

Federal Ministry of Education and Research
Call for proposals under the Federal Government's Strategy
for the Internationalization of Education, Science and Research
Regulations governing the funding programme for the "Integration of the Central,
Eastern and South Eastern European Region in the European Research Area"
(Bridge2ERA)
16 February 2018

1 Aim and purpose of funding and legal basis

1.1 Aim and purpose of funding

Europe needs a strong and open common Research Area that attracts the world's best talent and contributes to strengthening Europe's international competitiveness and solving global challenges. Differences continue to exist between the Member States of the European Research Area (ERA) with regard to their performance in research and innovation. The annual European Innovation Scoreboard identifies innovation leaders and strong innovators as well as moderate and modest innovators.

Many of the Central and Eastern European countries count among the moderate to modest innovators. Some of them are not yet involved in the European research programmes on a larger scale. These countries are aiming to develop their involvement in research and innovation in particular in order to enable Europe to better unlock its potential in the future. At the same time, national research and innovation systems need to be coordinated more effectively.

Under its Internationalization Strategy and its Strategy on the European Research Area, the German Federal Government is taking responsibility for enhancing research excellence and for closer cooperation between science and industry within the European Research and Innovation Area.

The aim of these funding regulations is therefore to make use of joint research and innovation projects to improve the integration of the Central, Eastern and South Eastern European countries in particular. Against this backdrop, we will fund cooperation between German institutions and partners in the target countries aimed at drafting joint proposals within the framework of Horizon 2020, the European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, and other European programmes that are relevant to research. As far as possible, partner countries should draw on their own funds to support research collaboration, including funding obtained from the European Structural Funds. When establishing project consortia the aim should be to cover as much of the value chain as possible and to involve companies, notably SMEs, in promoting the transfer of technology and innovation.

Cooperation at European level is to be expanded by focussing on key topics of mutual interest – particularly in subject areas that are addressed in the Federal Government's High-Tech Strategy (<https://www.hightech-strategie.de/de/The-new-High-Tech-Strategy-390.php>), in the partner countries' national research and innovation strategies and in the priority areas of the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020.

The call targets the following countries:

- the EU Member States Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, and Slovenia,
- the official EU accession candidates Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, and
- the potential EU accession candidates Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Kosovo.

The funding measure introduced by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) contributes to achieving the objectives of the Federal Government's Strategy for the Internationalization of Education, Science and Research (<https://www.bmbf.de/en/internationalization-strategy-2209.html>) and the Federal Government's Strategy on the European Research Area (<https://www.bmbf.de/en/the-european-research-area-enabling-joint-research-and-joint-growth-3237.html>) and is a contribution to the BMBF's own activities to promote small and medium-sized businesses, notably to the implementation of its funding initiative to enhance the international outlook of SMEs ("KMU international", available in German at <https://www.bmbf.de/de/mittelstand-3133.html>).

1.2 Legal basis

The Federal Government will award grants in accordance with these funding regulations, sections 23 and 44 of the Federal Budget Code (BHO) and the administrative regulations adopted thereunder as well as the BMBF's regulations governing applications for expenditure-based grants (*Richtlinien für Zuwendungsanträge auf Ausgabenbasis, AZA*) and/or cost-based grants (*Richtlinien für Zuwendungsanträge auf Kostenbasis, AZK*). There is no legal entitlement to funding. The grant-awarding agency will decide freely after due assessment of the circumstances within the framework of the budget funds available.

According to these funding regulations, the awarding of public funding is governed by the provisions of Commission Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid (OJ L 352 of 24 December 2013, p. 1).

2 Object of funding

Funding is provided for the preparation of applications for R&D projects which address the thematic areas of the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020 (<http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/>) and other relevant EU funding programmes.

The preparation of applications for R&D projects is a two-phase process:

- The aim of the first funding phase is the establishment or development of multilateral project consortia. The project consortia will identify EU calls for proposals to which they intend to submit an application for funding.
- The aim of the second funding phase is the completion and submission of the application.

2.1 Horizon 2020

The topics addressed in Horizon 2020 include topics in the area of “Societal Challenges” (<http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/societal-challenges>):

- Health, demographic change and wellbeing
- Food security, sustainable agriculture and forestry, marine and maritime and inland water research
- Secure, clean and efficient energy
- Smart, green and integrated transport
- Climate protection, resource efficiency and raw materials
- Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies
- Secure societies

Furthermore, funding can also be provided for preparatory measures on individual funding lines of the “Industrial leadership” pillar. This applies to the following areas in the programme section “Leadership in Enabling and Industrial Technologies”:

- Information and Communication Technologies
- Nanotechnology
- Advanced Materials
- Biotechnology
- Advanced Manufacturing and Processing

Other programme sections of Horizon 2020 can also be addressed, for example transnational projects in the funding lines “Innovative Training Networks” (ITN) and “Research and Innovation Staff Exchanges” (RISE) within the framework of Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions or measures in accordance with the ‘Widening Participation’ approach in the programme section for “Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation”, in order to develop capacities for excellent research in regions that are less strong with regard to research and innovation.

2.2 European territorial cooperation (INTERREG)

Funding is also provided for preparatory activities associated with applications submitted to research and innovation-relevant programmes under the European territorial cooperation (INTERREG) initiative. These should focus in particular on the interface between the priorities of national and regional smart specialization strategies, the fields of action of the Federal Government’s High-Tech Strategy and – in so far as it is relevant – the priorities of the EU strategies for the Baltic Sea region (<http://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/>) and the Danube region (<http://www.danube-region.eu/>).

2.3 Eurostars

Preparatory activities for projects under the Eurostars programme (available in German at <https://www.bmbf.de/de/eurostars-das-erfolgreiche-foerderprogramm-fuer-kmu-285.html>) are also eligible for funding. Eurostars is a funding programme within the framework of the European EUREKA network. It is aimed primarily at innovative R&D-performing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which intend to conduct joint R&D projects in cooperation with partners from other Member States. Eurostars applies the principles of EUREKA; this also

means that no specific topics are set (bottom-up approach) and that proposals can be submitted at any time.

3 Recipients of funding

Universities, non-university research institutions and other institutions contributing to research as well as commercial companies, particularly SMEs, which fulfil the funding purpose and requirements are eligible for funding.

Under these regulations, SMEs are businesses that fulfil the requirements laid down in the EU definition of SMEs [cf. Annex I GBER¹ and the Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (notified under document number C(2003) 1422), 2003/361/EC, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L:2003:124:TOC>].

The recipients of funding declare in writing as part of their application to the grant-awarding agency that they fall into the category defined in Annex I of the GBER.

Research institutions which receive basic funding from the Federal Government and/or the *Länder* can only be granted project funding to cover additional project-related expenditure or costs under certain preconditions.

Please refer to the Commission Communication of 27 June 2014 concerning the Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation (2014/C 198/01), notably point 2, for more information on the conditions of what does and does not constitute state aid and the extent to which funding can be provided without constituting aid.

4 Prerequisites for funding

Funding will only be provided for proposals that have high potential for realization and success in line with the objectives of this call.

Each consortium must include at least three institutions eligible for funding:

- the German applicant
- at least one partner from one of the target countries listed in these regulations under 1
- and at least one other partner from one other of the 28 EU Member States (including the UK until the entry into force of its exit from the EU) or from one of the following countries associated to Horizon 2020: Faroe Islands, Iceland, Israel, Norway, Switzerland.

Further partners from EU-28 states and the associated states above may also be involved.

Applicants are advised to familiarize themselves with the European programmes identified in 2.1 - 2.3. They should check whether the intended project includes specific European components which make it eligible for EU funding. The result of such checks should be described briefly in the national application for funding.

Projects proposed for funding under this call should document their potential for longer-term sustainable cooperation with the target region as well as their added value for the ERA.

¹ GBER = General block exemption Regulation

Funding recipients are obliged to participate in possible evaluation measures and to provide any information needed to assess the success of the funding measure.

5 Type, scope and rates of funding

5.1 Type of funding

Funds will be awarded in the form of project grants.

German institutions that are eligible for funding can generally receive funding of a maximum of 120,000 euros, or 150,000 euros if a German SME is involved, for a maximum period of 24 months.

The funding period consists of two consecutive funding phases of up to twelve months each. Applications for funding cover both phases. The funding for the second phase is made available upon successful conclusion of the first funding phase (i.e. the establishment or successful expansion of the project consortium) and a positive evaluation of the prospects of success of the second project phase (i.e. the grant recipient has identified a call for submitting a proposal and has notified the funding provider thereof).

5.2 Type of financing

Grants for universities, research and science institutions and similar institutions are calculated on the basis of the eligible project-related expenditure (in the case of Helmholtz centres and the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft on the basis of the eligible project-related costs), which can be funded individually up to a maximum of 100 % in accordance with state aid legislation. Flat-rate grants cannot be granted to universities or university hospitals since the call is aimed at networking and exploratory measures and hence not at genuine research projects as in line with the regulations governing applications for expenditure-based grants.

Grants for commercial companies and projects at research institutions which constitute an economic activity² will be calculated on the basis of the eligible project-related costs. As a rule, up to 50 % of these costs can be covered by government grants, depending on the project's relevance to application and in accordance with state aid legislation (cf. annex). The BMBF's policy requires an appropriate own contribution of at least 50 % towards the eligible costs incurred.

5.3 Form of financing

Funds will generally be awarded in the form of non-repayable project grants.

5.4 Expenditure/costs eligible for funding

The following expenditures/costs will be eligible for funding:

² Please refer to point 17 of the EU Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation for the definition of economic activities.

- a) Travel and stays by German and foreign researchers and experts who are related to the project

The following applies to the funding of travel and stays by **German researchers and experts**:

Funding is provided for travel (if by air: economy class) by German experts to and from the project partner's location in the target countries specified under 4.

The cost of subsistence expenses incurred in the countries listed under 4 is eligible for funding. A flat-rate allowance of 94 euros per day or 2,116 euros per month (where stays last between 23 and 31 days) will be paid for accommodation and meals. Contributions to health insurance and, if applicable, other types of insurance are included in this allowance and must be paid by the funding recipients themselves.

Furthermore, funding is provided to cover the expenditure/costs incurred by German project partners for project-related travel in Germany.

The following applies to the funding of travel and stays by **foreign researchers and experts**:

Travel to and from the project partner's location (if by air: economy class) will be covered by the country sending the researchers.

The German funding provider will normally fund visits to Germany by project partners from the countries listed under 4 for a maximum period of two months per person per year at a fixed rate of 104 euros per day or 2,300 euros per month (where stays last between 23 and 31 days). A lump sum payment of 77 euros will be paid for each additional day in a subsequent month. The day of arrival and day of departure are counted as one day. Contributions to health insurance and, if applicable, other types of insurance are included in this allowance and must be paid by the grant recipients themselves.

In addition, funding is provided to cover the expenditure/costs incurred by project partners from the countries listed under 4 for project-related travel in Germany.

- b) Workshops

Workshops with existing partners or aimed at opening up new potential for cooperation may receive the following support both in Germany and the target region:

Funding will be provided to cover the various expenditure and/or costs related to the organization of workshops: Grants can be provided towards expenses such as accommodation of guests, transfers, provision of workshop documents, adequate hospitality and rental of premises. The exact amount depends on the size of the event and the number of foreign guests. In such cases, no per diem allowances (see a) above) will be provided.

- c) Project-related resources and equipment

Funding for project-related resources (such as consumables, office supplies, appliances) can be provided to a limited extent in justified exceptional cases.

- d) Staff for coordinating international networking

Project-related staff costs incurred on the German side for student assistants and/or scientific staff (generally up to salary grade TV-L / TVöD EG 13) can be funded for a total of up to twelve person-months for scientific staff and up to three person-months for student assistants.

The provision of further funding for foreign project participants by the competent funding agencies is desirable.

6 Other terms and conditions for funding

Notification of award for grants on an expenditure basis will include the *Nebenbestimmungen für Zuwendungen auf Ausgabenbasis des Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung zur Projektförderung* (NABF) (Auxiliary Terms and Conditions for Funds Provided by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research for the Promotion of Projects on an Expenditure Basis), the *Besondere Nebenbestimmungen für Zuwendungen des Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung zur Projektförderung auf Ausgabenbasis* (BNBest-BMBF) (Special Auxiliary Terms and Conditions for Funds Provided by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research for the Promotion of Projects on Expenditure Basis), and the *Besondere Nebenbestimmungen für den Abruf von Zuwendungen im mittelbaren Abrufverfahren im Geschäftsbereich des BMBF* (BNBest-mittelbarer Abruf-BMBF) for the drawdown of funds.

The *Nebenbestimmungen für Zuwendungen auf Kostenbasis des Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung an Unternehmen der gewerblichen Wirtschaft für Forschungs- und Entwicklungsvorhaben* (NKBF 2017) (Auxiliary Terms and Conditions for Funds Provided by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research to Commercial Companies for Research and Development Projects on a Cost Basis) will be part of the notification of the award of cost-based grants.

The *Nebenbestimmungen für Zuwendungen zur Projektförderung auf Kostenbasis des Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung an Unternehmen der gewerblichen Wirtschaft für Forschungs- und Entwicklungsvorhaben* (NKBF 2017) (Auxiliary Terms and Conditions for Funds Provided by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research to Commercial Companies for the Promotion of Research and Development Projects on a Cost Basis) will be part of the notification of award for grants to the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, the Helmholtz Association or a commercial company.

Funding recipients are expected to ensure open access if they publish the results of the research project in a scientific journal. This can be done through publication in an electronic journal which is accessible to the public free of charge. If the results are initially published in a way which does not provide the public with free electronic access, the article must be made publicly available free of charge by electronic means following an embargo period where appropriate (secondary publication). Embargo periods for secondary publication must not exceed 12 months. The BMBF expressly welcomes secondary open access publication of scientific monographs resulting from the project.

7 Procedure

7.1 Involvement of a project management agency, application documents, other documents and use of the electronic application system

The BMBF has currently entrusted the following project management organization with implementing the funding measure:

DLR Project Management Agency
European and International Cooperation
Heinrich-Konen-Str. 1
53227 Bonn, Germany

Web: <http://www.internationales-buero.de>

Contact persons:

For subject-related information:

Daniel Geyer
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Any alterations will be announced in the *Bundesanzeiger* (Federal Gazette) or in another suitable form.

Applicants are recommended to contact the project management agency for advice on applications. The agency will provide further information and details.

Applicants must use the 'PT-Outline' electronic tool for drafting project outlines and the 'easy-Online' electronic application system for drafting formal proposals. Guidelines, information for applicants and the auxiliary terms and conditions for the award of grants are available in German at

https://foerderportal.bund.de/easy/easy_index.php?auswahl=easy_formulare&formularschrank=bmbf.

7.2 Two-phase procedure

The application procedure consists of two phases.

7.2.1 Submission and selection of project outlines

In the first phase, assessable project outlines are to be sent to the project management organization in written and electronic form by

- 31 March
- 30 June
- 30 September
- 17 December

via the 'PT-Outline' electronic tool for drafting project outlines (<https://secure.pt-dlr.de/ptoutline/app/bridge2era>).

It may not be possible to consider project outlines received after the above dates.

The project description should not exceed ten pages (Arial 11, single-spaced).

The project outline should include the following aspects:

- Definition of the objectives to be achieved in the first phase (establishment or expansion of the project consortium) and demonstration of the excellence and originality of the envisaged scientific objective of the project, and if already possible, identification of possible European research programmes for the envisaged follow-up activities subsequent to the first funding phase
- Information on the state of the art of the applicant with regard to the above research topics (including the applicant's previous work, experience and findings)
- Assessment of potential for exploitation and application
- Scientific added value of the planned cooperation
- Identification of existing contacts and collaborations with the target countries / Assessment of the research and innovation potential of possible partners including the involvement of third parties
- Robust description of the work and time schedule indicating estimated individual expenditure/costs (prospective funding requirement)
- Submission of at least one Letter of Intent for cooperation from a foreign institution from one of the target countries listed under 1

The project outlines received will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- Fulfilment of the formal prerequisites for funding
- Compliance with the funding objectives of the call and the thematic priorities identified under 2 above
- Quality and originality of the project
- Relevance to BMBF programmes on the envisaged topic / topic area
- Expertise of the applicant and the partners involved
- Scientific benefits of the expected results

Suitable project ideas will be selected for funding on the basis of the above criteria and evaluation. Applicants will be informed in writing of the result of the selection process.

Applicants have no legal claim to the return of their project outlines and of any other documents which they may have submitted in this phase of the procedure.

7.2.2 Submission of formal proposals and decision-making procedure

In the second phase, applicants whose project outlines have been evaluated positively will be invited to submit a formal proposal on which a decision will be taken after final evaluation.

It is absolutely imperative for applicants to include a project description in German in their formal proposals. This description should not exceed ten pages and include the following aspects:

- Cooperation objectives
- Planned measures to implement the objectives of the funding measure set out in 1 and 2 above
- Added value of international cooperation
- Contributions of the international partners, access to resources in the target country
- Contribution of the project towards achieving the cooperation objectives outlined in the funding regulations
- Experience with collaboration, previous collaboration
- Detailed description of the work plan for cooperation
- Planned steps for the cooperation project, planning of milestones concerning content and time schedule
- Project-related resource planning
- Plans for the lasting consolidation of the cooperation with the project partners in country X beyond the funding period
- Plans for cooperation in follow-up projects
- Plans for expansion of cooperation to other institutions and networks
- Reason for funding requirement

The proposals received will be reviewed and evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Fulfilment of the formal prerequisites
- Contribution of the measure towards achieving the funding targets and purpose
- Lasting consolidation of international partnerships
- Initiation/development of new partnerships
- Applicant's experience with international cooperation
- Quality of the cooperation and added value for partner institutions
- Appropriateness and need for the requested amount of funding
- Guarantee of overall financing during the entire project period

A funding decision will be taken following a final evaluation based on the criteria and assessment procedure above.

7.3 Conclusion of the first funding phase and positive evaluation of the second funding phase

Proof of the successful conclusion of the first funding phase is to be presented in the form of a two-page report. This report needs to be submitted two months before the end of the first funding phase and should include proof of the following:

- Adherence to work schedule
- Identification of an EU call for proposals to submit an application
- Establishment/expansion of the R&D consortium for the said call for proposals, including proof that the partners from the target countries are playing an adequate and leading role in the consortium
- Submission of Letters of Intent for collaboration by all (domestic and foreign) institutions involved in the proposal

The decision on the provision of funding for the second funding phase will be based on the evaluation of the report.

The second phase of funding will involve the elaboration and submission of a proposal for funding under the selected EU call. The DLR Project Management Agency must be notified of the application without prior request.

7.4 Provisions to be observed

Approval, payment and accounting of the funds as well as proof and examination of proper use and, if necessary, revocation of the award and reclaiming of the funds awarded are governed by sections 48 and 49a of the Administrative Procedure Act (*Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz*, VwVfG), sections 23 and 44 of the Federal Budget Code (BHO) and the relevant General Administrative Regulations unless deviation from the General Administrative Regulations is allowed under the present funding regulations. The *Bundesrechnungshof* (Germany's supreme audit institution) is entitled to carry out audits in accordance with Sections 91 and 100 of the Federal Budget Code (BHO).

8 Duration

These funding regulations will be valid until the day of expiry of the de minimis Regulation to which a six-month transition period is added, that is, until 30 June 2021.

Bonn, 16 February 2018

Federal Ministry of
Education and Research

Dr. Matthias Hack

Annex

The requirements of state aid legislation specified under 1.2 (Legal basis) must be met in cases where de minimis aid is granted.

1. General prerequisites for funding / funding recipients:

Under no circumstances may the amount of funding granted exceed the threshold specified in the de minimis Regulation. – In the case of de minimis aid according to Article 3.2 of the de minimis Regulation, this threshold amounts to 200,000 euros granted to a single undertaking over any period of three fiscal years.

Applicants who apply for funding under these regulations declare their agreement to the application of the de minimis Regulation as the legal basis for the present regulations and their adherence to the Regulation, in particular that the funding provided under these regulations will not lead to the applicant exceeding the applicable aid threshold. This applies in particular to the potential cumulation of state aid for the project/activity in question.

Applicants who are granted de minimis aid are obliged to keep all relevant papers for a minimum period of three (fiscal) years.

2. Scope of funding / cumulation:

De minimis aid cannot be cumulated with State aid for the same eligible expenses if this cumulation would lead to an aid intensity exceeding the level fixed in the specific circumstances of each case by means of an exemption regulation or a decision by the Commission. De minimis aid which is not granted for or attributable to specific eligible costs may be cumulated with other State aid granted under a block exemption regulation or a decision adopted by the Commission.