the termination of an external project, an analysis of the results need to be presented to the Governing Board and overall contribution to INCF’s strategic goals, mission and values for 2011-2015 (or in context of other INCF strategic documents) assessed.

**Project requirements and expectations**

Each project is expected to be aligned with the mission of the INCF without compromising the real or perceived independence or impartiality of the organization.

Each project is expected to be a priority for INCF and the research community and to align with INCF’s strategic goals, mission and values for 2011-2015.
Each project is expected to either strengthen existing programs or to broaden the scope of INCF without compromising the programs of the INCF and/or other internally funded activities.

Each project is expected to have a well-defined management and financial plan describing the potential use of internal resources in the project. Each project should provide sufficient new funding, so it does not deplete internal resources.

Each project should be of the scope and size to be managed and accommodated alongside ongoing coordination and research activities within INCF.

Documentation demonstrating adherence to these requirements for a project under consideration will be presented to the Board or a Subcommittee of the Board for decision. A review will take place every second year to evaluate whether INCF’s involvement in the project should continue or be terminated.

**Role of INCF Secretariat**

The INCF Secretariat will provide a plan and a procedure to manage both INCF core activities and activities in external projects and each additional external project.

The INCF Secretariat must ensure to have sufficient resources (time, space, funds) for taking part in a new project. Involvement in seeking and executing external projects (grant writing, matching funds) should not be at the cost of INCF core activities.

INCF Secretariat will ensure external funding streams for coordinating and research activities must be kept separate.

The INCF Secretariat should take part in the project with focus on delivering brokerage and dissemination (within the project consortium and towards the global community) and on delivering developments with a potential for sharing and broader use by the community.

**Role of INCF Nodes**

INCF national nodes that have the relevant expertise and wish to take part in a project led or coordinated by the secretariat may receive project funding.

Where nodes are competing for the same objective, INCF will offer the same level of support and resource to each party.

**Charting of opportunities for external project funding**

The Executive Director collects information about opportunities for participation in external projects, and/or may proactively identify such opportunities.

Governing board members and national nodes with an interest in having INCF involved in a given external project should communicate their interest to the Executive Director.

The decision-making process and the roles and responsibilities of the director the governing board members, and other potential advisory entities, in seeking external research support are described in a separate document.