

Pursuant to its Funding Guidelines (as amended), the FWF has issued the following Application Guidelines for

Specialized Research Groups (Pre-Proposal)

effective as of May 27, 2025

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Please note: Explanations of the terms used in the Application Guidelines can be found in the [Definition of terms](#) (PROFI mode).

1 General Information

This document has been prepared in German and English for your convenience. In the event of a dispute, the German version shall prevail.

1.1 Program objective

Collaborations between researchers often result in the most outstanding research. In fact, many research questions can only be adequately investigated by teams. For this reason, the main objective of the Specialized Research Groups program is to fund excellent research in collaborative research formats, where multiple participating researchers working in one or more locations pursue a common research goal. The aim is to strengthen cooperation between researchers, research institutions, and different disciplines.¹

Thanks to its flexible format, the program is open to both larger and smaller groups of researchers. A consortium of three to twelve outstanding researchers (including the coordinator) at one or more Austrian research institutions is responsible for a Specialized Research Group project. Additional project staff and national or international cooperation partners may also be involved. The gender distribution in the consortium should be balanced; at least one third of the consortium should be made up of the underrepresented gender.

Another aim of the program is the advancement and career development of junior researchers (R2 and R3). The active involvement of academically younger consortium members gives talented junior researchers the opportunity to gain valuable experience working in teams and to take on responsibility within the consortia. The inclusion of junior researchers (R2 and R3) as consortium members is therefore explicitly permitted and encouraged.

The program is open to all scientific disciplines as well as interdisciplinary consortia. Researchers from the field of arts-based basic research are also invited to apply.

1.2 What types of projects can be funded?

Funding may be requested for projects in basic research that are clearly defined, innovative, with plausibly described objectives and methods, and are limited in duration (60 months).

One follow-up application for a second funding period can be submitted. The duration of the second funding period is four years.

¹ The Specialized Research Groups funding program is the result of the merger of the programs Special Research Areas and Research Groups.

1.3 Submission

All proposals must be submitted online using the [elane](#) digital application portal. The deadline for submission is **September 16, 2025 (2:00 pm local time Vienna)**. Project funding is administered through the research institutions ([PROFI](#)); this means the application must be approved for submission by both the coordinator of the consortium and the respective research institution (= lead research institution) before this deadline.² All forms required for the application must be completed online; other required documents such as the project description, including annexes and any additional documents, must be uploaded in full before the application can be approved for submission by the research institution. Applications submitted after the deadline will be returned without review, regardless of the circumstances. For additional information, please see the [elane user manual](#).

1.3.1 Who is eligible to apply?

All Austrian **research institutions** are eligible to apply.³ The intended project must be carried out in Austria or under the auspices of the applying Austrian research institution (= lead research institution). In addition to the lead research institution, a maximum of eleven other Austrian research institutions can be involved as partner research institutions. Each of the partner research institutions must be represented by at least one consortium member.

A Specialized Research Groups application is submitted by a consortium consisting of at least three to a maximum of twelve outstanding researchers (established researchers as well as junior researchers, R2 and R3) including the coordinator. The gender distribution in the consortium should be balanced; at least one third of the consortium should be made up of the underrepresented gender. An explanation must be provided in the project description if this percentage is lower than one-third. In addition, a description should be provided of the measures taken to increase the proportion of the underrepresented gender. The composition of the consortium is included as a criterion in the review process (see [Appendix B](#)). One consortium member takes on the role of coordinator and is employed at the lead research institution at the start of the project.

The remaining consortium members must be employed at the lead or partner research institution at the time the project is scheduled to begin. Their salary is financed either by the research institution or by the project as grant-salaried researchers (see [section 2.3.1.1](#)). If the principal investigator is employed part-time at the start of the project, project funds can be used to increase the extent of employment to full time.

Neither a specific academic degree nor Austrian citizenship is required to act as a consortium member. Consortium members must, however, have appropriate (arts-based)

² Approval for submission by the research institution may be waived by the research institution if it has authorized the coordinator to approve it themselves.

³ Research institutions must be [registered](#) in the FWF's research institution portal.

scientific qualifications (see [section 1.4](#)) and sufficient time resources to carry out the proposed research. The research institution must provide the necessary infrastructure.

Researchers who are predominantly working abroad for the duration of the project can only act as consortium members if they are employed at the lead or partner research institution at the time of application and for the entire duration of the project. The extent of employment at the lead or partner research institution must be at least 25%.⁴ However, only up to one third of the consortium members may be predominantly working abroad, with the exception of involvement in German Research Foundation (DFG) projects (see [section 1.3.1.1](#)). Coordinators must work predominantly in Austria.

1.3.1.1 Participation of researchers in Germany in a Specialized Research Group

If the consortium has five or more members, up to two consortium members may be based in Germany. These researchers' project parts can be integrated into the Specialized Research Group as a European cooperation ([Country-Specific Collaboration with Germany](#)). The researchers responsible for the project parts in Germany must be eligible to apply to the German Research Foundation (DFG). The FWF Application Guidelines for Specialized Research Groups apply for all applications submitted to the FWF.

In the full-proposal phase (see [section 3.3](#)), consortium members from Germany must also submit the proposal submitted to the FWF, including some additional information, to the DFG within one week (see [DFG requirements and contact information](#)).

If the Specialized Research Group is approved, the FWF will fund the Austrian parts of the project, while the DFG will fund the German parts. The total funding requested for the Specialized Research Group, including for the German project parts, may not exceed €9 million. The requested funds, including for the German project parts, must be presented in the Excel spreadsheet [Total-costs.xlsx](#) (see [section 2.1.3](#) and [2.2.5](#)). DFG guidelines apply to all applications for funding for the German project parts.

The German project parts must be described in detail in the project description included in both the pre-proposal and the full proposal (see [section 2.2.3](#)). The application must also include forms uploaded to elane for consortium members in Germany (see [section 2.5.2](#)).

As the lead agency, the FWF is responsible for the review process and makes a funding recommendation. If the DFG does not accept this funding recommendation, the entire Specialized Research Group will not be funded.

⁴ Proof of employment must be submitted to the FWF with the application.

1.3.2 Can multiple applications be submitted simultaneously?

There is no limit to the number of applications that can be submitted by a research institution.

The following applies to both the proposal phase and the implementation phase of the project, however:

- Each consortium member (including the coordinator) may be involved in a maximum of two applications in the programs Special Research Areas, Research Groups, and Specialized Research Groups. If a researcher is already involved in an ongoing or pending Special Research Area, Research Group, or Specialized Research Group as a consortium member, they may not be involved in a further Specialized Research Groups application.
- A researcher may apply for the position of coordinator or serve as coordinator in no more than one collaborative project (Clusters of Excellence, Emerging fields, Special Research Areas, Research Groups, Specialized Research Groups, Young Independent Research Group, #ConnectingMinds, doc.funds, or doc.funds.connect).
- Other consortium members may apply for the position of coordinator or act as principal investigator in *one* additional collaborative program.

1.4 What are the requirements for applicants?

1.4.1 General requirements

The publication records of all consortium members over the last five years must be internationally visible and commensurate with the expected career path in their field. The following criteria apply for the assessment of an applicant's publication record and initiation of the review process:

- **Quality assurance:** Most relevant in assessing the applicant's publication record are those publications that have been subject to a quality assurance procedure in line with international standards (peer review or an equivalent procedure; in the natural and life sciences, peer review is expected). Journals must usually be listed in Web of Science, Scopus, or the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). For journals not listed in those databases, or for monographs, edited volumes, contributions to edited volumes, or other publication types, the consortium member must provide a link to the publisher's website which contains a description of the applicable quality assurance procedure. Should no such description be available, it is the consortium member's responsibility to provide evidence that the publication has been subject to a quality assurance procedure in accordance with the standards of the field.

- **International visibility:** Most of each consortium member's publications must have a wider than national reach. In the natural sciences, life sciences, and social sciences, most of the publications listed must be in English.
- **Number/scope and quality** of the publications must be commensurate with the researcher's expectable career path and the respective discipline. Each consortium member must have published at least two quality-assured and internationally visible publications with a substantial and independent contribution on the part of the consortium member. At least one publication with first, last, or corresponding authorship is required, with the exception of publications in journals (or disciplines) that rank authors alphabetically. If any such publications are included in the required document *PI_publication.pdf* (see [section 2.2.4](#)), the individual consortium members' contribution must be specified.
- **Consortium members from the fields of the arts or arts-based research** must have excellent qualifications according to international standards and must have a connection to the development of the arts. This qualification is to be documented based on artistic, scholarly, and/or arts-based achievements of the last five years commensurate with the consortium member's career path and which demonstrate their international visibility.

The required upload *PI_publication.pdf* (see [section 2.2.4](#)), may also include two works (concerts, exhibitions, installations, performances, works of art, etc.) for these consortium members instead of publications.

If there is any uncertainty about general application requirements or about accounting for career interruptions (see [section 1.4.3](#) and [1.4.4](#)), the FWF recommends that consortium members contact the FWF Office or the [FWF Equal Opportunities and Diversity in Research Funding unit](#) in good time before submitting their application to confirm that all requirements are met and that any career interruptions can be accounted for. In cases of doubt, the appropriate decision-making bodies of the FWF shall decide on applicants' eligibility.

1.4.2 Equal opportunities, diversity, and inclusion

The [FWF Strategy for Gender Equality and Diversity of Researchers](#) applies. This means that breaks or delays in consortium members' research careers that have led to publication gaps, unorthodox career paths, or limited international research experience can be taken into consideration. For further details on accounting for career breaks, please refer to the [information sheet on career interruptions](#).

1.4.3 Consideration of career breaks

The FWF will take justified, documentable career breaks (e.g., due to pregnancy, childcare,⁵ caregiving obligations,⁶ military or civilian service, flight, and asylum) into consideration when assessing eligibility to apply.

1.4.4 Inclusion of the disabled and chronically ill

The FWF will also take any exceptions to and interruptions of typical career paths due to disability and/or long-term or chronic illness into consideration when determining whether an applicant meets the application requirements.

1.4.5 Data protection notice

When assessing eligibility, all personal data provided to the FWF by a consortium member on a voluntary basis that relates to the information provided in [sections 1.4.3](#) and [1.4.4](#) shall be taken into consideration exclusively to their benefit (to compensate for disadvantages). Please complete the required [form](#) and give your explicit consent to data processing on the last page. If you wish to submit further supporting documents in addition to those listed in the form, please submit them directly to the FWF Office. These will not be visible to your research institution. All information provided in this regard is used solely to check the application requirements and is not made available to reviewers.

Relevant information, without sensitive or personal data, can be included in an individual's academic CV, making it available to the reviewers. A general explanation, including the duration of the interruption or delay, is sufficient.

1.5 What types of funding can be requested?

Project-specific costs are eligible for funding. These include personnel and non-personnel costs that are needed to carry out the project (between €3 million and €9 million for five years, including 5% general project costs) and that are not included in the infrastructure provided by the research institutions. The FWF does not finance the infrastructure or basic equipment of research institutions.

For information on applying for personnel costs for consortium members' salaries, please see [section 2.3.1.1](#).

⁵ Childcare includes parental leave periods, if applicable.

⁶ Immediate family members and/or persons living in the same household: Spouses, registered partners, parents, children, adopted, step, and foster children, siblings, parents-in-law, and children-in-law.

Consortium members are only permitted to change the amount applied for in the pre-proposal in the full proposal in special cases specified by the FWF. However, the total funding requested may not exceed €9 million, even in the full proposal.

Please note that exaggerated cost projections may be grounds for rejection, even if a proposal is otherwise excellent.

Multiple funding is not permitted (see [FWF Funding Guidelines](#)).

2 Application

2.1 Sections of the application

A complete application must include the following sections:

2.1.1 Academic abstract

The (arts-based) academic abstract must be written in English, may not exceed 3,000 characters (including spaces; no formulas or special characters) and will be used to inform potential reviewers about the project. The abstract must use the English headings provided below and be entered into the designated form on elane.

- Wider research context / theoretical framework
- Hypotheses / research questions / objectives
- Approach / methods
- Level of originality / innovation
- Primary researchers involved

Where alternatives are indicated between slashes, please select those that apply to your project.

2.1.2 Project description

Project descriptions are limited to 20 consecutively numbered pages, including the table of contents (required), and where applicable, a list of abbreviations, headings, figures, captions, tables, footnotes, etc.

The project description must also include Annexes 1–3 and Annex 4 if applicable, on additional pages:

- Annex 1: List of literature cited in the application (*References*) on no more than 5 pages

- Annex 2: Details of the lead research institution and any partner research institutions and a plausible justification of the funding requested
- Annex 3: Academic or arts-based research CVs and description of previous research achievements for all consortium members involved in the application (no more than 3 pages per person)
- Annex 4 (optional): Collaboration letters from national and international cooperation partners (max. 1 page per letter)

The entire project description, including these annexes, must be uploaded as one file entitled *Proposal.pdf*. The FWF will send this document to the reviewers.

2.1.3 Additional documents

- Required:
 - A list of two publications or artistic works by each consortium member, documenting fulfillment of the general application requirements (publication record, see [section 1.4.1](#)) – for internal FWF use only
 - Publication lists (and/or list of artistic works for arts-based researchers) for internal FWF use to assess eligibility to apply and to check for conflicts of interest with potential reviewers (see [section 2.2.4](#))
- Where applicable:
 - Total costs: If consortium members in Germany are involved in the proposal (DFG participation, see [section 1.3.1.1](#)), the requested funding must be detailed in the Excel spreadsheet [Total-costs.xlsx](#).
 - Program-specific data of consortium members in Germany: This form must be completed and uploaded for each of the up to two consortium members in Germany, see [section 1.3.1.1](#).
 - Results or Final Project Report: If the project submitted is the continuation of an FWF-funded project (follow-up application), a report on previous results or a Final Project Report and a list of publications resulting from the project must be uploaded in the language of the application (no more than 6 pages)
 - Additional documents in the case of resubmission: If the application is a revised version of a previously rejected application (see [section 2.4](#)), a response to the reviews and an overview of all changes made in the resubmitted application must be uploaded (*Overview_revision*).
 - Cover letter accompanying the application (optional)

- List of up to 3 researchers (optional) – including, if applicable, reviewers of a rejected proposal – who are to be excluded from the review process (see [section 4.2](#)), with a brief justification

Any additional documents (e.g., recommendations for potential reviewers, letters of recommendation, forthcoming publications) will not be considered in further stages of the application process.

2.1.4 Forms to be completed

- Required forms: *Research site allocation*, *Contact*, *Application* (to be completed by the coordinator), *Program-specific data* (to be completed by the coordinator and all consortium members; if multiple research institutions are involved, the percentual distribution of funding per research institution must be entered here), *Cost breakdown*, *Academic abstract*, and *Co-authors*
- Where applicable: *Other cooperation*

2.2 Application content and form

2.2.1 Application language

To allow applications to be reviewed by international experts, **all** applications must be submitted in English.

2.2.2 Project description: Scope and formatting requirements

The project description may not exceed 20 pages. It must contain a table of contents with page numbers. Optional elements, such as a list of abbreviations, figures, figure legends, tables, footnotes, etc., must also be included in the 20-page limit.

The continuous text in the project description, Annexes 1–3, the publication lists, and the additional documents specified in [section 2.1.3](#) where applicable, must be written, without exception, in 11 pt. font with 1.5 line (15–20 pt.) spacing and at least 2 cm margins. A standard, easily legible font must be used for the body text. Formatting requirements (font type and size, line spacing, and margins) of the project description also apply for the additional documents, except for documents not prepared by the consortium members, such as collaboration letters.

Citations in the text and the list of works cited (*References*) in the application must be in line with the conventions of the respective discipline, preferably according to a widely used style guide (e.g., Chicago Manual of Style, APA Publication Manual). Consortium members are free to choose the citation conventions or style guide they prefer, but they must apply them consistently throughout the application. If available, a [DOI address](#) or another [persistent identifier](#) should be used for the literature cited.

2.2.3 Project description and annexes

There is no prescribed structure for the project description. International reviewers will evaluate the application in writing using the questions provided for the reviewers (see [Appendix B](#)). The following aspects must be addressed:

- State of research, research project, methodology, objectives, and hypotheses in an international context
- Level of originality or (arts-based) scientific innovation
- Expertise of the research team
- Collaboration within the project and, if applicable, with cooperation partners; added value of the collaboration
- All potential ethical, safety-related, or regulatory aspects⁷ of the proposal and how applicants plan to deal with them must be described in this section. If, in the opinion of the consortium member, the project does not raise such issues, justification should be provided.
- Any potential sex-specific and gender-related aspects⁸ of the proposal must be detailed. To what extent are sex-specific and gender-related aspects considered in the proposal? How will they be integrated into the research approach? These questions must be addressed briefly, even if the consortium members do not feel that the project involves any such components.
- If consortium members in Germany are involved in the application (see [section 1.3.1.1](#)), the project parts being carried out in Germany must be described in the application in detail. This description must clearly indicate which research work is being carried out in Germany and how the cooperation between the Austrian and German parts of the project will be implemented.

Annex 1: List of literature cited in the application (*References*) on no more than 5 pages

Annex 2: Financial aspects

The template for the description of projected costs can be found in [Appendix A](#).

- Information on the lead research institution and of partner research institution(s) where applicable

⁷ For instance, the European Commission's [Ethics for Researchers](#) or [The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) can serve as a guide here.

⁸ Positioning and thoughts on the research approaches in the project in terms of sex-specific and gender-related aspects could include: Is the research approach likely to produce sex-specific and gender-related findings? If so, what findings? How and where are these integrated into the research approach? (For information on determining the relevance of sex-specific and gender-related issues please see the [FWF website](#).)

- Existing project participants (not financed by FWF project funds – usually the consortium members and academic project staff at the research institutions)
- Available infrastructure
- Information on the funding requested
 - Explanation of why the personnel requested is needed (type(s) of requested position(s), job descriptions, extent of employment, and duration of involvement in the project)
 - Concise justifications for non-personnel costs (equipment, materials, travel expenses, and other costs); if funding for equipment is requested, applicants must explain why this does not constitute part of the basic equipment of the given research environment – see [section 2.3.2](#)).

Annex 3: CVs and description of previous research achievements

Academic (arts-based research) CVs and the research achievements of the consortium members must be described on no more than 3 pages per person. Please note that pursuant to the [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment](#), journal-based metrics such as journal impact factors, Article Influence Scores, or the h-index may not be included in academic CVs.

(Arts-based) Academic CVs must be structured as follows:

- *Personal details:* Personal data (name, researcher unique identifiers such as ORCID, research ID, etc., no photos), address of research institution, and relevant websites; please also provide a publicly accessible link to a list of all the researcher's publications.
- *Education:* List of artistic, scientific, scholarly, and/or arts-based research achievements
- *Position(s):* List of relevant artistic, scientific, or arts-based research positions (incl. the extent of employment in the case of part-time employment)
- *Career breaks* (if any): List of breaks or delays in the individual's scientific or arts-based research career (see also [section 1.4.3](#))
- *Net research experience* (optional): The length of time (in years and months) that has actually been used in net total for (arts-based) research – calculated in such a way as to be equivalent to full-time employment – and broken down into the time before and after completion of the applicant's doctoral degree. This is intended to make it easier for the reviewers to assess the researcher's qualifications in terms of academic age.
- *Research interests:* Description of the main areas of research and the most important research results achieved to date

- *Academic publications and/or (arts-based) research publications and/or works:* List of no more than 10 of the most important published or accepted publications and/or works (journal articles, monographs, edited volumes, contributions to edited volumes, proceedings, concerts, exhibitions, installations, performances, artworks, etc.); for each publication, either a [DOI address](#) or another [persistent identifier](#) should be indicated, if available.
- *Additional (arts-based) research achievements:* List of a maximum of ten of the most important (arts-based) research achievements outside of academic publications. Please present each research achievement individually (e.g., one project = one research achievement, two projects = two research achievements, etc.). Examples of such research achievements include freely accessible research data including software and codes, awards, contributions to conferences, keynote lectures, significant research projects, peer review activities, promotion of junior researchers, exhibitions, interactions with society (including citizen science or transdisciplinary activities), science communication, knowledge transfer, licenses, or patents. If available, a persistent identifier or link to the respective research achievement must be provided.

Annex 4 (optional): Collaboration letters

Collaboration letters (each no more than 1 page) from national and international cooperation partners who are named in the project description as being essential for the implementation of the project and whose role is plausibly described

2.2.4 Publication output

The following two separate uploads are required:

- *PI_publication.pdf:* Two publications or artistic works by each consortium member must be named, documenting fulfillment of the general application requirements (see template [PI_publication](#)). The FWF will determine eligibility to apply based on these publications.
- *Publication_lists.pdf:* List of all academic publications or artistic works⁹ published in the last 5 years (categorized into “quality-assured publications” and “other publications”) for all consortium members and postdocs who are funded by the project, in *one* PDF document; this publication list helps the FWF to determine if there are any potential conflicts of interest with reviewers. It will not be forwarded to the reviewers.

2.2.5 Total costs

For details on the funds that can be requested, please see [section 2.3](#).

⁹ Publication lists must include: all authors, complete titles, journal, year, and page numbers. For each publication, if available, either a [DOI address](#) or another [persistent identifier](#) should be indicated; for publications with more than 20 authors, an “et al.” citation can be used.

If consortium members in Germany are involved in the application (see [section 1.3.1.1](#)), only the funding requested from the FWF is recorded in the elane *Cost breakdown* form. In this case, the requested funding including the German project parts must be presented separately in the Excel spreadsheet [Total-costs.xlsx](#).

2.3 Eligible project-specific costs

When requesting funding, the regulations of the respective research institution and the FWF guidelines apply. The requested funds must be summarized in the elane *Cost breakdown* form.

If a research institution for which funds are requested is entitled to deduct value-added tax (VAT), the funds should be applied for without value-added tax (net). This applies to the lead research institution and, if applicable, to any partner research institutions.

VAT is an eligible expense only if the research institution(s) is/are not entitled to deduct it and it is demonstrably and finally borne by the research institution(s). Recoverable VAT is ineligible for funding, even if it is not reclaimed or recovered by the funding recipient.

Funding may only be requested for the cost categories specified below.

2.3.1 Personnel costs

Funding may only be requested for staff needed in addition to existing personnel resources for the realization of the project and only to the extent required for the project.

Full- or part-time employment contracts (*Dienstverträge*, DV) and contracts for marginal employment (*geringfügige Beschäftigung*, GB) are available for project staff. The [FWF's standard personnel costs](#) apply. These include a fixed percentual increase set by the FWF for subsequent years to compensate for wage increases.

Employment contracts for doctoral students may not exceed 75% employment (up to 30 hours per week). A part-time (50%) employment contract of 20 hours/week for student employees may be requested for researchers who have not yet completed a graduate degree program in the relevant subject area.

A full-time position for a project administrator (postdoctoral rate) may be requested to support the coordinator.

2.3.1.1 Grant-salaried positions

The FWF understands “grant-salaried” to mean that the consortium members’ salary is financed by the funds of the research project.

Applying for funding (including partial funding) of one's own position is possible for every consortium member, regardless of whether they are in permanent or long-term employment at the time of application. A senior postdoc salary¹⁰ may be requested for the grant-salaried position (pro-rated accordingly in the case of partial funding).

Women consortium members whose own position is funded to the extent of at least 50% have the additional option of applying for up to €2,000 per year in the category of "Other costs" for personal coaching and further training measures that directly contribute to their career development. Coaching is understood to mean person-centered counselling and support processes in a professional context. Continuing education activities eligible for funding include courses on scientific – in particular, subject-specific – skills (e.g., courses on methodological skills) and personnel development measures such as those offered at some research institutions (e.g., in teaching, academic writing, writing funding applications, especially in English, personnel management and project management, conflict- and problem-solving skills, academic organization, and vocational training and other seminars directly related to career development, including programs for the advancement of women).

2.3.2 Equipment costs

Funding for equipment may only be requested if it is specifically required for the project and if it is not part of the existing infrastructure of the participating research institution(s). "Infrastructure" is defined to include all equipment (and components thereof) that a modern research institution needs to conduct basic research in the relevant discipline at an internationally competitive level. This means that equipment such as computers, laptops, etc. are considered part of the standard infrastructure and no funding will be approved for these items.

Equipment eligible for funding includes:

- Scientific instruments
- System components
- Self-constructed devices (generally assembled from smaller pieces of equipment and materials)
- Other durable goods
- Intangible assets such as concessions, industrial property rights, and licenses derived from such rights

Equipment with an acquisition value in excess of €250,000 can only be financed through depreciation. Only the percentage of costs that are incurred during the project period can be requested and financed. The depreciation rules of the research institution acquiring the equipment apply.

¹⁰ The senior postdoc rate can only be requested to fund the consortium member's own position; the postdoc salary rate applies for project staff members at the postdoc level.

If funding is requested for a piece of equipment which is required specifically for the project, the lead research institution confirms upon submission that they have verified that no comparable equipment that could be used or shared is available within a reasonable distance, and that third-party (co-)financing options have been explored. The research institution that owns the equipment must also ensure that any possible costs arising from the use, maintenance, and repairs of the equipment are covered.

The coordinator is to instruct their research institution to order the equipment and effect payment accordingly. The principles of economy, efficiency, and expediency apply to any acquisition. The procurement guidelines of the research institution and the provisions of the [Federal Procurement Act 2018](#) as amended apply.

In order to determine the equipment costs (incl. VAT, unless the research institution is entitled to deduct input tax) to be requested, vendor quotes must be obtained before the application is submitted pursuant to the research institution's procurement guidelines. Vendor quotes are submitted to the FWF only upon request.

If a specific piece of equipment is required that is available at the research institution but is in need of repair, funds for repair can be requested instead of funds for a new purchase. The same applies here: The prerequisite for eligibility is that the equipment may not be part of the research institution's infrastructure and is not used for other purposes.

2.3.3 Material costs

"Materials" is defined as consumables and small items of equipment (cost per item less than €1,500 incl. VAT).

The calculation of funds requested for project-specific material costs should be justified based on the project's schedule, work plans, and experimental schedule. Experience from previous projects should be considered in making the calculations.

2.3.4 Travel costs

Funding may be requested for project-specific travel and accommodation, field work, expeditions, etc. The project description must include a detailed itinerary, broken down by project staff members. This plan must indicate which staff members will be travelling, the destination, for what purpose, when (in which year of the project), for how long, and how much the travel will cost.

When planning travel in connection with a project, researchers should always carefully consider whether travel is absolutely necessary or whether the relevant information can be exchanged virtually.

If a project requires travel, transportation by train is generally preferred to travel by air as a contribution to environmental sustainability. Funding can be requested for any resulting extra costs such as an additional overnight stay.

Travel expenses for researchers from national and international research institutions other than the lead research institution and/or the partner research institution(s) can only be granted in exceptional cases. Grounds for the exception must be provided in detail.

Travel and accommodation costs are generally calculated according to the individual travel expenses policies of the lead or partner research institution. If no such policies are in place at the research institution, the federal regulations governing travel costs ([Reisegebührevorschrift des Bundes 1955, RGV](#)) as amended apply.

2.3.5 Costs as part of national and international collaborations

In the case of cooperation arrangements, costs arising within the context of a research cooperation at the respective research institution are to be borne by that research institution. This does not apply to [cooperation arrangements with researchers from developing countries](#) (see [section 2.3.6](#)).

Funds may only be transferred directly to a cooperation partner (in Austria or abroad) upon presentation of an invoice and only if they are in payment for clearly defined commissions or services and immediately necessary to carry out the Austrian project.

2.3.6 Other eligible costs

- Independent contractor agreements (costs for work of clearly defined scope and content carried out by individuals, provided that they are cost-efficient and justified in the context of the artistic, scientific, or arts-based research project)
- Funding for annual team retreats in Austria (internal, project-specific events intended to strengthen the scientific exchange between project participants);
- Costs for the preparation, archiving, open access, and reuse of research data in repositories in accordance with the FWF's [Open-Access Policy for Research Data](#)
- Costs that cannot be included under personnel, equipment, materials, or travel costs, for example:
 - The use of research facilities, e.g., costs for the project-specific use of available equipment (project-specific "equipment usage time") or large research facilities
 - Costs for necessary project-specific artistic events (funding for these costs shall only be granted in the amount considered by the reviewers to be absolutely essential for carrying out the project)
 - Any laboratory animals necessary for the project

- Project-specific work carried out outside the researcher's research institution (e.g., for analyses carried out elsewhere, interviews, sample collection, etc.)
- Disposal of project-specific hazardous waste
- [Cooperation arrangements with researchers in developing countries](#)
- [Equality measures](#): The consortium can budget a maximum of €20,000 per year for equality measures as part of the project's total funding volume.

The procurement guidelines of the research institution and the provisions of the [Federal Procurement Act 2018](#) as amended apply.

2.3.7 General project costs

The approved grant sum includes 5% general project costs that are permitted for funding but cannot be requested individually using the abovementioned cost categories. They are subject to the [FWF's Funding Guidelines](#) and the costs must be eligible for funding. These include, for example, costs for conference travel, dissemination activities, and minor unforeseen costs necessary for the project.

Overhead costs for the research institution are not included in general project costs.

General project costs are to be entered in the appropriate field in the *Cost breakdown* form and calculated as 5% of the total funding requested. General project costs impact the number of reviews required for the proposal (see [section 3.3](#)). No justification for general costs is needed in [Appendix A](#).

2.3.8 Publication costs

Publication costs cannot be requested as part of the application process. Information on funding options for publications resulting from FWF-funded projects can be found on the FWF website under [Funding Portfolio: Communication](#).

2.4 Resubmitting a previously rejected application

A resubmission is defined as the revision of an application which the FWF has rejected with the same or similar research or arts-based research questions, regardless of the program category. If an application is submitted on the same or a very similar research or arts-based research question and if, in the view of the consortium, this application is not a resubmission but a completely new project, this must be explained in a separate accompanying letter to the FWF Office. For example, changes in research methods alone are not sufficient for a proposal to qualify as a completely new project. In cases of doubt, the appropriate decision-making bodies of the FWF shall decide.

Resubmissions must show changes from the rejected application. If an application has been rejected for the standardized grounds for rejection C3, C4, or C5, these changes need to be

substantial (based on the comments in the reviews). If no such changes are made, the FWF's decision-making bodies will return the application to the applicant without review.

When resubmitting an application, the following documents must be uploaded:

- An accompanying letter containing an overview of all changes made in the resubmitted application must be submitted to the FWF (*Overview_revision*). This overview will not be passed on to the reviewers.
- A response to all reviews of the rejected application must be provided, even if one of the reviewers is to be excluded from reviewing the resubmitted application (see [section 3.2](#)). This response, consolidated in *one* document, will be forwarded to all reviewers assessing the resubmission and should address the recommendations and criticisms included in the previous reviews as well as describe the resulting changes made.

While no deadlines for the resubmission of a rejected application apply, the respective application requirements do need to be complied with. Resubmissions must be submitted as described in [section 2.1](#), i.e., as a separate, new application and not as a supplementary application to the previously rejected proposal.

2.5 File formats, file names, and online forms

The following sections provide an overview of all files and forms to be submitted.

2.5.1 All applications must include the following parts:

a) Files:

- *Proposal.pdf* (project description incl. Annexes 1–3 and where applicable 4, with PDF bookmarks, at least for the major sections)
- *PI_publication.pdf* (two publications written by each consortium member must be named, documenting fulfillment of the general application requirements).
- *Publication_lists.pdf* (list of all academic publications published in the last five years for all consortium members and postdocs to be funded by the project, categorized into “quality-assured publications” and “other publications”)

b) Forms:

- *Research institution assignment*
- *Contact*
- *Application* (to be completed by the coordinator)
- *Program-specific data – coordinator*
- *Program-specific data – consortium member* (this form must be completed individually for each of the up to eleven consortium members in addition to the coordinator's form; if multiple research institutions are involved, the percentual distribution of funding per research institution must be entered here)

- *Cost breakdown*
- *Academic abstract* (in English)
- *Co-authors*
- *Other cooperation* (if applicable; for national and international cooperation partners)

2.5.2 File uploads, if applicable

- [Total-costs.xlsx](#) (= Excel spreadsheet of all requested funding, required if consortium members in Germany are involved in the proposal – DFG project parts, see [section 1.3.1.1](#))
- [Program-specific-data consortium-member DFG.pdf](#) (this form that must be completed and uploaded for each of the up to two consortium members in Germany, see [section 1.3.1.1](#))
- *Cover_letter.pdf* (= accompanying letter; optional)
- *Negative_list.pdf* (= reviewers who should be excluded; optional)
- *Follow.pdf* (= result report or Final Project Report of the previous project for follow-up applications; will be forwarded to the reviewers)
- *Overview_revision.pdf* (= for resubmissions, overview of all changes made in the resubmitted application)
- *Revision.pdf* (= for resubmissions, response to all reviews of the previously rejected application)

3 Processing and Decision on the Application

3.1 Submission and requests for changes

All of the documents specified above must be uploaded in full to [elane](#). Once an application has been officially submitted, the research institution and the coordinator can make no further changes to the application themselves. All applications that have been approved by the lead research institution on or before the deadline of **September 16, 2025, 2:00 pm Vienna local time** will be checked for completeness and any formal errors by the FWF Office.

The most common reasons why applications are returned without review are (a) a consortium member's publication record does not meet the requirements (see [section 1.4.1](#)), (b) the application does not address specific hypotheses or research questions (see [section 2.2.3](#)), or (c) resubmissions have not been sufficiently revised (see [section 2.4](#)).

If the FWF Office identifies issues with the application that it considers to be rectifiable, it will notify the lead research institution and the coordinator, giving them the opportunity to correct the problems within a period of 10 working days. The requested changes are to be submitted to [elane](#) as a supplementary application and approved for submission by the lead research

institution if applicable. If the **requested changes** are not submitted in full before the deadline, the decision-making bodies at the FWF will return the application without review.

Once the review process has begun, no more changes can be made to the application.

3.2 Excluding reviewers

A list of up to three potential reviewers who should not be consulted to review the proposal due to a possible conflict of interest can be uploaded as an additional document. The coordinator must give reasons why they wish to exclude these reviewers. If the reasons for exclusion are professionally and academically sound, the FWF will generally fulfill the coordinator's request and exclude those reviewers from the review process. A detailed description of the FWF's policy on conflicts of interest can be found in the [General Principles of the Decision-Making Procedure](#).

Please note that the FWF does not wish to receive, nor will it consider a list of potential reviewers from applicants.

3.3 Decision-making process

A detailed description of the decision-making process, the criteria for selecting international reviewers, and detailed rules concerning conflicts of interest and the composition of juries and review panels can be found in the [General Principles of the Decision-Making Procedure](#).

The decision-making process for Specialized Research Groups consists of two stages.

Stage 1: Pre-proposal

All pre-proposals meeting the FWF's formal criteria will be sent out for **review**. At least three reviews are required for a positive decision. In exceptional cases, a rejection is permitted on the basis of fewer than three reviews if any further reviews would not be able to balance out the reviewers' overall negative assessment. The FWF Scientific Board is expected to decide on the pre-proposals in March 2026 on the basis of the reviews obtained. If the Board's decision is positive, the respective applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal and to attend a hearing. The lead research institution and the coordinator will be informed of the FWF's decision in writing.

Stage 2: Full proposal and hearing

The project description for the full proposal may not exceed 40 pages. Application Guidelines for the preparation and submission of the full proposal will be sent to the coordinator after the pre-proposal has been approved. All full proposals meeting the FWF's formal criteria will be sent out for **review**. As a rule, four reviews are obtained for each full proposal. The FWF makes every effort to appoint at least two reviewers from the pre-proposal stage as well as two additional new reviewers.

All consortia invited to submit a full proposal must attend a **hearing** before a panel of experts after the written reviews of the full proposal have been processed. Hearings are held before three panels of experts, which are reconstituted on an annual basis depending on the consortia invited to submit full proposals and attend a hearing. The three panels correspond to the FWF's specialist departments (Biology and Medicine, Humanities and Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and Technology). As a rule, at least two experts are appointed to the panel for each Specialized Research Groups proposal. The dates for the hearings are set by the FWF and are generally between mid-September and late October.

The Scientific Board makes its funding decisions based on the overall results of the review process. The lead research institution and the coordinator will be informed of the FWF's decision in writing. Projects must begin on March 1 of the calendar year following the decision.

If approved for funding, the consortium must enclose a set of statutes with the Grant Agreement specifying the coordinator's responsibilities and competences and setting out the rules of cooperation within the consortium.

The entire decision-making process for Specialized Research Groups usually takes about 14 months.

3.4 Grounds for rejection

The reasons for rejecting an application are assigned to one of five categories (C1–C5) and communicated to the coordinator and the lead research institution; the coordinator is also sent anonymized copies of the reviews. A detailed description of the grounds for rejection can be found in the [General Principles of the Decision-Making Procedure](#).

3.5 Reviewing resubmissions

If the application is a **resubmission** of a previously rejected proposal, the FWF will generally contact those reviewers who provided constructive criticism on the previous application. Reviewers who gave entirely positive or negative comments will generally not be contacted for a repeat review. Resubmissions are, however, usually also evaluated by new reviewers.

3.6 Proposal bans

Applications that are rejected for reason C5 will also be barred for this program's next call and cannot be resubmitted at that time.

Applications that have been submitted to the same program three times (i.e., the original application and corresponding resubmissions) and rejected for reasons C3 or C4 are also barred for this program's next call. Rejections for reasons C1 or C2 do not count towards this

total. In general, only topics are banned, not consortium members or applying research institutions.

Application bans issued for Special Research Areas and Research Groups also apply to Specialized Research Groups.

4 Compliance with Legal Requirements and Standards of Research Integrity

4.1 Legal regulations

Please note that research institution(s) and all persons involved in the project must comply with all legal requirements and safety provisions (e.g., Federal Disabilities Act, Federal Equal Treatment Act) and all embargo and sanction regulations (e.g. Dual-Use Regulation [EU] 2021/821) that apply for the implementation of the project and must obtain all the necessary permits (e.g., from the Ethics Committee, the Animal Testing Commission, the National Heritage Agency, or the relevant foreign authorities).

4.2 Academic integrity

The [Guidelines for Good Scientific Practice](#) of the [Austrian Agency for Research Integrity \(OeAWI\)](#) apply.

Where a breach of these standards is suspected, the ombud of the respective research institution is responsible for investigating the issue. The research institution must report any cases of suspected serious deviations to the OeAWI. The FWF reserves the right to suspend, in part or in whole, any procedures related to applications or ongoing projects until this check or investigation has been concluded. For more detailed information, please see [FWF procedure in cases of suspected violation of the standards of good research practice](#).

5 Data Protection and Publication of Project Data and Results

5.1 Data protection

Pursuant to Art. 6 (1) item a of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), in conjunction with § 2g of the Austrian Research Organization Act (*Forschungsorganisationsgesetz*, FOG), the FWF processes and publishes personal data (e.g. the title of the submitted project, research institution, academic abstract, PR summaries) necessary for the administration of the funding by the FWF – while safeguarding business and trade secrets – for the purposes of research policy (e.g., presentation of the development of basic research

in Austria, economic analyses, funding impact reports, etc.) and for public relations work (publication of excerpts in the FWF annual report, on the FWF website, in press releases, media collaborations, etc.). If necessary, these data are also transmitted to third parties (e.g., for the preparation of research policy studies, on the basis of supervisory duties, in particular §§ 2d and 3a of the Research and Technology Funding Act [*Forschungs- und Technologieförderungsgesetz*, FTFG], to bodies and agents of the Federal Ministry of Women, Science and Research and, in particular, pursuant to § 3 [2], § 4 [1], and § 13 [3] of the Court of Audit Act 1948 [*Rechnungshofgesetz* 1948 RHG], to the Austrian Court of Audit as well as to bodies and institutions of the European Union in accordance with European legal provisions). Transmission of data is also based on § 6 (1) item c of the GDPR in conjunction with § 2g of the FOG.

Further information on the data privacy rights of the consortium members or applying research institution as well as the contact details of the FWF's data protection officers is available [here](#).

5.2 Publication of project data and results

Proposal summaries must be submitted to the FWF when the grant agreement is returned. Please note that if a grant is awarded, a PR proposal summary in German and English will be published on the FWF website, as well as the grant amount and later, PR results summaries of the project's findings in German and English. The coordinator must ensure that these texts are worded in such a way that legitimate interests of secrecy for reasons of national defense and patent law are safeguarded and business secrets are protected appropriately. [Guidelines for writing PR summaries](#) can be found on the FWF website.

In addition, the FWF requires a data management plan (DMP) for all approved projects. This plan should also be sent to the FWF when returning the grant agreement. The [template for the DMP](#) can be viewed and downloaded on the FWF website.

The guidelines specified in the grant agreement on acknowledging the FWF as the funding institution and the FWF's [Open-Access Policy](#) apply for any publication of project results (e.g., academic publications, research data, conference papers, and media reports).

6 Appendices to the Application Guidelines

6.1 Appendix A: Information on the research institution and description of financial aspects

Information on the lead research institution and any partner institutions and the description of project finances must be presented **in English** and appended to the project description as Annex 2. Costs must be broken down and adequately justified for each point below. The list of and justification for the requested funds must correspond to the costs indicated in the *Cost breakdown* form and may not exceed a total of €9 million.¹¹ The description should be structured as follows:

(a) Details on the lead research institution and – if applicable – the partner research institution(s):

- Existing personnel (not financed by the FWF, usually the consortium members and research personnel at the research institution(s))
- Existing infrastructure

(b) Information on the funding requested:

- Explain briefly why the personnel requested is needed for the project (number and type of requested positions, job descriptions, extent of employment, and duration of involvement in the project)
- Explain briefly why the non-personnel costs requested are justified (equipment, materials, travel, and other costs). If funding for equipment is requested, applicants must explain why this does not constitute part of the basic equipment of the existing research environment – see also [section 2.3.2.](#)

Please list and provide justifications for the following:

Personnel costs:

Equipment costs:

Material costs:

Travel costs:

Other costs (including independent contractor agreements):

¹¹ The funding requested for the Specialized Research Group, including the German participations, may not exceed a total of €9 million. Funds requested for German project parts may not be listed in the *Cost breakdown* form, but must be described in Appendix A and presented in the Excel spreadsheet *Total-costs.xlsx*.

6.2 Appendix B: Notes and questions for reviewers in the Specialized Research Groups funding program¹²

In all of its programs, the FWF actively supports equal opportunities and equal treatment. The review of a proposal must not put researchers at a disadvantage for non-research-related reasons such as age, gender, etc. For example, the review of applications should not focus on the researcher's actual age, but on the relation between the researcher's previous research achievements and the length of their research career.

Our commitment to equal opportunities also means taking breaks or delays in consortium members' careers into consideration (e.g., due to parental leave; long-term or chronic illness; disability; caregiving responsibilities; etc.) which may have resulted in gaps in a researcher's publication record, unorthodox career paths, or limited international research experience. Please also see our information for reviewers on [Unconscious bias in the decision-making process](#).

Only the ten most important academic publications and the ten most important additional research achievements of the consortium member are to be considered when evaluating the application. As a signatory to the [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment](#), the FWF also emphasizes that, in assessing research performance, reviewers should refrain from using journal-based metrics such as journal impact factors, Article Influence Scores, or the h-index.

Please review the current proposal¹³ based on the following three assessment criteria: 1) Project, 2) Researchers involved, and 3) Overall evaluation. For each of these criteria, we ask you for both written comments and a rating on a scale from "outstanding" to "poor." Please be aware, however, that the FWF's funding decision will be based primarily on reviewers' written assessments rather than the ratings assigned.

Please keep in mind that sections 1 and 2 will be forwarded to the coordinator in full and in anonymous form. In the event of approval, the research institution will be allowed to read the anonymized reviews forwarded to the coordinator.

¹² Further information can be found on the FWF website: [FWF's mission statement and values](#) and the [Application Guidelines for Specialized Research Groups \(Pre-Proposal\)](#).

¹³ The project proposal must meet the FWF's formal requirements. Please bear these in mind when writing your review. (Key formal requirements: no more than 20 pages for the project description including figures and tables; no more than 5 pages for the list of references; no more than 3 pages for each academic CV, including a description of previous research achievements and the ten most important publications. For further information, please see the [Application Guidelines for Specialized Research Groups \(Pre-Proposal\)](#)).

Section 1: Forwarded to the consortium members in full

1) Project

- a) The **quality of the research project**, in particular in an international context
- b) The project's **potential for innovation**
- c) The **coherence** of and **added value** generated by the proposed research project
- d) The project's potential for generating significant **synergies** between the researchers involved
- e) **Ethics**: Have ethical considerations been addressed satisfactorily?
Sex-specific and gender-related aspects: Independently of the gender balance among the consortium (see 2 below), researchers are required to address any relevant sex-specific and/or gender-related aspects inherent in research questions and/or research design. Please assess whether the treatment of these aspects is adequate.

2) Researchers involved

- a) Quality of the individual researchers' **previous work** and their potential for making a **significant contribution** to the proposed research
When evaluating their qualifications, please consider their career stage, taking into account unorthodox career paths and circumstances that may have slowed down their progress (e.g., parental leave, long-term or chronic illness, disability, caregiving responsibilities).
- b) The **composition** of the team with respect to expertise, the level of cooperation within the project, and how suitable these are for meeting the research project's goals
- c) The **composition** of the consortium in terms of the different academic ages of the researchers involved
- d) The **gender balance** of researchers in the consortium

3) Overall evaluation

Please summarize your assessment.

Section 2: Optional recommendations for consortium members

If you are in favor of the project being funded, you may want to add to the formal assessment in section 1 by making further and perhaps more informal comments or suggestions here. However, please note that these remarks, too, may also have an impact on the FWF's funding decision, especially if they amount to substantive criticism of the project.

Section 3: Confidential remarks to the FWF

All information that could be relevant for a decision should ideally be included in sections 1 and 2, as these sections are also forwarded to the coordinator in full.

Please use this space to make any comments that you do not want communicated to the coordinator. Feel free to also give us feedback about the review process and your interactions with us.