

### 3.6.3 Details on the Mandated Organisation

In November 2018, the German federal government and the governments of the German states, acting in unity with the Joint Science Conference<sup>30</sup> (GWK), has decided to fund one of the largest scientific national data oriented initiatives named National Research Data Infrastructure (NFDI). The initiative has a current budget of €900 Million, which is secured for ten years.

With the goal to bring scientific communities together to eventually provide science-driven data services, the infrastructure also aims to contribute to the development of EOSC and to connect German data infrastructures with European and international platforms. NFDI is the mandated member in the EOSC Association for Germany<sup>31</sup>.

The NFDI is a close interaction of two entities. On one side there is the NFDI association, which is the registered legal entity that receives funding for staff and offices. It's headed by a directorate that has the main goal to coordinate a network of organisations and these organisations organize themselves into consortia.

On the other hand are the Consortia. Over three funding rounds, starting with calls for proposals in 2019 and 2020 and accompanied by the DFG<sup>32</sup>, consortia were invited to develop a portfolio of FAIR data services oriented along scientific disciplines or communities. A third call is being prepared for 2021.

The NFDI consists of a number of consortia which are associations of universities, non-university research institutions, departmental research institutions, academies, and other publicly funded information infrastructure institutions or other corresponding actors. As of this writing 9 consortia are in operation with 18 more awaiting formal approval. Each consortium will develop and offer a service portfolio for research data management for its subarea. Proposals and the consortia of NFDI must comply to the requirement of describing how they will connect with international developments, such as EOSC, and how they plan to ensure compliance with the FAIR principles<sup>33</sup>.

In addition to the scientific consortia that work on a thematic basis, project structures will be established that are primarily concerned with the construction of a horizontal technical infrastructure. The organisation of these basic services has not yet been finalised, but they will in any case link up with existing European organisations such as EOSC.

#### Consortia as members of the NFDI association

There will be two kinds of consortia. One, which is usually called "NFDI consortium", is funded by the DFG. In a scientific selection process that is principally and legally separate from NFDI, funding consortia are formed. Candidate consortia write a proposal to be submitted to the DFG, which is then carefully reviewed by a number of international evaluators. Based on this evaluation, a list of consortia is proposed by the DFG to the GWK. It's the GWK that makes the actual approval. This procedure guarantees a research driven process, where researchers select which consortia are

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.gwk-bonn.de/en>

<sup>31</sup> Because of procedural steps the German DFG is currently a placeholder for this role until the earliest General Assembly of the EOSC Association.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.dfg.de/foerderung/programme/nfdi>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.eosc-pillar.eu/establishing-fair-data-services>

eligible for funding. The GWK, the political representation, can only approve or disapprove but they cannot add or change proposals.

This first type of DFG funded consortia will be transformed into the second type, which is a consortium that exists within the NFDI association. This step is necessary because German law requires that membership in an association is voluntary, so the NFDI directorate cannot force anyone to become a member of an association. NFDI cannot expect that the DFG funded consortia become members of the NFDI association. Therefore, the directorate must show the benefits of participating in the coordinating activities that it conducts within the association. The members will become subsidiaries in the NFDI association.

Currently, NFDI is building a network of researchers and is building cooperations with existing organisations and initiatives such as MDI, DFN, GAIA-X and National Initiatives as well as with EOSC. Only in the near future, NFDI is foreseen to play a central and active role in building up a federated data infrastructure in Germany. This means that today, NFDI consortia, although representing the building blocks of a new national data infrastructure, cannot be compared with the regular and established infrastructures. On the other hand, because NFDI today fulfils a central role and at the same time encompasses all existing scientific communities it is interesting to learn how the existing scattered landscape will be transformed in a collaborative interoperable data environment.