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General Principles of the Decision-making Procedure

for the

"Translational-Research-Programme"

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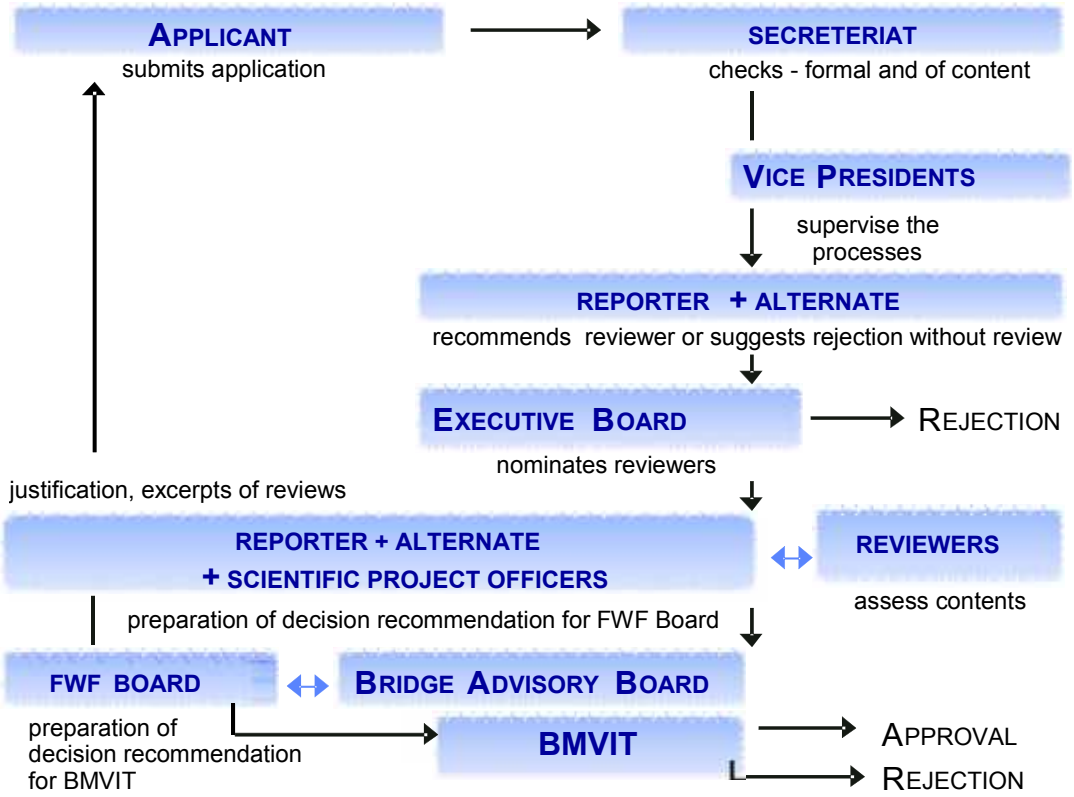
Selection procedure

All applications submitted to the FWF (Austrian Science Fund) 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.

The Translational-Research-Programme (TRP) is commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology (BMVIT). Final decisions on funding are taken by the BMVIT on the basis of recommendations from the FWF Board, which are in turn based on the results of an international peer-review procedure and the recommendations of the BRIDGE Advisory Board.

Flow diagram



BRIDGE Initiative

BRIDGE is a joint initiative of the FWF (Austrian Science Fund) and the FFG (Austrian Research Promotion Agency) established to fund projects at the interface between basic scientific research at research institutions (university and non-university) and industrial research/experimental development in commercial undertakings. This initiative involves two programmes, the Translational-Research-Programme (FWF) and the Bridge Programme (FFG), which differ in terms of their proximity to applied research.

BRIDGE Advisory Board

The BRIDGE Advisory Board is composed of three voting members from basic research (nominated by the FWF) and three from companies (nominated by the FFG) as well as two voting members each from the FWF and the FFG. In addition, single representatives from the BMVIT, the BMWF (Federal Ministry of Science and Research), the BMWFJ (Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth) and the CDG (Christian Doppler Research Association) have observer status. The Advisory Board meets regularly, generally four times per year, and the chair alternates each year between representatives nominated by the FFG and by the FWF.

The Advisory Board is responsible for making recommendations on funding projects submitted in the framework of the Translational-Research-Programme (TRP) and projects in the FFG's BRIDGE Programme.

The Advisory Board is also required to consider issues that specifically relate to the two programmes. These may relate to general interpretation of guidelines, to the interpretation and future development of the programmes and to practical issues.

Submission

The Translational-Research-Programme takes the form of a call for applications. Applications must be submitted in accordance with the "Application guidelines" for the Translational-Research-Programme[1] and must be on the FWF's forms. The Secretariat will check all applications received by the application deadline (or posted – as shown by the postmark – by this date) for completeness and for formal shortcomings. The application is then entered into the FWF's computer system and be assigned a project number. The applicant is sent a letter acknowledging receipt.

Each application will be assigned by the appropriate departmental Vice-president to a Reporter and an Alternate. The assignment is based primarily on the research field (or fields in the case of interdisciplinary projects) of the application. However, strict attention is paid to ensure that there are no possible conflicts of interest. If it could appear that there is a conflict of interest, the Reporter(s) in question will play no part whatsoever in the handling of the application. 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;

[1] In placing an application for a Translational Brainpower-project, attention should be paid to the "Guidelines Translational Brainpower" (http://www.fwf.ac.at/de/applications/trp-translational-research.html)

- 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.

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. Executive Board is not tied to meeting dates and its decisions are taken continually.

The FWF will reject (without review) any applications for which the FWF is not responsible, that are incomplete, that do not conform to the FWF's requirements, or that contain any other formal deficiencies (in particular those which exceed the permitted length, use smaller fonts and/or exhibit a lack of or an insufficient explanation of thematic relevance). Only complete applications (i.e. including an electronic version) will be sent for review. Post-hoc improvements/changes to the content of the free-form application (narrative text) are not permitted. However, it is possible to add 'formal' information (e.g. original signatures or stamps) up to 10 days after the deadline for submission of applications, but only if prior approval is granted by the FWF Secretariat (i.e. before the submission of the application).

In selecting referees, attention will be paid to the applicable aspects of the project (see also Annex I). Applications that span several disciplines may be sent to more referees than formally required.

Applications that have previously been rejected by the FWF and that have been resubmitted without having been substantially revised will generally be rejected without review by the

FWF. Once the review process has been initiated, no amendments to applications are permitted.

Minimum number of reviews

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

- 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 disproportionally more reviews.

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. The second numerical rating gives an overall assessment of the proposed project on a scale of 10-100. 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.

The decision

The review procedure is the responsibility of the FWF. When it is completed, the FWF Board and the BRIDGE Advisory Board together prepare funding recommendations for the BMVIT, based on the written reviews. On the basis of these recommendations the Federal Minister for Transport, Innovation and Technology decides which applications to fund.

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 emphasised 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.

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.

Applicants are asked to pay particular attention to the fact that TRP-projects are generally expected within three years to advance the application sufficiently to enable the work to be continued with the involvement of a commercial partner and the support of a different instrument (such as, e.g., FFG, CDG, EU etc.).

Applications for TRP-projects that build on the results of previously funded TRP-projects will be considered critically. A detailed scientific justification should be provided for the necessity of a further period of funding within the Translational-Research-Programme.

APPENDIX I: Questions for reviewers of a TRP-project

Section 1 (to be transmitted to the applicant in its entirety):

1 Scientific quality of the project

- How would you assess the preliminary work (basic or application-oriented research) undertaken by the participating scientists?
- How would you assess the quality and originality of the proposed research approaches?
- Are the project's goals described clearly?
- Are the expected applications innovative?
- How high is the potential (probability) that the scientific research will give rise to successful applications in the future?
- Are the chosen methods (including the work plan and time schedule) appropriate?
- How would you assess the quality of cooperation arrangements in the project (national and international, university and non-university)?

<u>Additional questions to referees of Translational Brainpower projects:</u>

- How crucial is the involvement (contribution) of the international partner for the performance and the success of the project?
- How important for the project are the Austrian project workers' research stays at the international partner's institution? Are the necessary conditions for such research stays fulfilled?

2 Quality of the human resources

- How would you assess the scientific quality and/or potential of the scientists involved?
- How important would you expect the project to be for the careers of the project participants (principal investigator and project staff, in particular doctoral students)? Are there plans with regard to career development? If so, are those plans adequate?

<u>Additional question to referees of Translational Brainpower projects:</u>

- How would you assess the scientific quality and/or potential of the international partner?

3 Broader implications

- How would you assess the framing and importance of the project with regard to the relevant research field and institutional context?
- Are the planned strategies for the dissemination of results and for the handling of intellectual property rights adequate?
- Can the project be expected to have implications for other areas of science?
- What exactly are the possibilities for application (new production technologies, new products, etc.) to be expected? Within what time period can they be expected?

4. Suggestions

What could (or should) be done to increase the project's chances of success?

Section 2 (confidential remarks to the FWF):

1 Financial aspects

In your review, please bear in mind that exaggerated costs may represent a reason for rejecting an application. Please comment on the following:

- Appropriateness of personnel and non-personnel costs (including any suggested budget reductions that could be made without jeopardising the success of the project);
- Suggestions for improvement (i.e. higher efficiency in terms of costs and benefits) with regard to the equipment requested.

2 Concluding recommendation on approval or rejection of the proposal; other comments.

Please note: If you rate the proposal as excellent (95-100%), please provide a brief additional rationale as to why you feel the proposal is among the top 5% in its field.