Supplementary instructions for the “Alternative Methods to Animal Testing” research grants funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF)

Eligible projects

Funding is available for projects that are clearly defined with specific limits in terms of duration and budget that focus on the research and development of methods to avoid animal testing. The application guidelines for the Stand-Alone Projects programme apply here.

The focus of this funding programme is basic research in line with the 3Rs principles (replace reduce, refine) described by Russel and Burch in 1959. Funding is available for research proposals whose results contribute to replacing animal testing (replacement) or, if this is not possible, to reducing the number of animals used (reduction) or minimising the animals’ pain and distress (refinement).

How to submit an application

Applications under this call for proposals must be submitted following the guidelines and using the forms of the Stand-Alone Projects programme by 16 May 2022 (14:00 CET) at the latest.

Applications can only be submitted via the FWF’s electronic application portal (https://elane.fwf.ac.at). At the end of the online application process, a cover sheet is generated which must be sent to the FWF with the relevant signatures and stamps by no later than 16 May 2022. The date of postmark serves as proof of timely submission. Alternatively, the cover sheet can be signed using the applicant’s qualified electronic signature (e.g., mobile phone signature) and sent to the FWF (office@fwf.ac.at) by e-mail. Please note that a scanned, signed, and stamped cover sheet is invalid if it does not have a qualified electronic signature.

Please note that you must first select the “Stand-alone Project (P)” programme category and then select the “3R - Alternative Methods to Animal Testing” call from the drop-down menu.

In addition, a programme-specific form must be filled out in elane. On the basis of this programme-specific form, the FWF will decide whether the submitted stand-alone project actually meets the thematic requirements of the current call. If this is not the case, the applicant agrees that the application shall be processed and decided upon as a stand-alone project according to the standard procedure.

Once the application has been received, applicants may only make changes or provide supplementary information if requested to do so by the FWF; any such changes or supplementary information must be submitted within 10 days of receiving notification from the FWF. Applications which are received after the deadline will be handled according to the usual procedures of the Stand-Alone Projects programme.

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1 For example: https://www.digital.austria.gv.at/citizen-card-concept
Eligible costs
Depending upon the project, funding can be requested for project-specific costs (personnel and non-personnel costs). Please note that the number of reviews required depends on the amount of funding requested.

Decision-making procedure
Based on the recommendation of the FWF Board, the decision on the awarding of funding is made by the BMBWF within four weeks of the FWF Board’s decision-making meeting, which is expected to take place in December 2022. The BMBWF will provide €600,000 in funding for research projects as part of this call. Where the resources required for an excellent project to be funded by the BMBWF exceed the funding amount provided by the BMBWF, the FWF will fund the difference from its own budget. Grant proposals which receive outstanding reviews but cannot be funded by the BMBWF will be funded directly by the FWF.

Specific information on the call
Applications submitted under this call in the Stand-Alone Projects programme are not subject to the limit on the number of ongoing projects (“3 projects regulation”, PDF, 79 KB).

Notes and questions for reviewers of “Alternative Methods to Animal Testing” research grants
The FWF actively supports equal opportunities and fair treatment for all applicants. The FWF does not put applicants at a disadvantage for non-research-related reasons (such as age, gender, etc.) and therefore asks all reviewers to apply the same standards. For example, when assessing applicants’ qualifications, please disregard their actual age, but consider their academic age instead. Our commitment to equal opportunities also means taking into account breaks or delays in applicants’ research careers (e.g., due to parental leave; long-term or chronic illness; disability; caring responsibilities; etc.), which may have led to publication gaps, unorthodox career paths, or limited international research experience.

Only the ten most important academic publications and the ten most important additional research achievements of the applicant are to be considered when evaluating the application. As a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), the FWF also emphasises that, in assessing research performance, reviewers should refrain from using journal-based metrics such as the Journal Impact Factor.

Please review the present proposal\(^3\) using the following six assessment criteria: 1) innovation and originality, 2) quality of the proposed research, 3) approach and feasibility, 4) researchers’ qualifications, 5) ethics and gender, and 6) overall evaluation. For each of these criteria except 5) we ask you for both written comments and a rating on a scale from “excellent” to “poor”. Please be aware, however, that the FWF’s funding decision will be based primarily on referees’ written assessments rather than the ratings assigned.

Please keep in mind that sections 1 and 2 will be forwarded to the applicant in their entirety and in anonymous form.

**Section 1**

1) **Innovation and originality with regard to 3Rs research:**

How relevant is this project to 3Rs research? Is the proposed research innovative? Does it make an original contribution to its field?

2) **Quality of the proposed research:**

Are the research questions formulated clearly? Are they timely, challenging, and likely to lead to relevant insights?

3) **Approach and feasibility:**

Is the research design well-conceived, clearly formulated, and suitable for answering the research question(s)? Is there a well-organised work plan? Have the methods been chosen well and does the proposal describe them in sufficient detail?

   - How would you assess the plausibility of the proposed research?
   - How likely is it that other laboratories and research institutions around the world can use the alternatives developed as part of this research?
   - Do you expect that the use of the alternatives developed here will create an added value compared to the approaches currently in use in this field? Please give reasons.

4) **Qualifications of the researchers involved**

How well are the researchers qualified to carry out the proposed research? How would you assess the academic qualifications of the applicant, their team, and collaboration partners? In evaluating their qualifications, please consider their career stage, taking into account unusual career paths and circumstances that may have slowed down their progress (e.g., parental leave, long-term or chronic illness, disability, caring responsibilities).

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\(^3\) The project proposal must meet the FWF’s formal requirements. Please bear these in mind when writing your review. (Key formal requirements: 20 pages max. for the project description including figures and tables; 5 pages max. for the list of references; 3 pages max. for each academic CV, including a description of previous research achievements and the ten most important publications. For further details see [https://www.fwf.ac.at/en/research-funding/application/stand-alone-projects/](https://www.fwf.ac.at/en/research-funding/application/stand-alone-projects/)
5) Ethics and gender:
   a) Ethics: Have ethical considerations been addressed satisfactorily?
   b) Gender: Applicants must address any relevant sex-specific and/or gender-related elements inherent in their research questions and/or research design. Please assess whether their treatment of these components is adequate.

6) Overall evaluation:
What is your overall impression of the proposal? Specifically, what would you consider its key strengths and weaknesses? Please give reasons for your answers, taking as much space as you need.

Section 2: Optional recommendations for the applicant(s)
If you are in favour 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 impact on the FWF’s funding decision, especially if they amount to substantive criticism of the project.

Section 3: Confidential remarks to the FWF
Please use this space to make any comments that you do not wish to be conveyed to the applicant(s). Feel free to also give us feedback about the evaluation process and your interactions with us.