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

Special Research Areas: Pre-Proposals

April 14, 2023, version 1

Discovering what matters.

Contents

1   General Information

1.1   Program objective

The program is intended to facilitate the establishment of research networks based on international standards through the autonomous creation of key research areas at one research location, or, under certain conditions, at several locations. The Special Research Area funding program supports the development of extremely productive, tightly interconnected research units for generally long-term and inter- or multidisciplinary work on complex research topics.

1.2   Definition of terms

Explanations of the terms used in the Application Guidelines can be found in the Definition of terms (PROFI mode).

In addition, some terms specific to Special Research Areas are explained below:

Term	Definition
Consortium	Group of subproject heads who jointly design and implement the Special Research Area
Subproject head (consortium member)	The 5 –15 researchers conducting the project, including the coordinator, who together form the consortium
	Subproject heads should be established researchers and, if applicable, junior scientists with at least two but no more than eight years of national and/or international postdoctoral research experience or experience in conducting their own research (e.g. an FWF project).
	Each researcher must lead exactly *one* research subproject; project leadership cannot be shared.
Subproject, research	Research unit in the Special Research Area, which is described and budgeted by the individual subproject head and can only be implemented in association with the other research subprojects of the Special Research Area; one subproject head must be assigned to each subproject.

Term	Definition
Coordinator	Aside from the general definition (see Definition of terms), the Special Research Area coordinator must also lead both a research subproject and the Special Research Area coordination project.
Coordination project	In addition to the research subprojects, the Special Research Area also includes one administrative subproject, called the coordination project. This subproject is for the administration of project-specific travel expenses and other resources necessary for the coordination of the project and is headed by the coordinator.
Project administrator	A full-time position (postdoc rate) providing administrative support to the coordinator; ideally, this person has experience in science/research management
Statutes	Agreement between the subproject heads Statutes must be drawn up during the second stage, i.e. the full-proposal stage; they specify the tasks and responsibilities of the coordinator, regulate the cooperation between the subproject heads, and describe the decision-making processes.

1.3   Submission deadline

The deadline for submission (i.e. approval of the application for submission by the research institution) is **October 2, 2023 (2:00 pm local time, Vienna/Austria).** All proposals must be submitted online using the elane digital application portal. Project funding is administered through the research institutions (PROFI mode); this means the application must be approved for submission by both the coordinator and the applying research institution (= lead research institution).[1] 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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[1]   Approval for submission by the research institution may be waived by the research institution.

1.4 Who is eligible to apply?

All Austrian **research institutions**[2] are eligible to apply. The intended project must be carried out in Austria or under the auspices of the applying Austrian research institution. The application is submitted by the research institution where the coordinator works. The research institution appoints the coordinator to carry out the project.

The research question is to be established at Austrian research institutions. The Special Research Area focusing on this question will be anchored at one, or under specific conditions at several research locations[3] (whereby at least 50% of the research subprojects are to be implemented at one location). For a Special Research Area to be established, there must already be existing research potential, and the group of subproject heads submitting the application must be sufficiently large and well-qualified to be able to establish and run a research program of international standing within the research profile of the participating research institution(s).

The consortium for which funding is requested must consist of **5 (min.) to 15 (max.) researchers**, each leading a research subproject. One-third of the consortium members should belong to the underrepresented gender. The composition of the consortium is one of the deciding factors in the review and evaluation process.[4] Consortium members should be internationally outstanding researchers and, if applicable, junior researchers from all academic disciplines, especially from the humanities, social sciences, and cultural studies.

Subproject heads must, however, have appropriate academic qualifications (see section 1.6) and sufficient time resources to carry out a subproject as part of the proposed research. The research institution must provide the necessary infrastructure.

Subproject heads are generally employed at Austrian research institutions and are either funded by the research institution or financed by the project as part of their own position (see section 2.3.1.1). If they are employed part-time at the start of the project, it is possible to increase their employment to full-time as part of the project. All research institutions that employ subproject heads must be listed as either the lead research institution(s) or partner research institution(s) on the title page of the application.

In addition, it is possible for an international researcher who works abroad but is also employed to an extent of at least 25% at an Austrian research institution to act as a subproject head.[5]

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[2] Research institutions must be registered in the FWF's research institution portal. [Login | Der Wissenschaftsfonds (fwf.ac.at)]

[3] Research location = All research institutions located in a city, town, or municipality, as well as any research institutions located within an 80-km radius that cooperate on a regular basis with the local research institution

[4] See also Background information target ratio.

[5] Potential applicants are considered eligible if, at the time of submission of the pre-proposal, they have a genuine employment contract (extent of employment: at least 25%) which is not funded by the FWF and which is guaranteed for the planned duration of the project. Before submitting an application, researchers are required to submit evidence of employment and a brief description of the project, including a plan for its execution, information on the researcher's presence on site, rules of representation, etc., for approval by the FWF.

In projects with five subproject heads, at least three must be affiliated with one research location; otherwise, the rule is that at least 50% of the subproject heads must be employed at one location. **Subproject heads from Germany** can be involved in the Special Research Area by means of international collaborations ([LAP agreement](#)). The distribution rule applies to subprojects from Germany. FWF regulations apply to all such subprojects, and they must be approved by the FWF prior to submitting the pre-proposal. The funding organization DFG must also be notified of any such integrations in advance.

One researcher from the team acts as the coordinator. The researchers (including the coordinator) act as subproject heads. The coordinator represents the Special Research Area to the public, leads their own subproject, and manages the coordination project. A researcher may serve as coordinator in no more than *one* Special Research Area project. The coordinator of a Special Research Area project cannot simultaneously act as the coordinator of a Cluster of Excellence, Emerging Fields, Young Independent Research Group, doc.funds, or doc.funds.connect project or of an FWF Doctoral Program. Multiple applications to serve as coordinator in any of these programs cannot be submitted concurrently.

1.4.1 Can multiple applications be submitted simultaneously?

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

Multiple participation in the Special Research Area program: Each researcher may only participate in a maximum of two Special Research Areas per call, including participation in an SFB-project funded by the DFG in Germany. If a researcher is already acting as a subproject head in two Special Research Area projects (in Austria or Germany), they may not participate in a further Special Research Area pre-proposal. This applies to both the application and the implementation phases of a project. Within a Special Research Area, each researcher may lead a maximum of *one* research subproject.

Please note that for **subproject heads**, the number of ongoing/approved projects in the Principal Investigator Projects, International, Clinical Research, and Arts-Based Research programs is limited to a maximum of three projects. For further information on restrictions concerning the permissible number of applications and ongoing projects, please see [Restriction on the number of projects](#).

1.5 What types of projects can be funded?

Applications can be submitted for the implementation of a **joint multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary[6] project** intended to generate scientific/scholarly findings. The project is limited in duration to the initial funding period of 48 months. The project description must

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[6] "Interdisciplinary" refers to an integration-oriented collaboration between researchers from at least two disciplines, working towards common goals and outcomes, in which disciplinary perspectives are combined into an overall view. For further information, please see [Supplementary information on Special Research Area pre-proposals](#).

include a detailed description of the first funding period as well as an overview of the long-term perspective (long- and short-term research goals). A Special Research Area can be funded for a maximum of 8 years.

All Special Research Areas should pursue scientific/scholarly goals that in most cases go beyond established disciplinary boundaries, requiring collaboration between multiple researchers with different specializations. Owing to the multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary nature of the research questions involved, these projects can only be worked on jointly from different perspectives, leading them to open up new and unorthodox fields of research. The objective is to explore an innovative topic in Austria on a larger scale, build on an existing research potential, and expand the existing research priorities at research institutions.

Aspects of a research project that go beyond the realm of science and scholarship may be mentioned in the pre-proposal, but they will not impact the funding decision.

1.6   What are the requirements for subproject heads?

1.6.1   General requirements

The publication records over the last five years of all subproject heads must be internationally visible and commensurate with the expected career path in their field. The following criteria apply for the assessment of an applicant's publication record and initiation of the review process:

- **Quality assurance:** Most relevant in assessing the applicant's publication record are those publications that have been subject to a quality assurance procedure in line with international standards (peer review or an equivalent procedure; in the natural and life sciences, peer review is expected). Journals must usually be listed in Web of Science, Scopus, or the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). For journals not listed in those databases, or for monographs, edited volumes, contributions to edited volumes, or other publication types, the subproject head must provide a link to the publisher's website which contains a description of the applicable quality assurance procedure. Should no such description be available, the subproject head is responsible for providing 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 subproject head'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 expected career path and the respective discipline. At least two publications must be quality-assured and internationally visible publications with a substantial and independent contribution on the part of the subproject head. 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 subproject head's contribution must be specified.

If there is any uncertainty about general application requirements or about accounting for career interruptions (see sections 1.6.3 and 1.6.4), the FWF recommends that subproject heads contact the FWF Office or the FWF Equal Opportunities in Research Funding office 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.

1.6.2   Equal opportunities, diversity, and inclusion

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

1.6.3   Consideration of career breaks

The FWF will take justified, documentable career breaks (e.g. due to pregnancy, childcare,[7] caregiving obligations,[8] military or civilian service, flight, and asylum) into consideration in assessing the principal investigator's eligibility to apply.

1.6.4   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 when determining whether the principal investigator meets the application requirements.

1.6.5   Data protection notice

When assessing eligibility, all personal data provided to the FWF by a subproject head on a voluntary basis that relates to the information provided in sections 1.6.3 and 1.6.4 shall be taken into consideration exclusively to their benefit (compensation of disadvantages). Relevant information (without sensitive or personal data) can be included in an individual's

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[7]   Childcare includes parental leave periods, if applicable.

[8]   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.

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

1.7 What types of funding can be requested?

Project-specific costs are eligible for funding. These include personnel and non-personnel costs that are necessary for carrying out the project (benchmark: €1,000,000 per year) and that go beyond the resources provided by the infrastructure of the research institution. The FWF does not finance the infrastructure or basic equipment of research institutions.

For information on applying for personnel costs for the subproject head's own salary, please see section 2.3.1.1.

Please note that exaggerated cost projections may be grounds for rejection, even if a proposal is otherwise excellent.

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
- Added value
- Primary researchers involved

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

2.1.2 Project description

- Title page: Project title, lead research institution (address and head), name and institution address of the coordinator, list of collaborating research institution(s) (address and head), including details of the subproject heads employed there (name and institution address)

- Table of contents

- Project description on max. 15 consecutively numbered pages (not including the title page and table of contents), including where applicable a list of abbreviations, headings, figures, captions, tables, footnotes, etc.

    The **following contents** are expected:
    - Description of the innovative, multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary research proposal
    - The human potential of the Special Research Area
    - Wider impact on research in Austria
    - Organization and financing of the Special Research Area

- In addition, **an abstract on the coordination project and on each research subproject** (3,000 characters each, including spaces; no formulas or special characters)

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 partner research institutions and a plausible justification of the funding requested for the coordination project and each research subproject

- Annex 3: Academic CVs and descriptions of previous research achievements for all subproject heads involved in the proposal and for project staff to be financed by the project at postdoc level and higher (max. 3 pages per person)

- Annex 4 (optional): Collaboration letters from national and international cooperation partners (max. 1 page per letter)

The project description, including these annexes, must be uploaded as a single file titled *Proposal.pdf*. The FWF will send this document to the reviewers.

2.1.3 Additional documents

- Required:

  - Two publications written by each subproject head must be named, documenting that they fulfill the general requirements to act as subproject head (publication record, see section 1.6.1)

  - Publication lists for internal FWF use to assess eligibility to apply and to check for conflicts of interest with potential reviewers

  - Commitment of all participating research institutions

- Where applicable:

  - Only for junior researchers (with at least two to max. eight years of research experience): PDF scan of the doctoral certificate and proof of two years postdoctoral research experience

  - Additional documents in the case of resubmission: If the application is a revised version of a previously rejected application (see section 2.4), a response to the reviews and an overview of all changes made in the resubmitted application must be uploaded.

  - List of max. three researchers (optional) – including, if applicable, reviewers of a rejected proposal – who subproject heads request to be excluded from the review process (see section 3.2), with a brief justification

  - Cover letter accompanying the application (optional)

Any additional documents (e.g., recommendations for 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: *Research institution assignment* form, *Application form*, *Contact form*, *Program-specific data* form for each subproject head, *Cost breakdown* form, *Academic abstract,* and *Co-authors* form
- Where applicable: *Other collaborations* form

2.2 Application content and form

2.2.1 Application language

To allow applications to be reviewed by international experts, all applications must be submitted in English **without exception**.

2.2.2 Project description: Scope and formatting requirements

The continuous text in the project description (incl. abstracts), 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. Applicants must comply strictly with all upper limits specified (e.g., no. pf pages, etc.). 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 subproject head, 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). Researchers are free to choose the citation conventions or style guide they prefer, but they must apply them consistently throughout the application. If available, a DOI address (DOI = Digital Object Identifier) or another persistent identifier should be provided for the literature cited.

2.2.3 Project description and annexes

The project description must be based on the aspects indicated in sections 2.2.3.1 to 2.2.3.4 and contain the abstracts as specified in section 2.2.3.5. Annexes must be attached as described in section 2.2.3.6.

2.2.3.1 Proposed research

- Description of the excellent and innovative research proposal based on international standards; description of the state of research, the expected scientific/scholarly progress, the significance of the research results for the international community, and an explanation of how the proposed Special Research Area is distinctive within the relevant national and international scientific community
The most important national and international cooperation arrangements are to be mentioned; the individuals involved should be named, as well as the subject of the intended cooperation arrangement(s), and how they contribute to the project. All of the national and/or international cooperation arrangements that were stated as essential in

the project description should be listed on the *Other collaborations* form and may be confirmed by a collaboration letter.

- Definition of the long-term goals (eight years) of the research program, which is generally interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary in scope and may also include high-risk elements; definition of the specific goals of the first funding period (four years)
  In the case of an interdisciplinary research approach, please include:
  - Description of the common language (coherent and consistent terminology)
  - Description of the research areas to be investigated
  - Description of the relevant research challenges
  - Description of the merging of the various disciplinary theories to be combined into a common theoretical approach
  - Description of the shared methodologies used
  - Description of how a synthesis will be formed – common language, theoretical basis, individual contributions

- Presentation of the coherence of the subprojects in terms of the interaction of research competences and work; description of the synergies and added value of the cooperation between all groups

- Any potential sex-specific and gender-related aspects[9] of the proposal must be detailed. To what extent are sex-specific and gender-related aspects considered in the proposal? How will they be integrated into the research approach? These questions must be briefly addressed, even if the researchers do not feel that the project involves any such aspects.

- All potential ethical, safety-related, or regulatory aspects[10] of the proposal and how applicants plan to deal with them must be described in a separate section. Grounds must be provided for why the researchers believe the project does not raise any such issues, if this is the case.

2.2.3.2 Human potential

In the Special Research Area program, well-connected, productive researchers, building on their existing expertise, form an outstanding research unit with long-term objectives. The quality and composition of the consortium must be presented as follows:

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[9] Positioning and thoughts on the research approaches in the planned for the project in terms of sex-specific and gender-related aspects could include: Is the research approach likely to result in any 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.)

[10] For instance, the European Commission's Ethics for Researchers or The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity can serve as a guide here.

- Description of the personnel basis of the Special Research Area: previous research achievements of the individual subproject heads, including allocation within the research program of the Special Research Area (to the individual subprojects)

  - A description of the percentage of women in the Special Research Area (failure to achieve 30% participation of women must be justified)

  - A brief description of conditions for junior researchers[11] at the research institution(s)

- Description of an internationalization strategy to connect with the international research community

- Description of the involvement of junior researchers (doctoral students and postdocs) in the research work; description of the training concept for junior researchers
In addition to training opportunities within the Special Research Area, cooperation with a doctoral program can and should be sought in conjunction with a Special Research Area; possible considerations in this direction must be mentioned.

- Description of the institutions involved (information on special equipment if applicable) and their contribution

2.2.3.3 Wider impact on research in Austria

Science communication: Please list planned publications and conference participations as well as visibility strategies for the Special Research Area in the international scientific community, including a suitable open-access policy (see Open-Access Policy); also strategies to increase the program's visibility to the Austrian public.

2.2.3.4 Organization and financing structure

- Overview table showing the total costs requested for the first funding period, broken down into the categories personnel, equipment, supplies, travel expenses, and other costs

- Outline of the internal communication, cooperation, and information structures of the Special Research Area in order to define the decision-making process on financial and personnel matters

- Description of the gender-appropriate working environment as well as a description of measures for ensuring an appropriate work-life balance[12]

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[11] Once the pre-proposal has been approved, the full proposal (i.e., the second stage of the procedure) must include information on conditions for women and junior researchers. Ideally, these are provided by the research institution and contain the following points: Number of women and of junior researchers, objectives for the advancement of women, objectives for the advancement of junior researchers at the research institution(s); incl. sources and references to relevant documentation

[12] If the pre-proposal is approved, detailed descriptions of the planned measures must be submitted with the full proposal. Further explanations on the costs that can be requested in the amount of €20,000 per year will be given during Proposers' Day if the applicants are invited to submit a full proposal.

As part of the full proposal, it will be necessary to draw up statutes regulating the internal cooperation between the subproject heads; these statutes must be brought to the attention of the lead research institution and the partner research institution(s).

2.2.3.5 Subproject abstracts

For the coordination project and each research subproject, an **abstract** with a maximum of 3,000 characters (including spaces, no formulas or special characters) must be submitted. Abstracts must be subdivided into the following sections using the following English subheadings:

Coordination project:
- The coordination project's role in the Special Research Area
- Contribution to the overall project

Research subprojects:
- Wider research context / theoretical framework
- Hypotheses / research questions / objectives
- Approach / methods
- Level of originality / innovation
- Added value
- Primary researchers involved

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

2.2.3.6 Annexes to the project description

Annexes are not included in the maximum page limit for the project description and must be attached to the project description in the specified order.

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 for the coordination project and lead or partner research institution for the individual research subproject:

  - Existing project participants (not financed by FWF project funds) (usually the subproject head and project staff at the research institutions)

  - Available infrastructure

- Details of the funding requested for the coordination project and each research subproject:

  - Brief explanation of why the project staff 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 also section 2.3.2).

Annex 3: CVs and description of previous research achievements

The academic abstracts and research achievements (for all subproject heads and any postdocs to be funded from the project) must be described on max. three pages per person using the guidelines, structure, and English headings provided below.

Required contents for academic CVs:

- *Personal details:* Personal data (name, researcher unique identifier(s) such as ORCID, research ID, etc., no photos), address of research institution, and relevant websites; please also provide a publicly accessible link to a list of all the researcher's publications.

- *Education:* List of academic milestones

- *Position(s)*: List of academically relevant positions (with the extent of employment in the case of part-time employment)

- *Career breaks*: List of career breaks or delays (see also sections 1.6.3 and 1.6.4)

- *Net research experience* (optional for CVs of subproject heads, postdocs): 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 individual's doctoral degree. This is intended to make it easier for the reviewers to assess 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 must be indicated, if available. Pursuant to 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 (optional): Collaboration letters

Collaboration letters (max. one page each) from national and international collaboration partners who are named in the project description as being essential for the implementation of the project and whose role is plausibly described; subproject heads are not collaboration partners

2.2.4 Required additional documents

The following three separate uploads are required:

Publication output

- *PI-publication.pdf*: Two publications written by each subproject head must be named, documenting that they fulfill the general requirements to apply (see template *PI-publication*). The FWF will determine eligibility to apply based on these publications.

- *Publication_list.pdf:* List of all academic publications published in the last five years[13] (categorized into "quality-assured publications" and "other publications") for all subproject heads and postdocs to be funded by the project, in *one* PDF document
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.

Commitment of all participating research institutions:

- Description of the planned support by the respective research institution Each participating research institution must detail the personnel (part 1) and equipment (part 2) needed for the Special Research Area (see Appendix B).

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[13]   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 Eligible project-specific costs

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

Funding may only be requested for the cost categories listed below.

2.3.1 Personnel costs

Funding may only be requested for staff 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. The 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. A full-time position for a project administrator (postdoctoral rate) may be requested to support the coordinator.

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

2.3.1.1 Grant-salaried researchers

The FWF understands "grant-salaried" to mean that the subproject head'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 subproject head, regardless of whether they are employed on a temporary or permanent basis at the time of application. The senior postdoc salary rate[14] applies for the subproject head's own position (pro-rated accordingly in the case of partial funding).

Women subproject heads 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 the researcher's career development. Coaching is understood to mean person-centered counselling and

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[14]   The senior postdoc rate can only be requested to fund the subproject head's own position; the postdoc salary rate applies for project staff members at the postdoc level.

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).

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 institutions. "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 coordinator 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 i(*Bundesvergabegesetz*) as amended apply. In order to determine the equipment costs 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 €1500,00 incl. VAT).

The calculation of funds requested for project-specific material costs should be justified based on the project's schedule, work plans, and experimental schedule. 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 itinerary, broken down by project staff members. This plan must indicate which staff members will be travelling, the destination, for what purpose, when (in which year of the project), for how long, and how much the travel 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[15] 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 and the partner 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 partner research institution's individual travel expenses policies. If no such policies are in place at the research institution, the federal regulations governing travel costs (*Reisegebührenvorschrift des Bundes* 1955, RGV) as amended apply.

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[15]   The amount of a CO_2 offset contribution for flights can be calculated, for example, using Climate Austria's CO₂ calculator.

2.3.5 Costs as part of national and international collaborations

In the case of cooperation arrangements, costs arising within the context of a research collaboration at the respective 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 then 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
    - Equality measures – the Special Research Area can budget a maximum of €20,000 per year for equality measures as part of the project; these costs must be described and justified in the full proposal.

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

2.3.7 General project costs

The approved grant sum includes 5% general project costs that are permitted for funding but cannot be requested individually using the abovementioned cost categories. They are subject to the FWF's Funding Guidelines and the costs must be eligible for funding. These include, for example, costs for conference travel, dissemination activities, and minor unforeseen costs necessary for the project.

Overhead costs for the research institution are not included in general project costs.

General project costs are to be entered in the appropriate field in the *Cost breakdown* form and calculated as 5% of the total funding requested. No justification for general costs is needed in Appendix A.

2.3.8   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 under 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 applicant, 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 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 before the specified deadline:

- In any case, a cover letter to the FWF must include an overview of all changes made in the resubmitted application; this overview will not be forwarded 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 3.6). 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 there is no time limit for the resubmission of a rejected application, the respective application requirements and the call-specific application deadlines do apply. 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

Below please find an overview of all documents/forms to be submitted.

2.5.1 All applications must include the following parts:

a) Files:

- *Proposal.pdf* (project description and abstracts, including annexes 1-3 and where applicable 4, with PDF bookmarks, at least for the major sections)
- *PI_publication.pdf* (two publications written by each subproject head must be named, documenting that they fulfill the general requirements to apply)
- *Publication_list.pdf* (publication list of all the key project participants – all subproject heads and project staff to be financed by the project at postdoc level and higher – for the last 5 years, categorized into "quality assured publications" and "other publications")
- *Commitment_national_research_institution(s).pdf* (commitment of participating research institution(s); to be prepared for each participating research institution)

b) Forms:

- *Research institution*
- *Application form*
- *Contact form*
- *Program-specific data*
- *Cost breakdown*
- *Academic abstract (in English)*
- *Co-authors*
- *Other collaborations (if applicable; for national and international collaboration partners)*

2.5.2 File uploads, if applicable

- *Doctoral_certificate_name_researcher.pdf* (doctoral/PhD certificate of junior researcher)
- *Postdoc-research_activity_name_researcher.pdf* (documentation of junior researcher's postdoctoral research experience)
- *Cover_letter.pdf* (accompanying letter)
- *Negative_list.pdf* (reviewers who should be excluded; optional)

- *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)

The coordinator must finish preparing the application in time to allow the research institute sufficient time to approve the application for submission by **October 2, 2023 (2:00 pm local time, Vienna/Austria).**

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 coordinator can make no further changes to the application themselves. All applications approved by the lead research institutions by **October 2, 2023 (2:00 pm local time, Vienna/Austria)** will be checked for completeness and formal accuracy 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 coordinator, giving them the opportunity to correct the problems within a ten-day period. 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 submitted 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 2.1).

Once the review process has begun, no further changes can be made to the application. The FWF must be notified immediately of any changes to the consortium during the review process; such changes require the FWF's approval.

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 coordinator must give reasons why they wish to exclude these reviewers. If the reasons for exclusion are professionally and academically sound, the FWF will generally fulfil the coordinator's request and 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 FWF Decision-Making Procedure.

Please note that the FWF does not wish to receive, nor will it consider a list of potential reviewers from researchers.

3.3   Number of reviews required

For the evaluation of the pre-proposal, a minimum of three independent reviews are required for a positive decision.

3.4   Decision-making process

For detailed information on the decision-making process, the criteria for selecting international reviewers, detailed rules concerning conflicts of interest, and the composition of juries and review panels, please see the General Principles of the Decision-Making Procedure.

The **review process** for Special Research Areas usually takes about 14 months.

In the spring of the year following submission of the proposal, the Scientific Board will decide on the pre-proposal on the basis of the reviews obtained. If the Board reaches a positive decision, the researchers will be invited to submit a full proposal. This full proposal must be submitted within ten weeks. The applying research institution and the coordinator will be informed of the FWF's decision in writing.

International experts will be invited to a hearing to complete the review of the full proposal. This international panel discusses the proposals with the researchers and research institutions and, based on the presentations and discussions, prepares a recommendation for the Scientific Board (in a closed session, i.e., in the absence of the Scientific Board). The Scientific Board will decide on the awarding of funding in November of the same year based on this recommendation. The lead research institutions and subproject heads will be notified of these decisions in writing.

3.5   Grounds for rejection

The reasons for rejecting an application are assigned to one of five categories (C1–C5) and communicated to the coordinator and the lead research institution; the coordinator 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 generally not be contacted for a second review. However, please note that 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 (with the "three times" referring to the original application and two 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 researchers or applying research institutions.

4   Compliance with Legal Requirements and Standards of Research Integrity

4.1   Legal regulations

Please note that the lead research institution must comply with all legal requirements and safety provisions (e.g., Federal Disabilities Act) that apply for the Special Research Area project and obtain all the necessary permits (e.g., from the Ethics Committee, the Animal Testing Commission, the National Heritage Agency, or the relevant foreign authorities).

4.2   Academic integrity

The Guidelines for Good Scientific Practice of the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity (OeAWI) 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 OeAWI. 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, please 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 coordinator 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 coordinator 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 coordinator 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. Guidelines for writing PR summaries 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 papers, and media reports).

6 Appendices to the Application Guidelines

6.1 Appendix A: Information on the research institution(s) and description of financial aspects

Information on the lead research institution and the partner research institutions and the description of project finances must be presented **in English,** categorized into coordination project and subprojects, 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 lead research institution and the partner research institution
- Existing personnel (not financed by the FWF, usually the subproject heads and research personnel at the research institution(s))
- Existing infrastructure (Note: Please briefly describe the status quo and future outlook as detailed in the document *Commitment national research institution(s)*)

 (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 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: Commitment of the national research institution(s)

Please describe the additional infrastructure that will be provided by the research institution(s). This document can be written in German, as it will remain with the FWF and will not be sent to reviewers.

Part 1) - Research institution A–X

Part 1 describes the **human resources** required by the Special Research Area at the respective research institution. Any modifications resulting from the reviews and subsequent approval by the FWF must be renegotiated.

(1) Participants (staff provided by the participating research institution: Starting situation of the Special Research Area)
   a. Number of professors
   b. Number of assistant professors
   c. Number of non-academic professional staff
   All participants must be named.

(2) Additional participants needed:

   To be indicated for each research institution

   The following information and actions must be indicated for academic positions such as professor/assistant professor, and also for non-academic professional staff: number, transfer of positions, new or replacement, creation of new positions, and implementation by *(date)*

   Optional:

(3) Funding of visiting researchers
       Number of researchers per year

(4) Funding for doctoral students
       Number of doctoral students per year

FWF Austrian
Science Fund

Part 2) - Research institution A–X

Part 2 describes the **infrastructure** that the Special Research Area will need to establish a key research focus at the research institution and that will be provided as a priority.

(1) Available laboratory workspaces or workstations
    a. Extent
    b. Quality and equipment

(2) Additional space required by the Special Research Area and provided by the research institution
    a. Extent
    b. Quality and equipment
    c. Implementation by *(date)*

(3) IT equipment - number and type

(4) Large-scale equipment required - number and type
Acquisition by *(date)*

(5) Integration of the teaching program offered by the Special Research Area into the university's existing curriculum – Number and type of new courses – Description of the courses offered

6.3   Appendix C: Notes and questions for reviewers in the Special Research Areas funding program[16]

The FWF actively supports equal opportunities and equal treatment in all of its programs. The review of an application must not put researchers 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 the how the length of the individual's research career corresponds to their research achievements to date.

Our commitment to equal opportunities also means taking breaks or delays in researchers' careers into consideration (e.g., due to parental leave; long-term or chronic illness; disability; caregiving responsibilities; etc.) which may have resulted in gaps in a researcher's publication record, unorthodox career paths, or limited international research experience. Please also see our information for reviewers on unconscious bias in the decision-making process.

Only the researcher's ten most important academic publications and their ten most important additional research achievements 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.

Please review the current proposal[17] based on the following six assessment criteria:
1) Quality and innovation of the Special Research Area proposal, 2) quality and composition of the consortium, 3) wider impact, 4) organization and funding, 5) ethical, sex-specific, and gender-related aspects, and 6) final assessment. 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 researchers in full and in anonymous form.

Section 1 (forwarded to the researchers in full)

1) Quality of the Special Research Area proposal
  - Quality of the research on which the Special Research Area is based (international competitiveness, scientific/scholarly innovation potential)

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[16]   Further information can be found on our website: FWF's corporate policy and mission statement and the Application Guidelines for FWF Special Research Areas.

[17]   The proposal must meet the FWF's formal requirements, and we ask you to please bear these in mind when writing your review. (Important formal requirements: Project description incl. figures and tables, no more than 15 pages, plus one abstract per subproject; list of relevant literature cited, max. 5 pages; academic CVs and description of previous research achievements of all researchers, incl. their ten most important publications, max. 3 pages each.) For further information, please see Special Research Areas (fwf.ac.at).

- Thematic coherence and expected added value of the SFB

2) Quality and composition of the consortium
- Researchers: academic potential (qualifications and international reputation), research capacity
- Gender ratio
- Percentage of junior researchers as subproject heads
- Involvement of junior researchers as project staff

3) Wider impact
- Dissemination strategies including a suitable open-access policy and science communication: Quality of the measures with regard to overall visibility of the Special Research Area, also beyond the scientific/research field (contribution to public awareness of research)

4) Organization and funding
- Quality of the organizational plan, especially with regard to a coherent organization between subprojects, cooperation within the Special Research Area, and consistency with the planned project duration (short- and long-term work plan)
- Quality of network structures (communication and information paths) and the formal framework

5) Ethical, sex-specific, and gender-related aspects
- Ethics: Have ethical considerations been addressed satisfactorily?
- Sex-specific and gender-related aspects: Researchers are required to address any relevant sex-specific and/or gender-related elements inherent in research questions and/or research design. Please assess whether the 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 remarks to the researchers)

If you are in favor 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 also have an 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 want submitted to the researcher. Feel free to also give us feedback about the evaluation process and your interactions with us.