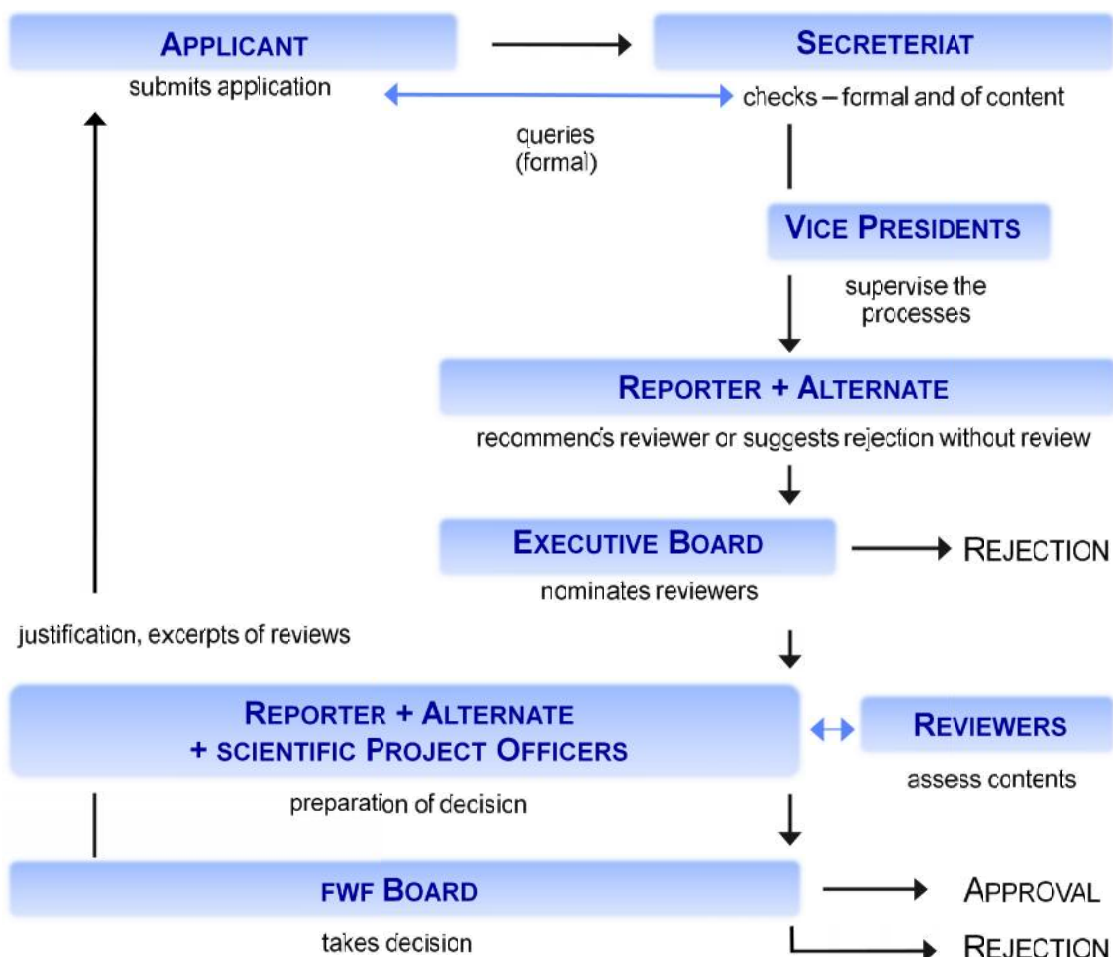


General Principles of the Decision-making Procedure

All applications submitted to the FWF are subjected to a peer review procedure in which only scientists working outside Austria are requested to review proposals. Their reviews represent the basis for all funding decisions. Both the quality and the international relevance of the research are thus guaranteed.

The FWF treats **all** scientific disciplines identically and has **no quota system** to regulate the distribution of funding between the various disciplines.

Flow diagram¹



¹ In particular programmes (especially commissioned programmes, large-scale research projects and graduate schools) the review procedure may differ on specific points (e.g. use of a multi-step procedure, an international jury) from these general principles. Differences are noted on the web pages relating to the individual programmes. In the case of international programmes, the submission, review and decision-making procedures are in line with the particular structures and procedures of these programmes and may differ from the general principles outlined in the present document.

Submission

Following receipt of an application, the FWF Secretariat checks it to ensure it is complete and satisfies all formal requirements. The application is then entered into the FWF's computer system and the applicant is sent a letter acknowledging receipt. The relevant Departmental President allocates the application to a particular Reporter and Alternate. Allocation is based primarily on scientific expertise but particular attention is paid to ensure that the chosen Reporter and Alternate are absolutely impartial. The Research and Technology Promotion Act (FTFG) requires all FWF employees and all members of the various boards to perform their duties conscientiously and in an unbiased manner. If there is a conflict of interest, § 7 of the General Administrative Procedures Act (AVG) obliges them to refrain completely from participation in the procedure and in particular not to take part in any voting. In addition to the direct relationships mentioned in § 7 of the AVG, other important factors may make a Board member appear to have a conflict of interest, i.e. to have a personal connection to the matter under discussion or to the applicant that might jeopardize his or her impartiality. Members will be deemed to have a potential conflict of interest if an informed third party could think this is the case. The FWF has thus formulated the following criteria:

- When applications are considered that come from persons, institutes or groups to which a Board Member has close ties, either personal or work-related, he or she should not take part in the discussions and should leave the room while discussions are in progress. The following rules apply in particular to conflicts of interest with regard to research institutes (all references to Reporters apply equally to Alternates):
- Same institute (or similarly sized unit); generally also same Faculty (or similar unit). Exceptions are possible in the case of large faculties or similar units with a wide thematic scope. Such exceptions must be noted on the meeting documents.
- Smaller universities that cover a relatively narrow scope, such as the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration (Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien), the Vienna University of Veterinary Medicine (Veterinärmedizinische Universität Wien), the Vienna University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, (Universität für Bodenkultur Wien) and the University of Leoben (Montanuniversität Leoben). (Exceptions require the approval of the Departmental President.) Furthermore, the rules regulating conflict of interest of referees (see below) also apply to Reporters and Alternates.
- If a Board Member submits an application, (a) this will not be handled by the scientific and administrative project officers who normally work together with the Member; (b) the Member must leave the room while the application is being considered by the Board; and (c) all referees' reports are generally made available to the meeting (exceptions to this rule must be justified).

Initiation of international review

Applicants may request that up to three persons or research groups be excluded from the review process (because of competition or of a difference in scientific opinion). In close collaboration with the FWF Secretariat, the Reporters and Alternates propose appropriate referees working outside Austria to the Executive Board. In selecting referees, attention is paid to ensure that there are neither negative nor positive conflicts of interest. Referees are considered to have a potential conflict of interest if:

- they stand to gain professionally, financially or personally from approval or rejection of the application;
- they have published together with the applicant (or with any co-applicant or cooperation partner) within the previous five years, or if they have cooperated or worked at the same research institution with the applicant, co-applicant or cooperation partner within this period;

- they have a fundamental difference of scientific opinion from that of the applicant (or with any co-applicant or cooperation partner) relating either to the topic or to a particular method;
- they have any close personal or professional contacts to the applicant (or to any co-applicant or cooperation partner) that could give rise to the suspicion that they have a conflict of interest.

The following criteria apply to the selection of international referees:

- referees must be internationally recognized in the relevant discipline and should still be actively involved in research;
- if the referee previously worked in Austria, he or she should have been out of the country for at least five years before being considered. Exceptions must be communicated to the Departmental President of the department handling the application;
- referees should not be nominated more than a total of twice in a single year for all programmes (a third nomination is possible under exceptional circumstances but should be noted on the meeting documents); and
- attention should be paid to ensuring that referees show a mix of age and nationality. Aspects such as gender and breadth of knowledge of the subject should also be taken into consideration. Thus, (a) a suitable mix of older and younger referees should be aimed at; (b) on average, no more than 15% of referees nominated by a Reporter and his/her Alternate should come from Germany and Switzerland (this figure should not exceed 25% in the humanities). Similarly, a concentration of referees from any particular country or region should be avoided; (c) for disciplines with very small research communities, at least one referee from outside the immediate field or one with more general expertise should be contacted; and (d) the proportion of female referees should be on average at least 25% for a calendar year. When reviews are performed by panels (hearings, e.g. for large-scale research programmes or graduate schools) it is desirable to have at least two women on the panel.

The Executive Board of the FWF takes decisions on initiation of the review procedure. Reviewers are nominated based on proposals from the Reporters and/or Alternate. The Executive Board is not tied to meeting dates and its decisions are taken continually. Applications that fall outside the FWF's scope or that are submitted by scientists who do not have sufficient expertise or research experience will be rejected without review, unless the problems can be rectified within a reasonable period of time (generally a maximum of three weeks). This clause applies only to programmes without application deadlines; for programmes with deadlines it is generally not possible to make corrections or improvements to applications. Decisions to reject applications without review are taken by the Executive Board but must be approved by the Board.

Minimum number of reviews

The number of reviews required before a decision may be taken depends primarily on the amount of funding requested and the type of funding programme:

- Stand-alone projects/Translational Research/PEEK: up to an application amount of EUR 350,000 at least two reports are required. An additional report is required for every additional EUR 100,000 requested. For applications above EUR 550,000 each increase of EUR 150,000 requires disproportionately more reviews.
- Programmes for scientific mobility and the promotion of female scientists: generally 2-3 reviews.

- SFB, NFN, DK-Plus: depending on the size and the thematic composition, 4-6 reviews for “concepts” and 6-8 for hearings.
- START/Wittgenstein: at least 4 reviews for START applications and at least 6 for nominations for the Wittgenstein Award.
- Stand-alone publications: 1-2 reviews.
- The number of reviews required under all other programmes, such as commissioned programmes and international programmes, depends on the particular agreements in force for the programme. In all cases, though, at least 2 reviews are required.

The number of reviews may be increased for applications that impinge on several scientific fields.

Structure of the reviews

A review comprises a written report, in which the referee is asked to respond to particular questions. The review is divided into two sections, the first of which is transmitted in full to the applicant. In the second section the referee may make confidential remarks to the FWF.

Referees also undertake two numerical assessments. In the first, marks on a 5-point scale (1=excellent, 2=very good, 3=good, 4=average, 5=poor) are assigned to particular aspects mentioned in the written review.² The second numerical rating gives an overall assessment of the proposed project on a scale of 0-100. The FWF sends referees a brief explanation of the corresponding standards of quality:

Please note that the FWF makes high demands on the quality of the projects it funds and thus predominantly supports projects rated as very good or excellent. The numerical rating indicates:

100-95	Excellent	in relation to the academic age of the applicant, among the best 5% of applications in the field worldwide
90-80	Very good	among the best 20%, marginal improvements are suggested
75-60	Good	substantial changes are recommended
55-35	Average	fundamental revision is required
30-10	Poor	the proposed research is internationally not competitive

In all cases decisions are based on the written reviews from referees and not solely on the numerical ratings they assign.

Excellent		Very Good			Good				Average					Poor				
100	95	90	85	80	75	70	65	60	55	50	45	40	35	30	25	20	15	10

If the review is insufficiently well argued, it is not taken into account in the decision-making procedure. Referees are required to declare any possible conflicts of interest. If a referee fails to do so but it subsequently transpires that he or she does have a conflict of interest, the review is not taken into account.

² (a) The questions to the referees and thus the aspects assessed by marks may vary according to programme and to programme goals. The questions and the form for referees in use for the various programmes are given on the FWF’s home page. Please see: <http://www.fwf.ac.at/en/projects/index.html>

(b) There is no numerical assessment for “concepts” submitted for large-scale research projects or graduate schools. The reviews solely comprise written reports.

The decision

The Reporter responsible for the application presents it to the Board, together with a summary of the reviews received and taking into account any comments of the Alternate(s). If the application comes from a person or an institution or group with which individual members of the Board have a close relationship, these Board members leave the room before the application is presented and take no part in the ensuing discussions. Decisions are often taken only following extensive discussion and comparison between different applications. Most decisions are unanimous.³

Following the Board Meeting, the FWF Secretariat will communicate the decisions to the applicants, together with the texts of the reviews (in anonymous form). In the case of a rejection, the Board, or in some programmes the respective panel, will insert a brief explanation (see below) for the decision.

Justifications for rejections	
C 1	The FWF Board considered the application worthy of funding but could not approve the grant due to the budgetary situation and competition among applicants. If the project is resubmitted, its strengths should be emphasized even further.
C 2	The FWF Board considered the application worthy of funding but could not approve the grant due to the budgetary situation and competition among applicants. If the project is resubmitted, its strengths should be emphasized even further, and the suggestions and criticism provided by the reviewers should be taken into account.
C 3	The application was rejected by the FWF Board. If the project is resubmitted, the suggestions and criticism provided by the reviewers should be taken into account in a thorough revision of the application.
C 4	The application was rejected by the FWF Board. In the FWF Board's opinion, the criticism voiced in the peer reviews is so severe that the applicant is advised not to resubmit the project.

The Reporters, Alternates and Departmental Presidents are supported in their work by the FWF Secretariat, which is the direct contact point for applicants in all matters relating to projects.

5. Re-submission of applications and follow-up projects

For applications that represent resubmissions of rejected applications or that aim at continuations of previous work, it is generally the case that some of the previous referees are contacted. In all cases, though, at least one “fresh” referee is consulted. For resubmissions, it is important to draw attention to changes made in response to explicit suggestions from the referees.

³ Applications may be proposed for rejection with fewer referees' reports than formally required by the amount of money requested or the particular programme category if it is clear from the available reviews that the application is to be rejected. The Reporter and Alternate and the Departmental President must give their consent.