

In accordance with its Funding Guidelines dated January 1, 2022  
(as amended), the FWF has issued the following  
Application Guidelines for

# START Program

Vienna, effective as of July 1, 2023, version 1

01/07/2023

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Please note: Key terms used in these Application Guidelines are explained in the document [Definition of Terms](#).

# 1 General information

## 1.1 Aim of the program

The fundamental aim of the program is to support researchers from all disciplines at the beginning of their academic career with at least two and at most eight years of postdoctoral experience who have already produced scientific/scholarly work of a top international standard and whose research careers to date make it likely that they will continue to conduct first-rate research in the future.

A START project with a budget of at least €800,000 and a maximum of €1,200,000 is intended to provide medium-term financial security for research activities over a period of five years. START principal investigators should acquire the necessary qualifications for a leading position in research (especially as a professor in Austria or abroad) by independently managing a generously funded research project.

The program is targeted at researchers from all disciplines. In principle, the FWF aims to achieve as balanced a distribution as possible between disciplines and genders, but there are no fixed quotas for individual subject areas. Priority will be given to principal investigators who are in an early stage of their career and have not yet received any third-party funding in programs with similar aims and comparable funding amounts,<sup>1</sup> e.g., “ERC Starting Grants”.

As one of the most generously supported funding programs for individuals doing research in Austria, the START Program is very visible in the public eye and makes a significant contribution to the reception and acceptance of research in society.

## 1.2 Submission

All proposals must be submitted online using the [elane](#) digital application portal by **20 September 2023 (13:59 CEST)**.

Project funding is administered through the research institutions ([PROFI](#)); this means the application must be approved for submission by both the applicant and the respective research institution (= lead research institution).<sup>2</sup> All forms required for the application must be completed online; other required documents such as the project description incl. annexes and any additional documents must be uploaded in full before the application can be approved for submission by the research institution. For additional information, please see the [elane user manual](#).

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<sup>1</sup> The criterion of third-party funding in programs with similar aims and comparable funding will not be taken into account if the comparable grant is close to the end or already finished.

<sup>2</sup> Approval for submission by the research institution may be waived by the research institution.

## 1.3 Who is eligible to apply?

All Austrian **research institutions**<sup>3</sup> are eligible to apply. The proposed research must be carried out in Austria under the auspices of the Austrian lead research institution. The application must be submitted together by the principal investigator and the research institution where the project is to be carried out.

It is not possible to submit applications with principal investigators who hold a permanent professorship at the time of application or who have already accepted an appointment to a permanent professorship.

The principal investigator must be employed at the Austrian research institution applying for funding at the time the project is scheduled to begin. Their salary is financed either by the research institution or by the project as a grant-salaried researcher (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.

The START Program is aimed at highly qualified postdocs of all disciplines from Austria and abroad with a minimum of two and a maximum of eight years' experience in their academic career (see also the requirements in [section 1.5.1](#)).

### 1.3.1 Can several applications be submitted simultaneously?

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

The following restrictions/requirements apply for **principal investigators** with regard to START applications/projects and other simultaneous applications/projects:

- It is not possible for one person to serve as the principal investigator in several START projects/applications.
- It is also not possible to submit parallel applications with identical content in other FWF programs such as Stand-Alone Projects, international Programs, ESPRIT, etc. The sole exception to this rule is the Elise Richter Program, where at the same time an application which is substantially similar in content may be submitted as long as the program-specific guidelines are observed.
- A START submission based on (a content overlap with) an already ongoing funding program (e.g., Stand-Alone project, Elise Richter project) is possible. Should the START project be approved, the already ongoing funding must be transferred to the START project and terminated with the start of the START project.

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

- By submitting a START application, the principal investigator undertakes, provided that they are formally eligible to apply, to submit a research project with the same content for funding under the next possible call<sup>4</sup> of the “ERC Starting Grant” (see also [section 2.6.1](#), “program specific data”). The research institution and the principal investigator commit themselves to using the ERC funding in the event that both funding applications are approved. Further information on the ERC funding programs can be found [here](#).
- Please note that the number of ongoing/approved projects is limited for principal investigators in the START Program. Further information on the restriction on the number of ongoing projects and the limit on the number of applications can be found at [Restriction on the number of projects](#).
- The principal investigators of a START application can apply simultaneously to other organisations for funding for the planned research project; however, they are required to inform the FWF immediately in writing both of applications submitted to other funding institutions as well as the decisions made on these applications. The decision-making body in the FWF will decide whether and to what extent this third-party funding will be deducted from the funding through the START Program. If substantially identical applications are approved by other national and international funding organisations, and the approved funding is sufficient to carry out the planned research project, the principal investigator must decide on one of the approved funding grants. It is not possible to combine them.

## 1.4 What types of projects can be funded?

Funding may be requested for projects in basic research that are clearly defined, innovative, convincingly described in terms of objectives and methods, and limited in time.

Projects are considered to carry out innovative basic research when they possess one or more of the following attributes: (i) research on new ideas and/or examination of new research questions, (ii) development or application of new research methods, new technologies, or original approaches to solving research questions, or (iii) application or modification of existing methods, technologies, or approaches to new research questions. (Please note that the next logical step or the incremental further development of published data is not considered to be innovative or original).

Aspects of a research project that go beyond the realm of science and scholarship (e.g., applications of the research results in business, society, politics, etc.) may be mentioned in the application, but they will not play a part in the assessment of whether the project should be funded.

The duration of funding is **60 months**.

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<sup>4</sup> If formal eligibility exists, submission of an ERC application with the same content must take place at the next opportunity (October 2023).

During an interim evaluation after three years, the research can be adapted to the changed research environment if necessary.

## 1.5 What requirements must be met to apply?

### 1.5.1 Requirements for principal investigators

Principal investigators must have a doctoral degree. The doctoral degree must have been awarded at least two and no more than eight years before the submission deadline **(20 September 2023)**. Cut-off date is the date of the successful thesis defense or the date the dissertation was officially accepted.

In addition, the principal investigator's publication record over the last five years must be internationally visible and commensurate with the expected career path in their field. The following criteria are decisive for assessing the publication record and initiating the review process:

- **Quality assurance:** The primary publications for evaluating the publication record are those that have been subjected to a quality assurance procedure in line with high international standards (peer review or an equivalent procedure; peer review is expected in the natural and life sciences). The journals must usually be listed in the *Web of Science*, *Scopus*, or the *Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)*. For journals not listed in those databases; monographs, edited volumes, or contributions therein; or other publication types, the principal investigator must provide a link to the publisher's website which contains a description of the respective quality assurance procedure. Should no such description be available on the website, it is the principal investigator'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 the principal investigator'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. At least two publications must be quality-assured and internationally visible publications with a substantial and independent contribution by the applicant. 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 applicant's contribution must be specified.

In addition, a principal investigator should ideally have completed a stay abroad of at least one year at the time of application and have already independently acquired competitive third-party funding after the doctorate.

If there is any uncertainty about general application requirements or about accounting for career interruptions (see [sections 1.5.3](#) and [1.5.4](#)), the FWF recommends contacting the FWF Office or the [FWF unit](#) for equal opportunities in research funding in good time before submitting the 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.

## 1.5.2 Equal opportunities, diversity, and inclusion

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

## 1.5.3 Consideration of career breaks

The FWF will take justified, documentable career breaks (e.g. due to pregnancy, childcare,<sup>5</sup> caregiving obligations,<sup>6</sup> military or civilian service, flight, and asylum) into consideration in assessing the principal investigator's eligibility to apply.

## 1.5.4 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 illness into consideration in determining whether the principal investigator meets the application requirements.

## 1.5.5 Data protection notice

When assessing eligibility, all personal data provided to the FWF by an applicant on a voluntary basis that relates to the information provided in [sections 1.5.3](#) and [1.5.4](#) shall be taken into account exclusively to the applicant's benefit (compensation of disadvantages). 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. Please use the appropriate [form](#) for this purpose 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. This

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<sup>5</sup> Childcare includes parental leave periods, if applicable.

<sup>6</sup> 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.



information is only used to check the application requirements and is not made available to reviewers.

## 1.6 What types of funding can be requested?

Project-specific costs in the amount of **at least €800.000 up to max. €1.2 million** are eligible for funding. These include personnel and non-personnel costs that are needed to carry out the project and that are not included in the infrastructure provided by the research institution. The FWF does not finance the infrastructure or basic equipment of research institutions.

In addition, funding may be requested for project-specific work at the associated research institution(s) where associated research partner(s) work. Associated research partners are researchers working on a project-specific basis at other Austrian research institutions (associated research institutions) and who are making a significant scientific/scholarly contribution to the project. The *Associated Research Partner* form must be completed for these researchers, if applicable. Funds are disbursed from the lead research institution to the associated research institution(s)<sup>7</sup>. Associated research institutions report directly to the FWF to account for funds used at their institution.

For information on applying for personnel costs for the principal investigator's own salary, please see [section 2.3.1.1](#).

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 academic abstract must be written in English, may not exceed 3,000 characters (including spaces, no formulas or special characters), and is used to inform potential reviewers about the project. The abstract must use the English headings provided below.

- Wider research context / theoretical framework
- Hypotheses / research questions / objectives
- Approach / Methods
- Level of originality / innovation

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<sup>7</sup> Associated research institutions must be [registered](#) in the FWF's research institution portal. Once a proposal has been approved, the lead research institution must enter into a cooperation agreement with the associated research institution.

- Primary researchers involved

Where alternatives are indicated between slashes, please select the alternative that applies to your project.

### 2.1.2 Project description

Project descriptions are limited to 22 consecutively numbered pages, incl. the table of contents (required), and where applicable, a list of abbreviations, headings, figures, captions, tables, footnotes, etc.

The project description must also include the following annexes on additional pages:

- **Annex 1:** List of literature cited in the application (References) on no more than 5 pages;
- **Annex 2:** Information on the lead research institution and any associated research institutions and a plausible justification of the funding requested (see [Appendix A](#));
- **Annex 3:** Academic CV and description of previous research achievements of the principal investigator on no more than 3 pages;
- **Annex 4:** Letter of support (in English) from the research institution where the project is to be carried out, signed by the dean or the head of the institution/department or the group leader, etc.;
- **Annex 5:** (optional): Collaboration letters of national and international cooperation partners (no more than 1 page per letter).

The project description incl. these annexes must be uploaded as *one* file named *Proposal.pdf*. This document will be sent to the reviewers by the FWF.

### 2.1.3 Additional documents

- Required:
  - Two publications written by the applicant must be named, documenting that the applicant fulfills the general requirements to act as principal investigator (publication record, see [section 1.5.1](#))
  - Publication list for internal FWF use to assess principal investigator's eligibility to apply and to check for conflicts of interest with potential reviewers

- Where applicable:
  - Additional documents in the case of resubmission: If the application is a revised version of a previously rejected application (see [section 2.5](#)), a response to the reviews and an overview of all changes made in the resubmitted application must be uploaded.
  - Cover letter accompanying the application (optional)
  - List of max. 3 researchers (optional) - including, if applicable, reviewers of a rejected proposal - who are to be excluded from the review process (see [section 3.2](#)), with a brief justification

Any additional documents (e.g., recommendations on 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 institution assignment form, application form, contact form, program-specific data form, cost breakdown form, co-authors form, and academic abstract*
- Where applicable: *Associated research partner form, Other cooperation form*

## 2.2 Application content and form

### 2.2.1 Language of application

To allow applications to be reviewed by international scientific or scholarly experts and to facilitate the decision-making process of the international jury, applications must be submitted in **English**.

### 2.2.2 Project description: Scope and formatting requirements

The project description may not exceed 22 pages. It must contain a table of contents with page numbers. Optional components such as a list of abbreviations, figures, captions, tables, footnotes, etc. are to be included in the 22-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. The form 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 applicant, 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*). Principal investigators are free to choose the citation conventions or style guide they prefer, but they must apply them/it 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

The project description must not exceed 22 pages and must include a table of contents as well as the following sections, each designated by headings:

- 1) Table of contents
- 2) State of the art of the relevant international research (including own preliminary work, if applicable) and relation of the project to this context
- 3) Clearly defined aims and hypothesis/hypotheses or research question(s) of the project
- 4) Description of the project's anticipated level of originality or scientific/scholarly innovation
- 5) Methods
- 6) **Associated research partners** (if applicable): Description of the contributions of the associated research partners (see [section 1.6](#)) to the proposed research; associated research partners must be named in the *Associated research partner* form.
- 7) **National and/or international cooperation partners** (if applicable): Please specify the intended cooperation partners and the subject of the intended cooperation(s) or the planned contribution to the project. **All** national and/or international cooperation arrangements that were stated to be essential in the project description must be listed on the **Other cooperation form** (one form must be completed for each cooperation partner) and may be confirmed by a collaboration letter.
- 8) Work plan and timeline
- 9) Research-related qualifications of the researchers involved and significance of the project for the career development of the principal investigator.
- 10) All potential ethical, safety-related, or regulatory aspects<sup>8</sup> of the submitted project and the planned handling of them must be described briefly in a separate section. These

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, the European Commission's [Ethics for Researchers](#) or [The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) can serve as a guide here.

questions should be addressed briefly in the text even if the principal investigator believes the project does not raise any ethical issues.

- 11) A separate section must describe what sex-specific and gender-related issues<sup>9</sup> the planned project may potentially give rise to, and how the applicant intends to deal with them. These questions should be addressed briefly in the text even if the principal investigator believes the project does not raise any sex-specific and gender-related issues.

**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 the research institutions of associated research partners
  - Existing project participants (not financed by FWF project funds) (usually the principal investigator 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:** CV and description of previous research achievements

The academic CV and previous research achievements of the principal investigator must be described on no more than three pages using the following guidelines and structure and the headings provided here in English.

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<sup>9</sup> Positioning and reflecting on the research approaches planned for the project in terms of sex-specific and gender-related issues, for instance: 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](#).

#### Required contents for academic CVs

- *Personal details*: Personal details (name, researcher unique identifier(s) such as [ORCID](#), research ID, etc., *no photos*), address of research institution and relevant websites. In addition, it is required to provide a publicly accessible link to the list of all published publications.
- *Education*: List of academic career with date, type, subject, and research institution of each degree
- *Position(s)*: List of research relevant positions (with the extent of employment in the case of part-time employment)
- *Career breaks*: Details of career breaks or delays (see also [section 1.5.3](#)).
- *Net research experience*: Based on the previous information, the length of time (in years and months) that has actually been used in net total for 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 doctoral degree. This should make it easier for the reviewers to assess the principal investigator’s qualifications in term of academic age.
- *Research interests*: Description of the main areas of research and the most important research results achieved to date
- *Academic publications*: List of no more than ten of the most important published or accepted academic publications (journal articles, monographs, edited volumes, contributions to edited volumes, proceedings, etc.); for each publication, either a [DOI address](#) or another [persistent identifier](#) should be indicated, if available. In accordance with the [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment](#), journal-based metrics such as journal impact factors, Article Influence Scores, or the h-index should not be included.
- *Additional research achievements*: List of no more than ten of the most important research achievements apart from academic publications, including achievements such as 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 research achievement must be provided.

**Annex 4:** A **max. 3-page** declaration of commitment from the research institution.

The name of the author must be stated at the beginning of the document (e.g., the head of the institution or group leader of the institution where the project is to be carried out). Using the English terms given here, the following points must be addressed.

- **Qualification/Expertise:** Skills and knowledge of the principal investigator to successfully carry out the proposed project and achieve the program goal
- **Career goals:** Longer and medium-term research and career goals of the principal investigator, contribution of the proposed project to the achievement of these goals
- **Research profile:** Contribution of the planned research to strengthening the independent scientific profile of the principal investigator, description of this profile
- **Institutional support:** Contribution of the research institution to the integration of the principal investigator and description of medium and/or long-term career prospects
- **Added value:** Contribution of the project to the long-term profile of the research institution and its international competitiveness

#### **Annex 5 (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 written by the applicant must be named, documenting that the applicant fulfills the general requirements to apply (see Template [PI-publication](#)). The FWF will base the applicant's eligibility to apply on these publications.
- *Publication\_list.pdf*: A list of all research publications over the last five years<sup>10</sup> (categorized as "quality-assured publications" and "other publications," see section 1.5) of the principal investigator. 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.

## 2.3 What project-specific costs can be funded?

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

Funding may only be requested for the following cost categories.

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<sup>10</sup> 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.

## 2.3.1 Personnel costs

Funding may only be requested for personnel who are 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. [FWF's standard personnel costs](#) apply.

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.

When requesting funding for [PROFI](#) (project funding via research institutions) eligible standard personnel costs, a fixed percentage increase must be included for the subsequent year to compensate for wage raises (see [Standard personnel costs and salaries for PROFIs projects 2023](#)).

### 2.3.1.1 Grant-salaried principal investigators

The FWF understands “own position” to mean that the principal investigator’s 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 principal investigator, regardless of whether they are in permanent or long-term employment at the time of application. The senior postdoc salary rate<sup>11</sup> applies for the principal investigator’s own position (pro-rated accordingly in the case of partial funding).

Female principal investigators 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 individual 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, e.g., programs for the advancement of women).

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<sup>11</sup> The senior postdoc rate can only be requested to fund the principal investigator’s own position; the postdoc salary rate applies for project staff members at the postdoc level.



### 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.) is considered to be 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.

If funding is requested for a piece of equipment which is required specifically for the project, the lead research institution must submit the *Affirmation of the lead research institution* form to confirm 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 principal investigator 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](#) (*Bundesvergabe-gesetz*) as amended apply.

In order to determine the equipment costs (incl. VAT, unless the research institution is entitled to deduct VAT) 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.

### 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 with reference to the timelines, work plans, and experiment plans. 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 travel plan broken down by project participant. This plan must indicate which persons, for what purpose, when (in which year of the project), for how long and where they will be travelling, and how much this 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 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. When travelling by air, it is strongly recommended to make a carbon offset contribution,<sup>12</sup> which can be requested as part of the travel expenses or funded through the budget for general project costs. A carbon offset contribution can be requested for up to 15% of the ticket price.

Travel expenses for researchers from Austrian and international research institutions other than the lead research institution or associated research institutions 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 lead or associated research institution’s individual travel expenses policies. 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.

Funding may be requested for the costs of presenting project results at conferences.

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<sup>12</sup> The amount of a carbon offset contribution for flights can be calculated, for example, using the [CO2 calculator](#) on the website of [Climate Austria](#).

### 2.3.5 Costs as part of national and international cooperation arrangements

Unlike when cooperating with associated research partners (see [section 1.6](#)), costs arising in the context of a research collaboration with an external research institution are to be borne by that research institution. This does not apply to [cooperation arrangements with scientists or scholars 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 funding available

- 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 research project)
- Costs for the preparation, archiving, open access, and reuse of research data in repositories in accordance with the FWF's [Open-Access Policy](#)
- 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
  - 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](#)

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

### 2.3.7 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 at [Peer-Reviewed Publications](#).

## 2.4 Resubmitting a previously rejected application

A resubmission is defined as the revision of an application addressing the same or similar research questions as a proposal the FWF has previously rejected, regardless of the program category. If an application is submitted on the same or a very similar research question and if, in the view of the principal investigator, 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 reasons C3, C4, and 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. 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 reviewing 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 taken into account. 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

Overview of all documents and forms to be submitted:

### 2.5.1 Required components of an application

#### a) Files:

- *Proposal.pdf* (project description incl. annexes 1-4 and where applicable 5, with PDF bookmarks, at least for the major sections)
- *PI-publication.pdf* (Two publications written by the principal investigator must be named, documenting that the applicant fulfills the general requirements to apply)

- *Publication\_list.pdf* (publication list of the principal investigator for the last 5 years, broken down into “quality assured publications” and “other publications”)

**b) Forms:**

- Research institution
- Contact form
- Application form
- Program specific data incl. declaration of commitment to apply within the framework of the next call for proposals of the "ERC Starting Grant
- Cost breakdown
- Academic abstract in English
- Co-authors
- Associated research partners (if applicable)
- Other cooperation (if applicable; for national and international cooperation partners)

## 2.5.2 File uploads, if applicable

- *Cover\_Letter.pdf* (= accompanying letter)
- *Negative\_list.pdf* (= list of reviewers who should be excluded)
- *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-making

### 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 principal investigator can make no further changes to the application themselves. All applications are checked for completeness and any formal errors by the FWF Office. If the FWF Office identifies issues with the application that it considers to be rectifiable, it will notify the research institution and the principal investigator, giving them the opportunity to correct the problems within a reasonable period of time (**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 necessary. If the **requested changes** are not made and submitted as a supplementary application before the specified deadline, the decision-making bodies at the FWF will return the application without review.

Similarly, applications will not be reviewed if they have been previously rejected by the FWF and resubmitted without appropriate revisions (see [section 2.5](#)).

The most common reasons why applications are returned without review by the FWF's decision-making bodies are (a) that the principal investigator's publication record does not meet the requirements (see [section 1.5.1](#)) and (b) that the application does not address specific hypotheses or research questions (see [section 2.2.3](#)).

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

### 3.2 Excluding reviewers

A list of a maximum of 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 applicant must give reasons why they wish to exclude these reviewers. If the reasons for exclusion are professionally and technically sound, the FWF will generally fulfil the applicant's request to 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 Number of reviews required

### 3.4 Decision-making process

A detailed description of the decision-making process, the criteria for selecting international reviewers, as well as the detailed rules on conflicts of interests and the composition of expert juries and boards can be found in [General Principles of the Decision-Making Procedure](#).

The FWF's decision-making bodies decide once a year on the conferring of awards based on a recommendation by the international jury. The international jury's recommendation is based on the results of the review and a hearing, which takes place on the first day of the international jury's annual meeting. In the run-up to the meeting (approx. three to four weeks before the meeting), the international jury draws up a shortlist of promising START candidates who will be invited to a hearing at the meeting of the international jury. Applicants whose project proposals are not selected for the shortlist will already receive a notification of decision at this time, together with the corresponding reviews in anonymised form.

The applicants will be informed of the decisions in writing.

### 3.5 Reasons for rejection

The reasons for rejecting an application are assigned to one of five categories (C1–C5) and communicated to the principal investigator and the lead research institution; the principal investigator is also sent anonymized copies of the reviews. A detailed description of the

reasons for rejection can be found in the [General Principles of the Decision-Making Procedure](#).

### 3.6 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 usually not be contacted for a second review. However, please note that generally all resubmissions are also evaluated by new reviewers.

### 3.7 Proposal bans

Applications that are rejected for reason C5 will be barred for 12 months (from the date of the decision) and cannot be resubmitted during that period.

Applications that have been submitted three times and rejected for reasons C3 or C4 (i.e., the original application and the respective resubmissions) are also barred for 12 months (from the date of decision); rejections for reasons C1 or C2 do not count towards this total.

In general, only topics are banned, not principal investigators or applying research institutions.

## 4 Compliance with legal requirements and standards of research integrity

### 4.1 Legal regulations

Please note that the research institution is obligated to comply with all legal requirements and safety provisions (e.g., Federal Disabilities Act) that apply for the Principal Investigator Project and obtain all the necessary permits (e.g., from the Ethics Commission, the Commission for Animal Experimentation, the Federal Monuments Authority Austria, or the relevant foreign authorities).

### 4.2 Academic integrity

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

Where a breach of these standards is suspected, the ombud of the respective research institution is responsible for investigating the issue. Research institutions are required to report any cases of suspected serious violations of the standards to the ÖAWI. 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, 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**

Regarding personal data, pursuant to Art. 6 (1) item a of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the applicant or applying research institution consents to the processing of personal data and other data (e.g., title of the project submitted, 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.) and to the passing on of this data to third parties (e.g., for use in research policy studies). This consent can be revoked at any time in full or in part in writing to the FWF with effect for future data processing. Further information on the data privacy rights of the applicant 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**

Please note that if a grant is awarded, a PR summary in German and English will be published on the FWF website, as well as the grant amount and later, PR summaries of the project's findings in German and English. Summaries must be submitted to the FWF when the grant agreement is returned. The principal investigator 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. Information on the writing of PR texts can be found [here](#).

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 [here](#).

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 contributions, and media reports).



## 6 Appendices to the Application Guidelines

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

Information on the lead research institution and any associated research institutions and the description of project finances must be presented **in English** using the following structure 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.

a) Details on the research institution of the applicant and – if applicable – of associated research partners

- Existing personnel (not financed by the FWF, usually the principal investigator 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 (type(s) of requested position(s), 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 given research environment - see also [section 2.3.2](#)

List of and justification for

Personnel costs:

Equipment costs:

Material costs:

Travel expenses:

Other costs (including independent contractor agreements for work and services):

## 6.2 Appendix B: Notes and questions for reviewers in the START program<sup>13</sup>

The FWF actively supports equal opportunities and equal treatment in all of its programs. The review of an application must not put applicants at a disadvantage for non-research-related reasons such as age, gender, etc. For example, instead of considering the applicant's actual age, the review process should focus on how the length of the individual's research career corresponds to their research achievements to date.

Our commitment to equal opportunities also means considering 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, atypical 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 applicant 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 proposal<sup>14</sup> based on the following six assessment criteria: 1) innovation and novelty, 2) quality of the proposed research, 3) approach and feasibility, 4) researchers' qualifications, 5) ethics, sex 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 "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 applicant in full and in anonymous form. If the proposal is approved, the research institution may have access to the anonymized reviews submitted to the applicant. If the proposal is approved, the research institution may have access to the anonymized reviews submitted to the applicant.

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<sup>13</sup> Further information can be found on our website: [FWF's corporate policy and mission statement](#) and the [Application Guidelines for the START Program](#).

<sup>14</sup> The project proposal must meet the FWF's formal requirements. Please bear these in mind when writing your review. (Key formal requirements: 22 pages max. for the project description including figures and tables; 5 pages max. for the list of references; 3 pages max. for the academic CV, including a description of previous research achievements and the ten most important publications. For further details, please see the [Application Guidelines for the START Program](#).)

## **Section 1:**

### **1. Qualification of the principal investigator**

How well is the principal investigator qualified to carry out the proposed research? How would you assess the academic qualifications of the applicant and their potential to independently managing a generously funded research project? In evaluating their qualification, please consider the respective 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).

### **2. Innovation and originality**

Is the proposed research innovative? Does it make an original contribution to its field?

### **3. Quality of the proposed research**

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

### **4. 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?

### **5. Ethics, sex and gender**

*Ethics:* Have ethical considerations been addressed satisfactorily?

*Sex-specific and gender-related elements:* Applicants are required to 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 principal investigator**

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 principal investigator. Feel free to also give us feedback about the evaluation process and your interactions with us.