



MIRRI **IS21**
IMPLEMENTATION AND
SUSTAINABILITY FOR
THE 21ST CENTURY
MICROBIAL RESOURCE RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

IS_MIRRI21
Transnational Access Programme

Guidelines for TNA Applicants

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**The application to the IS_MIRRI21 Transnational Access programme
should be made via the TNA portal available at
<https://www.mirri.org/microbial-resources-data/transnational-access-tna/>**

1. WHO CAN APPLY FOR THE TNA?

1.1. Eligibility

Applicants should contact the Access Officer for technical verification and feasibility of their proposals **prior to application**.

Eligibility of proposals will be assessed upon the following criteria:

- ✓ The access must be trans-national for selected 'users', i.e., users must apply for access in a country other than the one of their home institutions
- ✓ PhD students, postdocs, researchers, or research engineers working/studying in recognised academic or research institutions, non-profit organisations or biotechnology companies can apply for the TNA. Early career researchers, multidisciplinary proposals and applicants from non-microbiology fields are also encouraged to apply
- ✓ Master and bachelor students are not eligible
- ✓ The call is open to worldwide applications, but limited to 20% of the total participants for residents in non-EU countries
- ✓ Access is funded for a period no longer than 30 days, including weekends
- ✓ Visits must be carried out from the signature of the contract to November 2022 included
- ✓ The applicants must have an active contract with their home institution by the period of the access
- ✓ The applicants must have the complete support and validation of their home institution
- ✓ Only proposals submitted before the call deadline will be accepted

Additional information :

- ✓ Collaborations with the Access Provider's staff are encouraged but not mandatory.
- ✓ All data obtained during the TNA should be Open Access (except for companies), and publications using this data should include the IS_MIRRI21 acknowledgement text.
- ✓ **Users coming from outside the EU will need to make their own visa and travel insurance arrangements.**

For more information regarding eligibility for the TNA programme, please **contact the Access Officer** (access@mirri.org).

2. TNA process – application procedure

The TNA call involves seven steps, as illustrated in the figure below. Proposals must be submitted online through the **TNA portal** (<https://apply.mirri.org/submit-proposal/>).

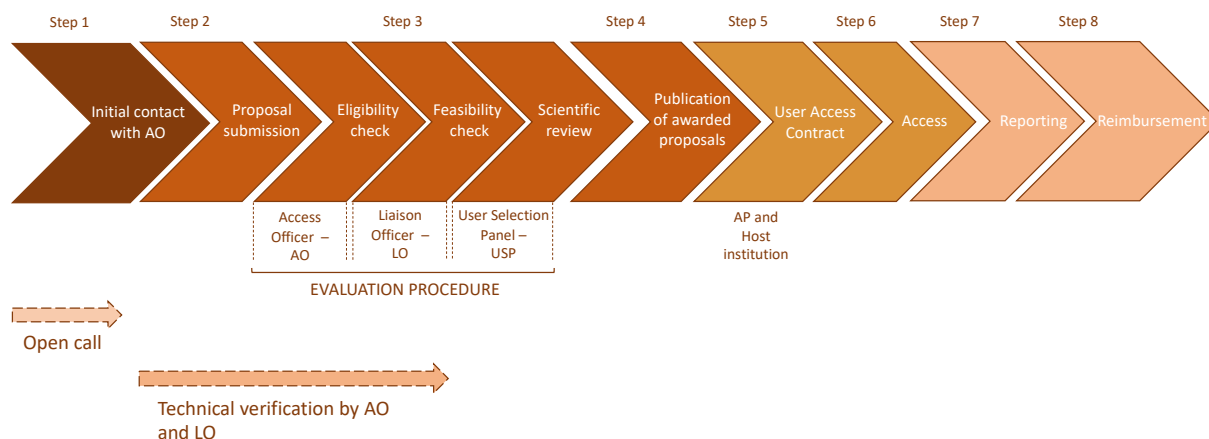


Figure 1. Timeline for the TNA call

Step 1. Initial contact with the Access Officer. Applicants should consult the TNA catalogue and identify the offer of interest. Afterwards, they should contact the **Access Officer** before the submission of their proposal. The **Access Officer** will guide the applicants throughout the process and interact with **Liaison Officer** to verify the feasibility of the project. Applicants who do not complete this step before submission might be excluded from the evaluation process.

Step 2. Proposal submission. After discussing the technical feasibility of the project, the applicants should draft a research proposal according to the parameters described in the application form. Applicants should complete the online application and upload the requested documents.

Step 3. Evaluation procedure. The evaluation of proposals will be carried out considering the following steps:

- ✓ *Eligibility check:* The **Access Officer** will select only the proposals that fulfill all requirements enlisted in the eligibility section to continue in the evaluation process. Incomplete proposals will not be considered.
- ✓ *Feasibility check:* **Liaison Officers** determine the feasibility of the projects regarding technical/logistical aspects and their coherence with the TNA offer. This feasibility check is done prior the User Selection Panel (USP) scientific review.
- ✓ *Scientific review:* Selection of proposals is based on peer review evaluation with scientific merit as the main criterion. The scientific review uses a panel-based system called **User**

Selection Panel (USP) to avoid conflicts of interest. This panel of external scientist evaluates the research projects and rank them based on the final score.

Step 4. Publication of awarded proposals. Applicants will be notified of the final decision *via* email and selected proposals will be announced through the web page of IS_MIRRI21.

Step 5. User Access Contract. The access should be carried out under the terms of a contract signed by the access provider and the users' host institution. This is a legally binding document in which rights, obligations and technical and logistical details of the TNA visit/project are specified.

Step 6. Access. The user develops the research project awarded.

Step 7. Reporting. Within three weeks after the TNA access is finished, users from both physical and remote access are required to (i) sign a "Confirmation of Access" form, (ii) deliver an "Activity Report", (iii) answer a "User Questionnaire" and (iv) a survey about the TNA Access experience. **The reimbursement of expenses incurred by the Users during the TNA Access will take place only after these documents are delivered.**

Step 8. Reimbursement. The reimbursement of travel and subsistence costs will be done according to the Access Provider's national laws and procedures. It is expected to be completed within the first month after the completion of access. Failure to provide a report will result in the user being billed for the entire cost of the access.

3. Application step by step

Before submission of a research proposal, applicants must follow a workflow, as indicated in Figure 2, comprising: registration on the TNA web portal, selection of the TNA offer of interest, filling the proposal (applicants will be able to modify their proposals, if necessary, but only before submission), accepting terms and conditions and submission. After the call is closed, applicants can monitor the status of their application via the TNA web platform and being notified about the results.

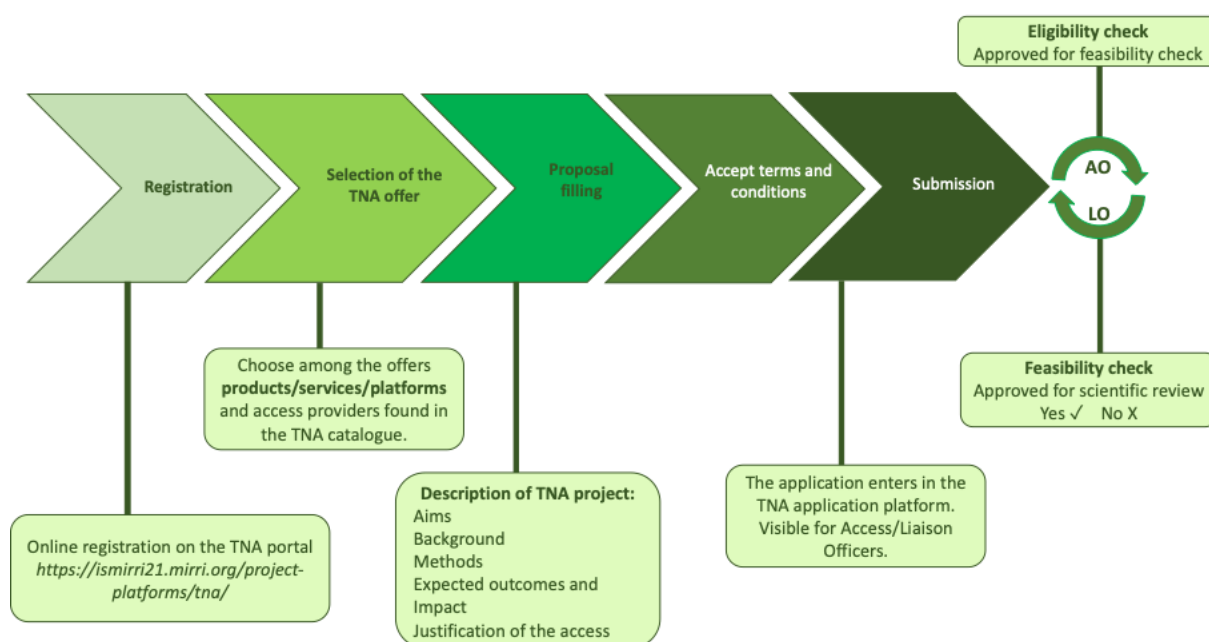


Figure 2. TNA online application workflow

Registration

Applicants can register in the TNA portal on <https://www.mirri.org/microbial-resources-data/transnational-access-tna/> after registration users can log in to their TNA account to complete the application form before the call deadline.

The TNA web platform allows the Access Officer to manage and follow-up the application and evaluation process, the access and reporting from users. It also allows the applicants to be informed about their application status in fulfillment of our transparency principles.

Users' data will be kept private and will be accessible only by those involved in the selection procedure of the IS_MIRRI21 TNA call. Personal information is required for statistical records of our programme and reporting to the European Commission, its use follows EU laws on data protection.

Selection of the TNA offer

Applicants will find a list of TNA offers provided by the access providers. Applicants should select the offer of interest among the products, services and facilities described by each Access Provider and confirm the selection. To select more than one offer click on "save and add another service/technology", if not, continue with the next step of the application by clicking on "add and continue".

Proposal filling

Research proposals must be drafted in English, clearly and avoiding use of jargon. Abbreviations should be explained. The proposal can be saved and completed afterwards by clicking "save and continue". The application proposal form includes :

- Objectives of the project
- Relevant background
- Methods
- Expected outcomes and impact
- The reason why the chosen research infrastructure is essential to carry out the project.

The length of the proposal should respect the maximum of characters specified in the application form.

Applicants should upload a CV and an **access planning form**. A **CV format**, which use is optional and the **access planning form** are available for download in the TNA portal. A **support letter** from the applicant supervisor at the host institution should be also uploaded. In case the applicant is a group leader or head of facility, no support letter is required.

Accept terms and conditions

Applicants should accept the terms and conditions to submit their proposal. This step is done only when the proposal is completed, and all additional documents are uploaded.

Submission

After the submission, the proposal can no longer be modified. The proposal status can be followed-up through the dashboard at the applicants' personal space on the TNA portal.

Applicants will be notified by email about the results of the selection process over a period of six weeks.

4. Evaluation procedure

The selection of proposals for the IS_MIRRI21 TNA is based on peer review evaluation with scientific excellence as the main criterion. The TNA programme uses a panel-based evaluation system called **User Selection Panel (USP)**. This panel of independent scientists scores the proposals for funding the access to the IS_MIRRI21 partners.

A minimum of two evaluators will be assigned to each proposal. Each reviewer will evaluate the research project proposal and the applicant profile. The review will consist in providing scoring based on established criteria and brief explanatory comments sustaining the score given to the research projects and the applicant. These comments will be summarised in a final statement called "evaluation report".

The evaluation and selection of proposals will be carried out under the principles of **excellence, transparency, fairness and impartiality, confidentiality, efficiency, ethics, and**

research integrity considerations. The USP will score each proposal according to the following criteria:

Originality and impact of the research project

- ✓ Is the proposal aligned with MIRRI's Strategic Research & Innovation Agenda 2021-2030 in the domains of (1) health & food, (2) agro-food or (3) environment & energy?
- ✓ Are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art? Does it propose original concepts, approaches, or development between or across disciplines?
- ✓ Is the proposed research high-risk/high gain?
- ✓ Could the outputs of this research be envisaged to have an impact on future research or technology?

Scientific Approach

- ✓ Are the proposed research methodology and the access arrangements appropriate to achieve the goals of the project?
- ✓ Does the proposal involve the development of novel methodology or the use of technology non-commonly applied in the field?
- ✓ Is the use of the facility, the proposed access planning, resources, and applicant's commitment adequate and properly justified?

Knowledge and expertise of the applicant

- ✓ Does the applicant have the required scientific expertise to successfully execute the project?
- ✓ To what extent the new competences and skills that will be acquired during the access are relevant to the researcher's existing professional experience or will give a boost to her/his future career?

Finally, the applications will be scored using the following values:

Score	Definition
5	Excellent. Proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criteria.
4	Good. Proposal addresses the criteria very well. Any shortcomings are minor.
3	Fair. Proposal addresses the criteria, but a few shortcomings are present.
2	Poor. The criteria are inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
1	The proposal fails to address the criteria or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.

The maximum grades for all selection criteria sum 45 points for each reviewer. The final score will be the sum of the individual scores given by the two reviewers.

5. ACCESS

5.1 User Access Contract and Material Transfer Agreement (MTA)

An **MTA** (for remote access to biological material) and/or a “**User Access Contract**” (for physical access and remote services) should be agreed between the user and the Access Provider specifying the terms and conditions of the access. In case of virtual access, the user should read and accept the Terms of Use established by the Access Provider.

The **User Access Contract** (UAC) is a legal document that specifies the rules, obligations, logistics and technical details of the TNA visit. This document should also specify the administrative procedures for the reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses. The user can accept or negotiate details with the **Liaison Officer** or the **legal office** from the Access Provider.

Users are encouraged to check in advance with the **Liaison Officer** the provisions and the administrative procedures of the Access Providers for the reimbursement of the expenses planned for the TNA visit.

As the UAC is a legally binding document, both parties must be advised by their legal officers in the negotiation procedure. If the document is approved by both parties, the contract is signed by:

- The legal representative of the Access Provider.
- The legal representative of the user's home institution.
- The user

The parties should agree on how to conduct the signing and exchange of signed documents, since it depends on legal and administrative requirements of local organisms (some require originals whereas others are satisfied with PDF copies of the signed documents).

As soon as the parties have signed the user access contract, the project can officially start according to the dates and conditions specified in the document.

A copy of the signed user access contract must be also provided to the **Access Officer**.

Users should finalise the details regarding the access logistics with the **Liaison Officer** before the visit, such as the detailed timeline of the proposed work, previous arrangements for the start of the experiments or other actions as specified in the contract.

5.2 Support provided before, during and after the access

The **Access Officer** is the main contact for the applicants during the TNA call, assisting them during the application, evaluation, and reporting process.

The **Liaison Officer** will provide support to the users during the access. This assistance is provided to fulfill the terms and conditions agreed upon by the user and the access provider.

Scientific support

For physical access, Access Providers offer access to their facilities and their basic equipment. Experimental support includes the supply of standard disposables and the use of standard laboratory equipment (all should be specified/listed in the research proposal and the user access contract). The applicants should list in the project proposal the equipment and disposables needed for executing their work. During the initial contact with the Access Providers and during the feasibility check, the **Liaison Officer** specifies which items in this list are considered as “standard” and which are not. Items outside the aforesaid definition of “standard”, such as unusual and/or expensive consumables are not included in the access, and either must be supplied by the user or ordered by the access provider and then charged to the user.

The provision and transfer of biological material (living resources and their derivatives, such as DNA or proteins) should be ruled in a Material Transfer Agreement (MTA) or their use should be specified in the “User Access Contract” (later described). Field material is provided under the terms of the User Access Contract and its use by the user shall be subjected to the European and international legislation. Cultured material is provided under the rules and regulations established by the Access Provider.

Logistical support

The **Liaison Officers** together with the facilities’ local staff will advise and assist users with logistics including bookings, travel itineraries, on-site accommodation, and local transportation.

Technical support

In case of physical access, users will benefit from access to laboratory, services, machines, products, and assistance during the TNA. The **Liaison Officer** or an appointed person in charge, will take care of the day-to-day needs and challenges of the user within reasonable expectations.

The **Liaison Officer** should guarantee the access to core facilities, machines, resources, and data necessary to carry out the TNA project. If needed, training will be provided for the proper and safe use of the facility.

In case of remote access, the **Liaison Officer** should liaise between the user and the infrastructure staff to guarantee that of all activities necessary to develop the user's project will take place.

When shipping of material is required for the project execution at the Access Provider, the user should handle the shipping, cover the costs, and inform the **Liaison Officer** about the details of the shipment schedule. **If shipping of material produced during the TNA visit is required, the Access Provider will handle the shipping to the users' home institution. Costs will be covered by the TNA programme (up to 400 EUR).**

6. REPORTING

6.1. Confirmation of access

A confirmation of access form should be downloaded from the TNA portal on <https://www.mirri.org/microbial-resources-data/transnational-access-tna/>

Users and access providers should complete and sign this document for each access provider visited during the TNA. The document (in PDF format) should be delivered to the **Access Officer** via email within two weeks after the end of the TNA visit. The confirmation of access is mandatory for the on-site and remote access.

Failure to provide this document will result in no-reimbursement of the entire access costs.

6.2. TNA activity report

A TNA activity report form should be downloaded from the TNA portal on <https://www.mirri.org/microbial-resources-data/transnational-access-tna/> .

Users should describe in this document the objectives, methods, and preliminary results of the research project carried out during the TNA visit and deliver it to the **Access Officer** (and cc the **Liaison Officer**) via email. This report is mandatory only for the on-site access and the remote services.

One document for each access provider visited during the access should be filled and signed by the user within three weeks after the end of the TNA visit.

Failure to provide this document will result in no-reimbursement of the entire access costs.

6.3. User questionnaire and TNA feedback survey

Each user from a project funded by an EU Research Infrastructure is requested to complete the "User Questionnaire". The questionnaire enables the Commission to evaluate the Research Infrastructures Action, to monitor the individual grant agreements, and to improve the services provided to the scientific community.

The questionnaire can be found following the link: <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/RIsurveyUSERS> and must be filled within two weeks after the end of the TNA visit.

Users must answer the questions and create a PDF file by clicking the option “download the PDF version” on the webpage before submitting. Users should write in the Question 1, Number and Acronym of the Project: "871129 IS_MIRRI21". Users should send this PDF file to the **Access Officer**.

Failure to provide this document will result in no-reimbursement of the entire access costs.

For the TNA feedback survey, the user will receive a link to answer a questionnaire within two weeks after the end of the TNA visit.

Through this user feedback, the users will share their experience during the whole process, starting from the application procedure until the outcomes and experiences of their access at the visited infrastructures. These exchanges will give rise to improvements for the future TNA calls of the IS_MIRRI21 project.

7. Dissemination of results and acknowledgements

IS_MIRRI21 follows the **FAIR** (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) and **Open Access** principles¹. All projects receiving Horizon 2020 funding are **required** to make sure that any peer-reviewed journal article they publish is openly accessible, free of charge (article 29.2. Model Grant Agreement).

Scientific research data, which is the data underlying publications and/or other data (such as curated but unpublished datasets or raw data) should be **Open Access** when there is no case of conflicts of interests regarding commercialisation of the scientific information, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), privacy concerns and security. SMEs are excluded from this rule.

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¹ Guidelines to rules on open access to scientific publications and open access to research data in Horizon 2020. European Commission – Directorate General for research and innovation. Version 3.2, 21 March 2017.