

FWF Sustainability Strategy

The FWF is aware of its responsibility as a research funding organization and is committed to contributing to the sustainable development of society. For this reason, sustainability is one of its core values, and the FWF is developing a sustainability strategy and a package of key sustainability measures.

The FWF makes every effort to support sustainability with suitable strategies both in its funding programs and in its work at the FWF Office. Currently planned measures are summarized in this Sustainability Strategy, but will be continuously developed and adjusted to account for changing circumstances and new opportunities. The FWF bases its strategy on international developments and is in active contact with partner organizations and relevant working groups.

The FWF's sustainability activities can be divided into three fields of action:

1. Sustainable implementation of FWF projects
2. Sustainable working practices at the FWF Office
3. Funding research on sustainability

With regard to research, a distinction can be made between the sustainable implementation of research projects and the funding of projects on sustainability-related topics, i.e., projects with a research question that focuses on sustainability issues.

With this Sustainability Strategy, the FWF aims to allow researchers to implement their FWF projects as sustainably as possible. The following section 1 will focus on the sustainable implementation of research projects. Funding research on sustainability-related topics is covered in section 3.

1. Sustainable implementation of FWF projects

The FWF funds hundreds of research projects throughout Austria, involving around 5,000 researchers. The first field of action aims to help researchers implement their projects as sustainably as possible.¹ The FWF works closely with research institutions to support the sustainable implementation of research projects with suitable framework conditions.

Cooperation with research institutions

The participating research institutions are responsible for many of the measures needed for making research more sustainable. Examples include: green public procurement, creating a

¹ With regard to the sustainability of the research process, proposals should focus only on the ecological aspects of sustainability. This includes the responsible use of natural resources, the conservation of biodiversity, limiting emissions and waste, and protecting ecological systems to safeguard human and animal life in the long term.

sustainable research infrastructure through the expansion and improved use of core facilities,² suitable facilities for maintenance and repair, sustainable use of materials and supplies, and numerous other framework conditions and internal guidelines (travel, events, virtual meeting formats, etc.).

The FWF's guidelines are intended to support research institutions in their efforts to conduct sustainable research, and the FWF works with universities and non-university research institutions to this end. The aim is to establish minimum sustainability standards at research institutions that can then be taken into account when researchers apply for FWF funding.

Statement on sustainability in the application process

Starting in the fall of 2025, the FWF plans to require a statement from principal investigators on sustainability in the implementation of their project when applying for funding in the programs Principal Investigator Projects (PAT), Principal Investigator Projects International (PIN), and Clinical Research (KLP). This requirement is intended to raise awareness by encouraging researchers to reflect on their own research practices.

In particular, applicants will be asked to address the following points:

- Travel and alternative meeting modes (virtual formats for meetings, conferences, etc.)
- Planning experiments, field trials, and surveys
- Consumables, laboratory materials, samples
- Computing power
- Procurement, maintenance, and repair of project-specific equipment

When applying for funding, researchers will be asked to describe sustainability-relevant aspects in the implementation of the proposed research. In particular, the aim is to take sustainability-related considerations into account in the research process. Measures taken to conserve resources and reduce emissions should not, however, limit the generation of knowledge: Scientific excellence is still the decisive criterion in the assessment of proposals. The achievable degree of sustainability will obviously vary widely, as resource consumption differs considerably depending on the discipline.

Costs arising from a sustainable approach – e.g., for sustainable travel, repairs to equipment, or sustainable procurement – can be included in the accounting for the approved funds.³

² Core facilities (CF) are central facilities at research institutions which house large-scale equipment needed by different working groups and institutes. Core facilities have their own permanent staff and offer research-related services.

³ For all procurement activities in a legal sense, the Federal Procurement Act 2018 (*Bundesvergabegesetz*, BVergG 2018) and the federal regulations governing travel costs apply. The procurement guidelines of the respective research institution also apply, provided they do not contradict FWF regulations.

All proposals submitted for the abovementioned programs must briefly describe how sustainability aspects will be implemented in the project (maximum 1 page). These aspects need to be suitably addressed in the statement even if the applicant believes the project does not raise any such issues. If suitably documented measures by the research institution are in place, these can be referenced as part of the statement. The FWF provides an orientation guide to help applicants prepare the sustainability statement.

In the initial pilot phase the FWF staff checks if a statement has been provided and requests one if necessary. Sustainability statements will be provided to reviewers, but are not a criterion for assessment. In the future, the FWF plans to have sustainability statements evaluated by the reviewers.

2. Sustainable working practices at the FWF Office

The FWF Office is committed to a sustainable approach in the administration of funding, in day-to-day office operations, and in the peer review process.

Office measures

The FWF makes every effort to act sustainably in its administrative processes and office operations. Affected aspects include:

- Commuting and business trips
- Paperless office
- Avoiding or reducing waste, recycling
- Procurement and repair
- Events, hospitality
- Energy use in the building
- Social sustainability

Accompanying measures and guidelines for all employees are in place for all of these aspects; some have already been implemented and some are still in the development phase. These measures are regularly evaluated and adjusted if necessary.

Juries and committees

The organization of committee meetings, jury and panel meetings, and hearings should be as resource-efficient as possible:

- Review whether the meeting or hearing is necessary and how it should be held (in person, hybrid, virtual)
- Scheduling and travel planning should be optimized
- Sustainable means of transportation

- Accommodation of the participants
- Catering
- Digital working documents

3. Funding research on sustainability

The legal basis for the FWF's work, the Austrian Research and Technology Funding Act (FTFG), stipulates that its funding programs must be fundamentally open to all topics. As part of its funding activities, the FWF also supports research projects that deal with sustainability issues.

Optimal conditions for sustainability research

Sustainability-related projects often have special characteristics that may put them at a disadvantage compared to other projects. Such projects often feature strongly interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approaches and sometimes involve citizen scientists. These approaches may be disadvantaged in the review process as compared to monodisciplinary research projects, which can result in them being more critically assessed. The FWF has been actively working for several years to remove these obstacles through targeted measures. Inter- and transdisciplinary work is integrated in the program design of the FWF's funding programs and is given appropriate consideration in the review process. With #ConnectingMinds, a separate funding program has been established exclusively for transdisciplinary research, and the Top Citizen Science program funds research featuring the active involvement of citizens. All projects that choose such approaches are naturally eligible for these programs, but they also especially benefit research projects in the field of sustainability.

Subject-specific programs

Participation in partially externally funded programs for the direct funding of sustainability-related projects is one of FWF's key strategies. Funds from the Fonds Zukunft Österreich (FZÖ) and from European programs (European Partnerships and ERA-NETs) are currently being used for this purpose. The FWF regularly proposes sustainability-related programs to be able to continue to support this topic with suitable direct funding.

Funding from the alpha+ Foundation

The alpha+ Foundation funds the most highly visible direct support for sustainability-related research with the Zero Emissions Award. Each year, up to €900,000 is invested in research projects aimed at closing knowledge gaps in the field of the energy transition. This makes the Zero Emissions Award Austria's largest privately sponsored grant for climate-relevant basic research. The FWF is working to acquire additional funds for direct funding of sustainability-

related research through the alpha+ Foundation, further expanding its commitment in this field.