

Call for Tenders

Evaluation of the doc.funds Program

Vienna, September 2, 2024

Discovering
what
matters.

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1 Client and Awarding Office

Austrian Science Fund (FWF)
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This call for tenders has been prepared in accordance with (i) the [FWF's Rules](#) on Quality and Transparency for Evaluations and (ii) the [Evaluation Standards](#) in Research and Technology Policy developed by the Austrian Platform for Research and Technology Policy Evaluation ([fteval](#)). These standards are to be observed by all companies and organizations submitting tenders.

The FWF

The Austrian Science Fund (FWF) is Austria's leading organization for the funding of basic research. The purpose of the FWF is to support the ongoing development of Austrian science and basic research at a high international level. In doing so, the FWF makes a significant contribution to cultural development, to the advancement of our knowledge-based society, and to prosperity and the creation of value in Austria. Further information on the FWF's responsibilities, and the values to which it is committed, can be found on the FWF's website at <http://www.fwf.ac.at/en/>.

2 Contract Objectives

The purpose of the contract to be awarded is evaluate the FWF's doc.funds program. The main question is whether the additional funding for doctoral training provided by the FWF has a demonstrably positive effect on structured doctoral training at the participating research institutions as a whole. The evaluations should take a critical look at FWF's present doc.funds program to identify strengths and weaknesses, to quantify and qualify outcomes, output, and impact.

Specifically, the evaluation team is expected to:

- Provide an overview of doctoral training formats at Austrian research institutions
- Assess the impact of the doc.funds program on doctoral training in Austria
- Assess the structural impact of the doc.funds program on the participating research institutions and their non-FWF-funded doctoral training formats

- Analyze the current selection procedures and funding conditions of the doc.funds program and optimization potential for future calls for applications
- If necessary, provide an international comparison with other funding formats for doctoral students (not on an individual basis in the form of scholarships) that are similar to the Austrian conditions (focus on Northern and Western Europe, e.g. NL, SE, DN, NO but excluding the UK, DE, and CH)
- Provide evidence-based recommendations to the FWF and its supervisory bodies on if and how the doc.funds program should be continued, improved or restructured
- Depending on the data situation, provide a proposal for a concept for a complete or sample-based career tracking of completed PhDs

The final evaluation report is expected to be delivered by the end of 2025. The budget for the study is limited to **€100,000**.

3 Background

Mission and objectives

The main objective of the doc.funds program is to support the outstanding academic or arts-based education and training of doctoral students within the framework of existing doctoral programs. The program is intended to assist in the further or continued development of structured doctoral programs in accordance with international standards at Austrian doctoral research institutions. In the long term, it is intended to contribute to reinforcing research orientation and to consolidating existing education and training structures for highly qualified junior researchers. At the same time, the program is designed to support the development of key scientific or arts-based research areas at universities or other research institutions entitled to confer doctoral degrees.

Structured doctoral programs are embedded in a focused and consistent research framework. They also feature procedures or structures and commitments that ensure the quality of the research, as well as optimal and appropriate academic or arts-based research support for doctoral candidates.

Program in detail

- The funding program is aimed at all Austrian research institutions entitled to grant doctoral degrees, where at least 5 researchers or arts-based researchers join to form a consortium to implement a project.
- The main objective is to support excellent research or arts-based research training for doctoral students in existing doctoral programs that have been in place for at least 2 years.

- In the long term, it should contribute to reinforcing research orientation and to consolidating existing education and training structures for highly qualified junior researchers.
- Personnel costs for 5 to 10 doctoral candidates plus training costs of up to €5,000 per doctoral candidate position per year for a total of 4 years

Prerequisites

- Consortium of at least 5 researchers (=faculty members) from universities, universities of applied sciences, and non-university research institutions with outstanding research records by FWF standards
- A target of 30% of the underrepresented gender in the consortium; the composition of the consortium is defined as a decision-making criterion in the review and evaluation process.
- The existing structured doctoral program must have been running for at least 2 years on the date of the application deadline.
- Commitment to basic funding by the lead research institution (and any partner research institution(s)), i.e., provision of all necessary infrastructure, financial means for ongoing operation, and ensuring institutional affiliation
- Involvement of doctoral students in a focused and consistent research framework; education through research
- Existing structures and procedures for:
 - Admission and selection of doctoral candidates
 - Supervision and monitoring, suitable working conditions
 - Completion of the doctoral program

Funding decisions are made by the FWF Scientific Board, based on a recommendation from the international doc.funds jury; recommendations are made on the basis of an international peer review and hearings. About 4–5 projects can be funded per call.

One unique aspect of the FWF's funding approach – in contrast to many funding organizations in other countries – is that it adheres strictly to a **bottom-up principle** in its funding decisions. The FWF views its financial and administrative support as an extension of the possibilities for ground-breaking academic research rather than as a means to promote specific research topics, domains, or geographical areas (as it would be the case in a top-down oriented approach). The program provides research institutions with the opportunity to reinforce research strategies that are closely connected to research-related training and education. Team formation, topic choice, and drafting the doc.funds proposals to be submitted to the FWF are solely the responsibility of the involved researchers and their respective institution(s).

This bottom-up principle is also consequently applied to the doc.funds program. Funding decisions are made by the [Scientific Board](#), based on an international review process and the recommendations made by the doc.funds jury.

The program's history

In 1993, the FWF launched its first Doctoral Program (Doktoratskolleg - DK) with the aim of anchoring structured doctoral training at universities. The close integration of research and teaching was seen as a key criterion for success. The last call for applications for this program was issued in 2015, and the last 4 new DK projects were approved in March 2017. The DK program was evaluated in 2014. The evaluation report confirmed the relevance of the program, even though changing framework conditions and the high funding amount (in relation to the FWF's total budget) made it necessary to revise the program.

With the doc.funds program, the focus shifted from establishing a structured doctoral program to expanding and strengthening the highest standards in doctoral training according to the principle of research-oriented training. This more up-to-date format encourages competition in the existing structured doctoral programs at universities and motivates institutions to continuously improve programs, both in terms of the selection criteria for doctoral candidates and the training components.

Since the first call in 2016/17, the FWF has received 253 applications and funded 34 doc.funds projects.

4 Focus of the Evaluation and Methods

This evaluation of the doc.funds program is intended to focus on the program's effectiveness and how well its projects contribute to achieving the program's objectives, as a basis for further calls for applications, but also as possible input for improving or restructuring the program. The FWF is also open for recommendations for alternative approaches to research-based education and training structures for highly qualified junior researchers.

The successful bidder should use methods that provide a comprehensive picture of the doc.funds program's effectiveness in achieving the program objectives from the perspective of all stakeholders involved. The evaluation report should contain well-founded recommendations based on appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods. Specifically, the contractor should conduct a survey of applicants and reviewers/jury members, conduct interviews, or set up focus groups with relevant representatives of the research institutions and use suitable and targeted research methods to examine the observations/perceptions of the participating researchers (faculty) and funded doctoral students as well as representatives of the universities (and possibly also other research policy stakeholders) with regard to the program. The FWF also encourages the contractor to propose other specific methods and/or approaches.

5 Availability of Data and Relevant Documents

Documents	Availability
Public Program Documents	
Evaluation of the FWF Doctoral Program (DK)	Evaluation of the FWF Doctoral Program (DK) (zenodo.org)
Application Guidelines	fwf_doc_application_guidelines.pdf
Funded Projects (abstracts and teams)	Research Radar — FWF
Internal doc.funds program documents	
Internal strategy papers (in German)	Available upon contract
Applications	Available upon contract
Reviews	Available upon contract
Research documentation of funded projects	Available upon contract
Monitoring of PhDs funded during project duration	Available upon contract

Other sources

Links to other sources (e.g., Annual Reports) are listed at the end of this document ('Further Reading').

6 Deliverables, Meetings, and Presentations

- 1) Mid-term report (presentation)
- 2) Final evaluation report (written report max. 50 pages)
- 3) Executive summary of no more than five pages
- 4) One-page summary
- 5) If possible, a research publication in a peer-reviewed journal on a topic of the evaluators' choice (related to the evaluation) after the evaluation is finalized

Meetings and presentations:

- 1) Kick-off workshop
- 2) Mid-term presentation

- 3) Discussion of final report (draft version)
- 4) Presentation of the final report

7 Schedule

Call for tenders:	September 2, 2024
Deadline for tenders:	October 28, 2024
Invitation to hearings:	November 21, 2024
Hearings:	December 11, 2024
Decision:	December 23, 2024
Kick-off workshop:	January 20, 2025
Mid-term report and presentation:	June 2025
Final report (draft) and presentation:	September 2025
Public presentation of final report:	November 2025

8 Price and Payments

Prices must be fixed amounts which are not subject to change and which include reimbursement for all costs including travel and subsistence expenses. The price must be presented as a lump sum; separately reimbursable expenses will not be accepted. The estimated travel and subsistence expenses considered necessary by the bidder in order to carry out the study must be indicated separately (for informational purposes only).

The price quoted in the tender must be in euro. Bidders from countries outside the euro zone are also subject to this requirement. The price quoted may not be adjusted for exchange rate fluctuations at any time. It is up to the bidder to select an exchange rate and to bear the potential risks or benefits arising from any variations.

The total price for the services offered (including travel and subsistence expenses) is expected to be approximately **€100,000** *excluding* VAT.

Payments: Three payments will be made under the terms of the contract. The first payment (corresponding to 20% of the contractually agreed price) will be made after conclusion of the contract. The second (interim) payment (corresponding to 50% of the contractually agreed price) will be released after approval of the interim presentation and made within 30 days of the approval date. Should the interim presentation not be approved, the contractor shall have 20 days to respond to suggested changes and to submit a revised document. Once the FWF approves the final deliverables, the contractor may request the final balance due (30%).

9 Deadline for Tenders / Communication of Decisions

Tenders must be submitted as a PDF document by October 28, 2024, 10:00 am CET to Tina Olteanu, tina.olteanu@fwf.ac.at.

The FWF expressly welcomes submissions from international consortia. Hearings will take place in Vienna or virtually with the shortlisted bidders. The final decision will be made by the FWF based on the suggestion of a panel. The panel will be made up of members of the FWF Executive Board and staff members from the departments "Strategy – National Programs" and "Strategy – Policy, Evaluation, Analysis."

Criteria are (i) competences of the evaluation team: knowledge of the Austrian science system, and experience and knowledge in research assessments; (ii) utility (to which extent will the evaluation outputs and recommendations help the FWF to meet its needs); (iii) feasibility and appropriateness of the approach with respect to the aims of the evaluation; and (iv) appropriateness of the costs.

Important note: The FWF requests bidders with recent activities in international research, research management, or research funding in Austria and/or bidders recently commissioned by Austrian national ministries or other stakeholders in supporting the shaping of Austria's Research, Technology, and Innovation policy to declare potential conflicts of interest.

Conflict of interest: Tenders from institutions which appear as host or partner institutions of EF applications cannot be accepted due to potential conflicts of interest.

Contact person

For details regarding the tender:

Tina Olteanu

Phone: +43 1 505 67 40 8310

tina.olteanu@fwf.ac.at

10 Transparency of the Tender¹

The tender will be published on the FWF website and distributed via the FWF newsletter and fteval. Invitations have also been sent to the following institutions:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Convelop Cooperative Knowledge Design GmbH</u> <u>Karin Grasenick, Markus Gruber</u> Hilbergasse 1/I, A-8010 Graz • <u>DZHW – Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung</u> <u>Bernd Kleimann, Frank Dölle</u> Lange Laube 12, D-30159 Hannover • <u>Fraunhofer ISI</u> <u>Susanne Bühner-Topcu</u> Breslauer Straße 48, D-76139 Karlsruhe • <u>IGES Institut GmbH</u> <u>Dr. Friederike Haaß</u> Friedrichstraße 180, D-10117 Berlin • <u>IHS – Institute for Advanced Studies</u> <u>Bianca Brandl</u> Josefstädter Straße 39, A-1080 Vienna • <u>Joanneum Research</u> <u>Michael Ploder</u> Sensengasse 1, A-1090 Wien • <u>KMU Forschung Austria</u> <u>Peter Kaufmann, Thomas Oberholzner</u> Gusshausstraße 8, A-1040 Vienna • <u>National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM)</u> <u>Gabriele Durrant</u> University of Southampton Southampton SO17 1BJ, United Kingdom • <u>NIFU</u> <u>Liv Langfeldt</u> P. O. Box 2815 Tøyen, NOR - 0608 Oslo • <u>Prognos AG</u> <u>Thomas Stehnen</u> Goethestraße 55, D-10623 Berlin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>RAND Europe</u> <u>Salil Gunashekar</u> Westbrook Centre/Milton Rd, Cambridge CB4 1YG, UK • <u>Rathenau Instituut</u> <u>Eefje Cuppen</u> Anna van Saksenlaan 51 2593 HW Den Haag • <u>SPRU - Science and Technology Policy Research</u> <u>Ben Martin</u> University of Sussex. Sussex House Jubilee Building Jub-363 Brighton, BN1 9RH, UK • <u>Technopolis Group</u> <u>Katharina Warta</u> Technopolis Group Limited 3 Pavilion Buildings, Brighton, BN1 1EE, UK • <u>The University of Manchester</u> <u>Jakob Edler, John Rigby</u> Harold Hankins Building-9.08 Manchester Business School Manchester, M13 9PL, UK • <u>University of Twente</u> Science, Technology, and Policy Studies (STePS) <u>Klassjan Visscher</u> PO Box 217, NL-7500 AE Enschede • <u>VDI/VDE IT</u> Institut für Innovation und Technik <u>Ernst Andreas Hartmann</u> Steinplatz 1, DE-10623 Berlin • <u>WPZ Research GmbH</u> <u>Brigitte Ecker</u> Mariahilfer Straße 115/16, 1060 Vienna • <u>ZSI – Centre for Social Innovation</u> <u>Klaus Schuch</u> Linke Wienzeile 246, A-1150 Vienna
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¹ Any institutions from Austria that are considering submitting an application to the doc.funds program should please refrain from submitting an offer.

11 Further Reading²

Austrian Research System

Bundesgesetz zur Förderung der Forschung und Technologieentwicklung (Forschungs- und Technologieförderungsgesetz - [FTFG](#))

Austrian Research and Technology Report [2023](#)

(The Austrian Research and Technology Reports are status reports provided to the Austrian parliament on the nation's federally funded research, technology, and innovation. These reports draw on current data to present an overview of specific trends in research, technology, and innovation (RTI) and show how Austria ranks internationally in selected categories.)

FWF Annual Reports

Including mission statement, overview of grants, numbers of applications and approvals, funding requested/approved; [German](#) or [English](#) from 2010 onwards.

Principles of the FWF Decision-Making Procedure

The document [General Principles of the FWF Decision-Making Procedure](#) provides a brief overview of the application process, from the submission of proposals to the peer review process and the final funding decision. The process described in the document forms the basis for all FWF programs. In certain programs, exceptions to the general decision-making principles are possible; these exceptions are described in separate documents.

Evaluation Reports and Studies

The FWF provides access to all program evaluations, studies on FWF ex-ante peer review, outcomes of FWF projects, and many more interesting topics in the [publications section](#) of its website. Of specific interest is the evaluation report on the [FWF Doctoral Programs](#).

Statistics

- FWF [Research Radar](#)
- [FWF Dashboard](#)

² The FWF does NOT expect evaluators to consider all of these suggestions in their report. Some of the listed documents are available only in German.