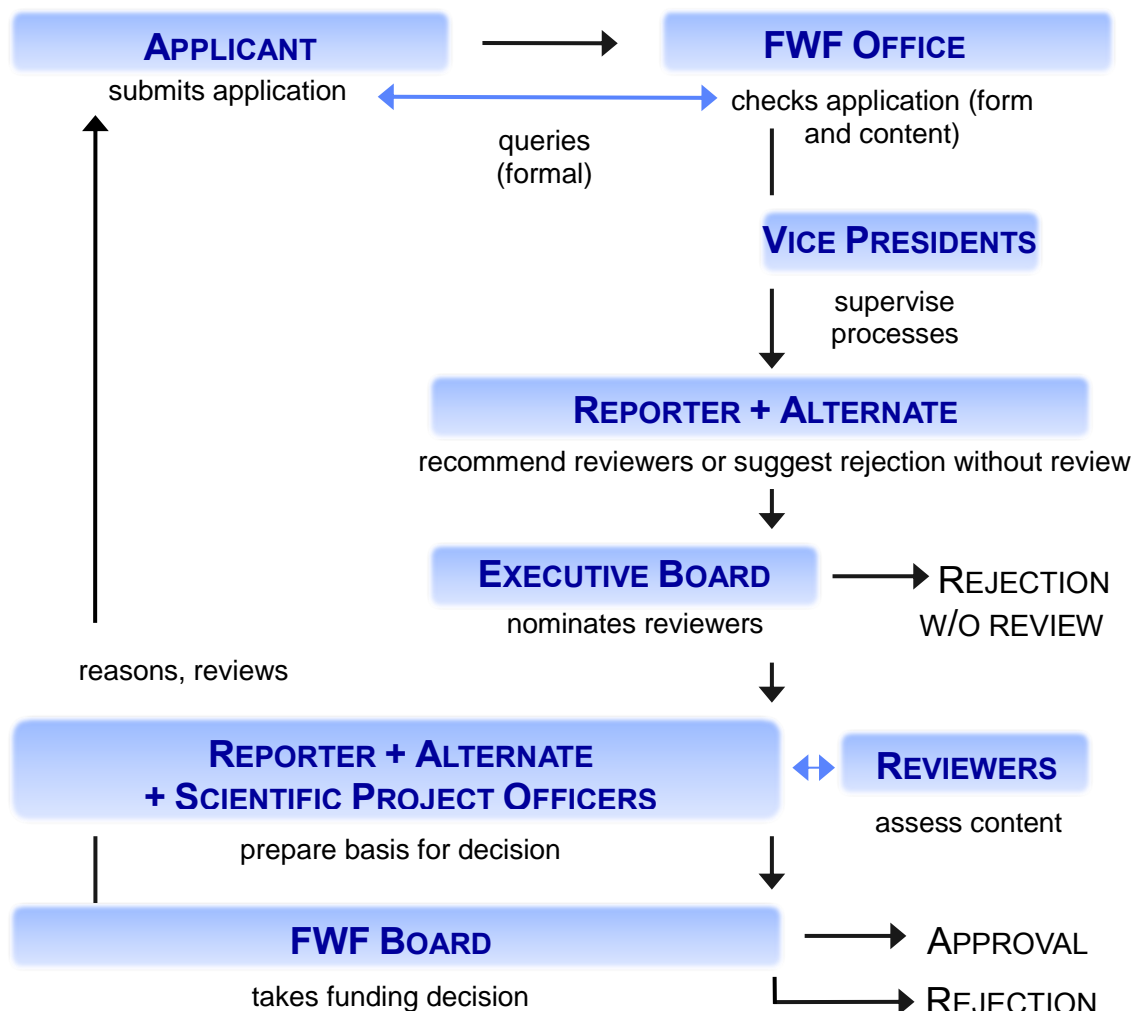


## 1. General Principles of the FWF Decision-Making Procedure

All applications received by the FWF are subjected to a **peer review procedure** in which only scientists working outside Austria are asked to review proposals. These reviews form the basis for all funding decisions, thus ensuring that the quality of the research funded is on par with international standards.

The FWF treats **all** scientific disciplines equally and has **no quota system** regulating the distribution of funds among the various disciplines.

Decision process flow chart<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> In specific programmes (especially commissioned programmes, large-scale research projects and graduate schools), the review procedure may differ from these general principles in certain respects (e.g. use of a multi-stage procedure or an international jury). Differences are noted on the web pages relating to the individual programmes. In the case of international programmes, all submission, review and decision-making procedures are in line with the specific structures and procedures of those programmes and may differ from the general principles outlined in this document.

## Submission

Following receipt of an application, the FWF Office checks to ensure that it is complete and satisfies all formal requirements. The application is then entered in the FWF's computer system and the applicant receives an acknowledgement of receipt. The applications are assigned to a particular Reporter and Alternate. These assignments are based primarily on scientific expertise, but the FWF pays close attention to ensuring that the chosen Reporter and Alternate are completely impartial.

The Austrian 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 impartial, unbiased manner. Where conflicts of interest arise, Art. 7 of the Austrian General Administrative Procedures Act (AVG) obliges those parties to refrain completely from participating in the procedure and in particular not to take part in any voting. In addition to the direct relationships mentioned in Art. 7 of the AVG, other important factors may make a Board member appear to have a conflict of interest, e.g. having a personal connection to the matter under discussion or to the applicant that might jeopardise that Board member's impartiality. Members are deemed to have a potential conflict of interest even in where a third party might believe that this is the case.

In discussions of applications received from persons or from institutions or working groups to which a Board member has a specific professional or personal relationship, that Board member is not permitted to take part in the deliberations and is required to leave the meeting room for the duration of the relevant discussion. Specifically, the following rules apply to institutional biases / conflicts of interest; Board members who belong to certain institutions or organisational units are generally considered to have a conflict of interest with regard to all applications received from persons affiliated with that institution or organisational unit:

a) Members of any organisational unit with fewer than 900 academic faculty members (including professors) are automatically subject to an institutional conflict of interest. Specifically, this rule applies to the following universities (each in their entirety):

- University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna;
- University of Leoben;
- University of Applied Arts Vienna;
- University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, Mozarteum University Salzburg;
- University of Music and Performing Arts Graz;
- University for Art and Industrial Design Linz;
- Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

b) At present, there are only two organisational units at universities in Austria which have 900 or more academic faculty members (including professors) and are therefore not automatically subject to an institutional conflict of interest:

- Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies, University of Vienna
- Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Graz

In addition to institutional conflicts of interest, Reporters, Alternates and FWF employees are also subject to the same rules regarding conflicts of interest as reviewers (see Appendix).

In cases where an FWF Board member submits an application, it is not handled by the scientific and administrative project officers who normally work together with that member. The member must leave the meeting room while the application is being considered by the

Board. All reviewers' reports are generally made available at the meeting, exceptions to this rule must be justified appropriately.

### **Initiation of international review**

Applicants may request that up to three persons or research groups be excluded from the review process. In close collaboration with the FWF Office, the Reporters and Alternates suggest appropriate expert reviewers – based outside Austria – to the Executive Board. In the selection of reviewers, due attention is paid to ensuring that there are neither real nor assumed negative or positive conflicts of interest.

The criteria for the selection of international peer reviewers as well as the rules regarding bias, conflicts of interest, and the composition of expert juries and boards are discussed in the Appendix.

The FWF Executive Board decides whether a review procedure is to be initiated and appoints reviewers on the basis of the recommendations submitted by the FWF's Reporters and/or Alternates. This is an ongoing process, and it is not linked to specific Board meeting dates.

Funding applications which are outside the scope of the FWF's funding activities or which involve applicants who obviously do not possess the professional qualifications or research experience necessary to carry out the project are rejected without the initiation of a review procedure. The same applies to funding applications which cannot be reviewed in their current form because they contain major errors which are not remedied (or not remedied within a reasonable period of time, generally no more than three weeks). This rule applies to programmes where applications are reviewed on a rolling basis. For programmes with specific submission deadlines, applicants are required to rectify the errors in their applications within 10 days after being notified of the errors. Decisions to reject applications without review are taken by the Executive Board and require the consent of the FWF Board in order to take effect.

### **Minimum number of reviews**

The number of reviews required before a positive decision<sup>2</sup> can be taken depends on the funding programme in question:

- Stand-Alone Projects / PEEK / KLIF / Mobility and women's programmes: at least 2 reviews
- SFB and DK: depending on the size and thematic composition, 3 to 4 reviews for outline proposals and 5 to 6 for hearings
- START and Wittgenstein: at least 3 reviews for START applications and at least 4 for Wittgenstein Award nominations.
- Stand-Alone Publications: at least 1 review
- 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, however, at least 2 reviews are required.

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<sup>2</sup> Rejections can be recommended on the basis of fewer reviews than would be required for the respective funding programme for an approval if the review(s) received already clearly indicate that the application cannot be approved. In such cases, the consent of the Reporter, Alternate and Vice President in charge of handling the application is required.

The number of reviews required may be increased for applications that cover several fields of research.

### **Structure of reviews**

A review must comprise a written statement in which the reviewers are asked to address specific questions in relation to the proposal. At the same time, reviewers are asked to provide an overall formal assessment (i.e. rating) for each specific question<sup>3</sup> using the five-point scale shown below. Each review consists of two sections: The first section is transmitted to the applicant in its entirety (including the overall ratings). In the second section, reviewers can provide additional, confidential remarks to the FWF.

The FWF provides the reviewers with a brief explanation of the quality standards that should form the basis for the formal ratings:

<p><b>Excellent = funding with highest priority</b></p> <p>The proposed research project is among the best 5% in the field worldwide. It is potentially ground-breaking and/or makes a major contribution to knowledge.</p> <p>The applicant and the researchers involved possess – relative to their academic age – exceptional qualifications by international standards.</p>
<p><b>Very Good = funding with high priority</b></p> <p>The proposed research project is among the best 15% in the field worldwide. It is at the forefront internationally, but minor improvements could be made.</p> <p>The applicant and the researchers involved possess – relative to their academic age – high qualifications by international standards.</p>
<p><b>Good = resubmission with some revisions</b></p> <p>The proposed research project is internationally competitive but has some weaknesses, and/or the applicant and the researchers involved possess – relative to their academic age – good qualifications by international standards.</p>
<p><b>Average = resubmission with major revisions</b></p> <p>The proposed research project will provide some new insights but has significant weaknesses and/or the applicant and the researchers involved possess – relative to their academic age – fair qualifications by international standards.</p>
<p><b>Poor = rejection</b></p> <p>The proposed research project is weak and/or the applicant and the researchers involved lack sufficient qualifications by international standards.</p>

<sup>3</sup> (a) The questions for reviewers can vary according to the relevant funding programme and its objectives; questions are generally included in the appendix to the programme's application guidelines. (b) Wittgenstein Award nominations, outline proposals for Priority Research Programmes and DK Programme proposals require only written reviews, i.e. no overall ratings are required.

In cases where a review is not sufficiently well argued, it is not taken into account in the decision-making procedure. Reviewers are required to declare any possible conflicts of interest. In cases where bias or a conflict of interest is identified at a later stage, the review is likewise disregarded.

**Funding decisions**

The Reporter responsible for the application presents it to the Board, together with a summary of the reviews received as well as any comments received from the Alternate(s). This process is also subject to the rules regarding conflicts of interest specified under **Submission** above, even in cases where a conflict of interest *might* be assumed or perceived. In most cases, decisions are made unanimously, often after a detailed discussion and comparison of the applications submitted. In the course of the discussion, bonuses for early-stage applicants (up to 8 years after conferral of doctorate) and/or independent applicants (minimum: 50%) may be applied.

After the FWF Board meeting, the decision letters are prepared by the FWF Office and dispatched to the applicants. Depending on the outcome of the decision-making procedure, the letter may be accompanied by excerpts from the reviews (in anonymous form).

For each rejection, the FWF Board or the jury/board responsible specifies one of the following standardised reasons for rejection in order to ensure a maximum of transparency and comparability in all decisions.

<b>Standardised reasons for rejection</b>	
C 1	The reviews of your application were entirely positive with regard to the research project itself as well as your research qualifications. However, the reviewers expressed even greater support for other applications. For budget-related reasons, the FWF can currently only approve those applications which receive the most favourable reviews and ratings; this means that your application could not be approved. If you choose to resubmit your application, please place greater emphasis on the strengths of the project in order to improve your chances of approval.
C 2	The reviews of your application were predominantly positive with regard to the research project itself as well as your research qualifications. However, there were several minor points of criticism in the review, and the reviewers expressed greater support for other applications. For budget-related reasons, the FWF can currently only approve those applications which receive the most favourable reviews and ratings; this means that your application could not be approved. If you choose to resubmit your application, please place greater emphasis on the strengths of the project and take the reviewers' suggestions into account in order to improve your chances of approval.
C 3	The reviews of your application were largely positive with regard to the research project itself and/or your research qualifications. However, there were a number of points of criticism in the review, meaning that your application cannot be approved in its current form. If you choose to resubmit your application, please focus on the strengths of the project and take the reviewers' comments and suggestions into account visibly and in a transparent manner.
C 4	The reviews of your application were only partly positive with regard to the research project itself and/or your research qualifications. However, there were numerous points of criticism in the review, meaning that the application

	would have to be revised substantially and possibly re-oriented in order to be eligible for funding. If you choose to resubmit your application, please take the reviewers' comments and suggestions into account visibly and in a transparent manner.
C 5	The reviews of your application were predominantly very critical. As it cannot be assumed that the weaknesses in the application can be remedied within a short period of time, the FWF Board has decided that a resubmission to this funding programme will only be permitted after a period of 12 months (starting from the decision date).

The FWF Office provides administrative support for Reporters, Alternates and FWF Vice Presidents in the performance of their duties. In all project-related matters, the FWF Office serves as the direct point of contact for applicants.

### **Resubmissions and follow-up applications**

In the case of previously rejected applications which are revised and resubmitted by the applicant as well as follow-up applications (i.e. grant applications to continue research related to a previous project), the FWF makes every effort to call upon previous reviewers as well as new reviewers in order to ensure a balance of continuity and new perspectives. In such applications, it is therefore crucial to clearly mark any changes made in response to explicit suggestions from (previous) reviewers in order to make those changes visible to "new" reviewers as well.

### **Proposal bans**

Applications that are rejected for reason "C5" will be barred from resubmission for at least 12 months from the date of the decision and cannot be resubmitted during that period.

Applications that have been submitted three times and rejected under grounds for rejection C3 or C4 (= original application and corresponding new planning), are also blocked for 12 months (from the decision date); this does not affect applications rejected under C1 or C2.

## Appendix

### Reviewer profile and bias, composition of juries

#### 1. Reviewer profile

- Reviewers must be internationally established experts who are currently active in their respective research fields, and they should possess at least the same level of qualifications (in relation to their academic age) as the applicants.
- The FWF only contacts reviewers who are based outside of Austria. In cases where reviewers have worked in Austria in the past, they are not to be contacted for reviews until they have been based outside of the country for at least five consecutive years. Any exceptions to this rule must be approved by the relevant FWF Vice President.
- A single reviewer should not be nominated more than twice per year. Exceptions to this rule may be made in the case of resubmissions.
- The reviewers of a given application must not be from the same institution.
- In the selection of reviewers, every effort should be made to ensure diversity in terms of age, regions and (where applicable) areas of expertise:
  - A suitable mix of younger and older reviewers is desirable.
  - On average, no more than 15% of reviewers should be from Germany/Switzerland each year (in the humanities: no more than 25%). Similarly, it is also important to avoid any excessive concentration of reviewers from a certain region or country.
  - In disciplines with very small research communities, efforts should be made to contact at least one reviewer from a related field or one reviewer more with general expertise.
  - The share of women among reviewers should average at least 30% per year. In addition, efforts must be made to ensure that the panel at SFB and DK hearings includes at least two women as reviewers.

#### 2. Reviewer bias

##### 2.1. General rules

Reviewers should refrain from assessing an application if a conflict of interest exists or could be perceived to exist. Specifically, reviewers are considered to be biased or to have a conflict of interest if:

- they stand to gain professionally, financially or personally from the approval or rejection of the application;
- they have published, cooperated, served on professional boards or other bodies involving frequent or regular meetings, or worked at the same research institution with the applicant (including persons involved in the project) in the last five years (see also below);
- they have fundamental differences of scientific opinion with the applicant (including persons involved in the project);
- any other close professional or personal ties exist between the reviewers and applicants (including persons involved in the project) which may give rise to suspicions of bias or of conflicts of interest in the eyes of uninvolved third parties.

##### 2.2. Special cases



Reviewers will generally not be considered biased under the following conditions:

- Reviewers are generally not considered biased in cases where joint publications with applicants (including persons involved in the project) include more than 20 authors, unless the applicant (including persons involved in the project) or reviewer is the first/lead or last author of the publication (except in cases where publications list authors in alphabetical order due to equivalent contributions).
- Reviewers are generally not considered biased in cases where they have published works in the same edited volumes or proceedings as the applicant (or persons involved in the project). This does not apply to scholarly tributes (Festschriften) in which the applicants (or persons involved in the project) or reviewers were editors or laureates.
- Reviewers are generally not considered biased in cases where they have produced joint publications with national or international cooperation partners associated with the applicant (or persons involved in the project).
- In cases where an application is revised and resubmitted, those reviewers from the previous round who provided substantial and constructive suggestions and criticism should generally be contacted again. In any case, however, new reviewers are also required for resubmissions.

Applicants are not to be asked to name reviewers for their applications. Should they do so, these suggestions are to be disregarded.

The enclosures to the applications may contain a list of undesired reviewers (“negative list”). This means that applicants may name a maximum of three potential reviewers who are believed to have possible biases and should be excluded from the review process. The FWF Executive Board will generally fulfil such requests. In cases where an application is resubmitted, the negative list may include reviewers of the previous version of the application. (In exceptional cases, Reporters may have the FWF Office request a list of desirable reviewers from the applicant. In cases where reviewers from this “positive list” assess an application, this must be noted in the meeting documents. In any case, only one review may be obtained from a reviewer on this list.)

The FWF assumes that, in the interest of good scientific practice, reviewers will also refrain from assessing applications and notify the FWF in cases which are not explicitly covered by the FWF’s rules regarding bias. Reviewers should always refrain from assessing an application in cases of doubt or borderline cases.

Institutions which handle the review process on behalf of the FWF (such as publishers in the Stand-Alone Publications programme) are to consult the FWF in any cases of doubt or borderline cases.

### **3. Composition of juries and similar bodies (e.g. review boards)**

FWF juries are decision-making bodies which comprise outstanding international experts and are established for specific programmes (such as the START programme, Wittgenstein Award, PEEK and KLIF programmes). On the basis of external reviews, these experts submit recommendations to the FWF Board by ranking the competing applications. The following rules apply to these bodies:

- Jury members must be internationally recognised, leading scientists and researchers in their respective fields who also (a) have a broader perspective beyond the boundaries of their field and (b) possess appropriate experience with similar competitive selection procedures.



- Juries generally comprise scientists and researchers based at research institutions outside of Austria. Persons who have worked in Austria in the past may not become jury members until they have been based outside of Austria for at least five consecutive years.
- At least one third of the members of these bodies should be women, and every effort should be made to ensure a maximum of diversity in terms of regions and institutions.
- In handling applications, jury members are subject to the same rules regarding bias and conflicts of interest as FWF Board members and reviewers. In cases of bias, the relevant jury member(s) does (do) not participate in the discussion of the application in question; those members are required to leave the meeting room while the jury deliberates on the application..
- Jury members are generally appointed for a term of three years, after which their term may be extended twice (maximum total: 9 years). At the same time, it is necessary to ensure that the composition of a jury does not remain the same for more than six years.