



Der Wissenschaftsfonds.

**EXPLORING NEW FRONTIERS**

**CULTIVATING TALENTS**

**REALISING NEW IDEAS**

**FUNDING  
THE WAY FORWARD**

# **FWF Information event: START Programme**

[www.fwf.ac.at](http://www.fwf.ac.at)

## Technical Check

- Please check your computer audio and video.
- We have set all participants to „mute“. Please unmute your microphone when we call on you personally.
- If you have questions or technical problems, please write them in the "Chat"
- For the Q&A session: We will create a list of speakers based on the messages in the chat and call you in that order.
- Contact details:
  - Mario Mandl and Simone Recchi: Moderators
- The presentation will be sent to you by e-mail.

# START programme

General conditions and requirements

# START-Programme

## Development

- 1996 on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF)
- 2006 significant changes of the requirements
- Since 2007 commitment to submit an ERC-StG/CoG, since 2014/2015 only ERC-StG

## Figures

- 165 START projects (about 172 Mio. EUR)
- Average number of applications per call: ~ 100 (last call 99)
- Proportion of female applicants: between 25-30 %, grant-salaried PI's about 50 %
- Approval rate 6-7 %
- Around 40 START grantees also received and ERC grant

# START-Programme

## Programme aims

- **Target group** are top-qualified researchers at an early stage in their career from any discipline, no quotas
- Provide **financial security** for a period of five years for research activities
- Through leading a generously funded research project qualification for a **leading academic position** in Austria or abroad

# START-Programme

## Programme requirements (I)

- **Doctorate (certificate)** – PhD or MD, between two and eight years prior to the application deadline (20.09.2022), extensions are possible (e.g. parental leave, long-term illnesses)
- **Austrian hosting institution** – ensuring the availability of the required infrastructure
- **Outstanding track record** – internationally recognized contributions to the development of the field
- Evidence of **independent** research activity
  - should already have acquired **competitive third-party funds** independently since earning their doctorate (responsible for planning and execution of a project)
  - should already have **research stays abroad** for a period of at least one year

# START-Programme

## Programme requirements (II)

- **Letter of support** from the hosting research institution
- **Commitment** to submit an application with the same content under the forthcoming call of ERC Starting Grants (next deadline: 25 October 2022)
- **Publications requirements:** (1) quality assured publications, (2) international visibility, (3) number/scope and quality :
  - **Quality assurance:** The primary publications for evaluating the publication record are those that have been subjected to a quality assurance procedure in line with high international standards (peer review or an equivalent procedure; peer review is expected in the natural and life sciences). The journals must usually be listed in the *Web of Science*, *Scopus*, or the *Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)*.



# START-Programme

## Programme requirements (III)

- **International visibility:** Most of the principal investigator's publications must have a wider than national reach. In the natural sciences, life sciences, and social sciences, most of the publications listed must be in English.
- **Number/scope and quality** of the principal investigator's publications must be commensurate with the expected career path and the field. At least two publications must be quality-assured and internationally visible publications with a substantial and independent contribution on the part of the principal investigator. At least one publication with first, last, or corresponding authorship in the life sciences is required.
- **Option for women:** Parts of the START proposal may also be submitted at the same time as a Elise Richter proposal
- The START application may be **based on an already approved/ongoing project** funded by the FWF (e.g. Stand-alone Project, Richter).

# START programme 2022/2023

## PROFI (project funding through research institutions)

- PROFIs instead of *ad personam* funding: Grant agreement is concluded with the research institution of the project leader
- Global budget; no administrative separation between personal costs and other costs
- Project submission through elane – select PROFIs and select the proper Austrian research institute. Please get in contact with your grant service unit etc. as soon as possible.
- Electronic final submission through an authorized person at the research institution; signatures are not required!
- Authorized persons can change the proposal forms but not the project description!

# Formal requirements for the application process (I)

- Forms ⇒ to be filled online
- Project description on no more than 22 pages (observe formatting guidelines) incl. a mandatory table of contents, list of abbreviations, headings, figures, captions, tables, footnotes, etc.
- Annexes to the project description
  1. List of literature cited (no more than 5 pages)
  2. Justification of costs
  3. **CV of the project leader** on no more than 3 pages:  
Personal details, Education, Position(s), Career breaks, Net research experience, Research interests, Academic publications (max 10), Additional research achievements (max 10)
  4. **Letter of support** from the hosting research institution
  5. If necessary: *collaboration letters*

## Formal requirements for the application process (II)

### Attachments, to be uploaded seperately:

- list of all published publications of the last five years of the PI (mandatory)
- If applicable: cover letter to the application
- List of reviewers to be excluded
- For resubmission:
  - Overview of all changes
  - Response(s) to reviews
- Vendor quotes for any relevant items requested under “Equipment” and “Other costs”
- Evidence of periods of child care, long term illness etc.

## Double application

### START & ERC StG

- Commitment of the applicant to submit an similar research proposal that I have submitted for consideration under the START Programme at the next possible date also within the European Research Council's (ERC StG ) funding programme

### Why is this an requirement for START?

- Maximizing individual chances of success
  - Similarities between ERC StG and START (programme objectives, age limit, funding duration, amount of funding)
- ERC StG = distinction on European level, important career step
- Fosters attractiveness of research institution in the European context
- Fosters European visibility of Austria as research location

## What are the general principles behind applications?

<b>Choice of theme</b>	Bottom up
<b>Type of research</b>	Innovative fundamental research
<b>Eligibility</b>	2-8 years after doctorate, hosting institution in Austria
<b>Quotas</b>	None
<b>Processing time</b>	In general 9 months
<b>Deadlines</b>	Opening of call in July, deadline mid-September each year

# START programme

**From proposals to projects: Presenting the right ideas to the right people in the right way**

Application guidelines and questions to reviewers

## Aim of this part

### Description of relations between

- Programme-mission (aims)
- Application guidelines
- Criteria for reviews



## Promotion of

- FWF: high quality scholarly/scientific research
- START: highest demands on researches and projects
  
- FWF: training and education by means of research
- START: build-up own research group, integration of young researchers
  
- FWF: science communication, science-friendly culture and knowledge transfer
- START: highest demands for START, START grantees are highly visible

# Project description

- 1. Scientific/Scholarly aspects**  
„What, Why, How?“
- 2. Human resources**  
„Who?“
- 3. Annex: Financial aspects**  
„Where and how much?“

# START-Programme

## Scientific/scholarly aspects

- Relevance to international research in the field (international state of research)
- Clearly defined aims and hypotheses or research question(s) of the project
- Description of the project's anticipated level of originality or scientific/scholarly innovation
- Methods
- Cooperation arrangements (national and international)
- Work plan, time plan as well as dissemination strategies
- Potential Ethical aspects
- Potential sex-specific and gender-related aspects

# START-Programme

## Human resources

- Academic qualifications of the researchers involved
- Importance of the project for the career development of the applicant

# START-Programme

## Financial Aspects

### **Information on the research institution**

- Available infrastructure
- Available personnel not financed by the FWF (usually the project leader and other project participants)

### **Information on the support requested**

- Justification for the personnel to be assigned to the project (type of position[s], description of nature of work, length and extent of involvement in the project)
- Justification for non-personnel costs (equipment, material, travel and other costs)

# START-Programme

## Guidelines for FWF Reviewers (I)

**Section 1** (section 1 and 2 will be transmitted to the applicant in its entirety)

1. Research-related qualifications of the applicant (in relation to the length of his/her careers) and potential to independently lead a generously funded research project
2. Level of originality or innovation of the application
3. Quality of the proposed research
4. Approaches and feasibility
5. Ethics and Gender:
  - Ethical considerations
  - Sex-specific and gender-related elements

# START-Programme

## Guidelines for FWF Reviewers (II)

### 6. Overall evaluation with regard to key strengths and weaknesses and final funding recommendation

- Excellent – funding with highest priority
- Very Good – funding with high priority
- Good – resubmission with some revisions
- Average – resubmission with major revisions
- Poor – rejection

### **Section 2: Optional recommendations for the applicant(s)**

- If you are in favour of the project being funded, you may want to add to the formal assessment in Section 1 by making further and perhaps more informal comments or suggestions here. However, please note that these remarks, too, may impact on the FWF's funding decision, especially if they amount to substantive criticism of the project.

# START-Programme

## Guidelines for FWF Reviewers (III)

### **Section 3 (confidential remarks to the FWF)**

Other comments intended solely for the FWF



## Note to reviewers on equal opportunities

The FWF actively supports equal opportunities and fair treatment for all applicants. The FWF does not put applicants at a disadvantage for non-research-related reasons (such as age, gender, etc.) and therefore asks all reviewers to apply the same standards. For example, when assessing applicants' qualifications, please disregard their actual age, but consider their academic age instead.

Our commitment to equal opportunities also means taking into account breaks or delays in applicants' research careers (e.g., due to parental leave; long-term or chronic illness; disability; caring responsibilities; etc.), which may have led to publication gaps, unusual career paths, or limited international research experience.

## Details on the formal assessment

### Ratings (I)

The FWF provides the reviewers with a brief explanation of the quality standards that should form the basis for the formal ratings:

#### **Excellent = funding with the highest priority**

The proposed research project is among the best 5% in the field worldwide. It has the potential to break new ground and make a major contribution to knowledge. The applicant and the researchers involved possess exceptional qualifications by international standards.

#### **Very good = funding with high priority**

The proposed research project is among the best 15% in the field worldwide. It is at the forefront internationally, but minor improvements could be made. The applicant and the researchers involved possess very good qualifications by international standards.

# Details on the formal assessment

## Ratings (II)

### **Good = resubmission with some revisions**

The proposed research project is internationally competitive but has some weaknesses, and/or the applicant and the researchers involved possess good qualifications by international standards.

### **Average = resubmission with major revisions**

The proposed research project will provide some new insights but has significant weaknesses and/or the applicant and the researchers involved possess sufficient qualifications by international standards.

### **Poor = rejection**

The proposed research project is weak, and/or the applicant and the researchers involved are insufficiently qualified by international standards.

## Reasons for rejection (I)

<b>C1</b>	The reviews of your application were <b>entirely positive</b> with regard to the research project itself as well as your research qualifications. However, the reviewers expressed even greater support for other applications. For budgetary reasons, the FWF can currently only approve those applications which receive the most favourable reviews and ratings; this means that your application could not be approved. If you choose to resubmit your application, please place greater emphasis on the strengths of the project in order to improve your chances of approval.
<b>C2</b>	The reviewers of your application were <b>predominantly positive</b> with regard to the research project itself as well as your research qualifications. However, there were several minor points of criticism in the reviews, and the reviewers expressed greater support for other applications. For budgetary reasons, the FWF can currently only approve those applications which receive the most favourable reviews and ratings; this means that your application could not be approved. If you choose to resubmit your application, please place greater emphasis on the strengths of the project and take the reviewers' suggestions into consideration in order to improve your chances of approval.

## reasons for rejection (II)

<b>C3</b>	The reviews of your application were <b>largely positive</b> with regard to the research project itself and/or your research qualifications. However, there were a number of points of criticism in the reviews, meaning that your application could not be approved in its current form. If you choose to resubmit your application, please focus more on defining the strengths of the project and take the reviewers' comments and suggestions into consideration in a clear and visible way.
<b>C4</b>	The reviews of your application were <b>only partly positive</b> with regard to the research project and/or your research qualifications. However, there were numerous points of criticism in the review, meaning that the application would have to be revised substantially and possibly refocused in order to be eligible for funding. If you choose to re-submit your application, please take the reviewers' suggestions and points of criticism into consideration in a clear and visible way.
<b>C5</b>	The reviews of your application were predominantly <b>very critical</b> . As it cannot be assumed that the weaknesses in the application can be remedied within a short period of time, the FWF Board has decided that a resubmission to this funding programme will only be permitted after a period of 12 months starting from the decision date.

## Formal requirements

- Final submission through an authorized person from the research institution
- Page limits for application and annexes
- Submit only specified enclosures
- Complete application in English
- Provide correct „negative list“ of reviewers
- Resubmissions:
  - overview of all changes made
  - Either one statement for all reviewers or separate statements to each reviewer
  - brief notes on modifications resulting from reviewer suggestions in the project description
- Appropriate file formats

## Scholarly/Scientific aspects

- Poor discussion of state of the art
- Vague description of problems/questions
- Aims too broad / ambitious
- Vague or missing hypothesis or research questions (e.g. „just data fishing“)
- Insufficient descriptions of methods and work plan
- Lack of focus in the project description
- Insufficient previous experience
- Incomprehensible costs
- Project description too short (within page limits!)
- English (or translated by somebody unfamiliar with the subject)

## What principles govern the review procedure?

Quality standard	→	International community
Peer review	→	Exclusively outside Austria
FWF Reporters	→	Nomination of referees
International Jury	→	Confirms and/or nominates additional reviewers
Number of reviews	→	At least 3 for a positive decision
Meeting	→	1 per year (June)
Decision	→	Recommendation of the international jury on the basis of reviews and a hearing, final decision: FWF board
Justification	→	Excerpts from the reviews, hearing and competition
Mid-term evaluation	→	Peer review of a mid-term report
Ex post evaluation	→	Peer review of the final reports



# START programme

Procedures and decision-making

Hearing/Interview as „last obstacle“

Project management from the FWF's perspective

# FWF procedures

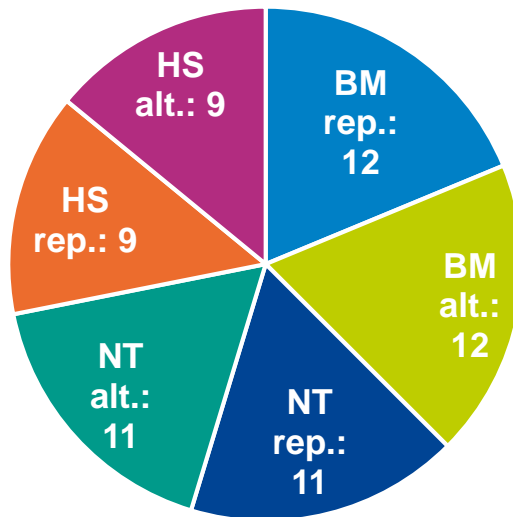
## Key points

- Strict bottom-up principle: No thematic requirements, no quotas, no preferential treatment
- Multiple checks in all steps of procedure and decisions
- Close interaction with applicant to maximize transparency
- Independent, international peer review as the basis for quality assurance
- Text of reviews as most important basis for decisions (ratings treated as mere indicators)
- Discussion of and decisions on all projects from all disciplines during an FWF Board meeting with representatives from all disciplines

## The "heart" of the FWF funding machine

### FWF Board

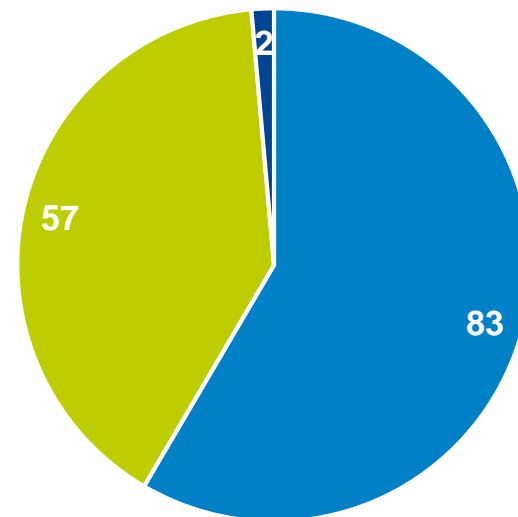
32 reporters, 32 alternates  
(all university professors)



**NT:** Natural sciences and engineering  
**HS:** Humanities and social sciences  
**BM:** Biology and medicine

### FWF Office

around 150 employees, about 2/3 for direct project support

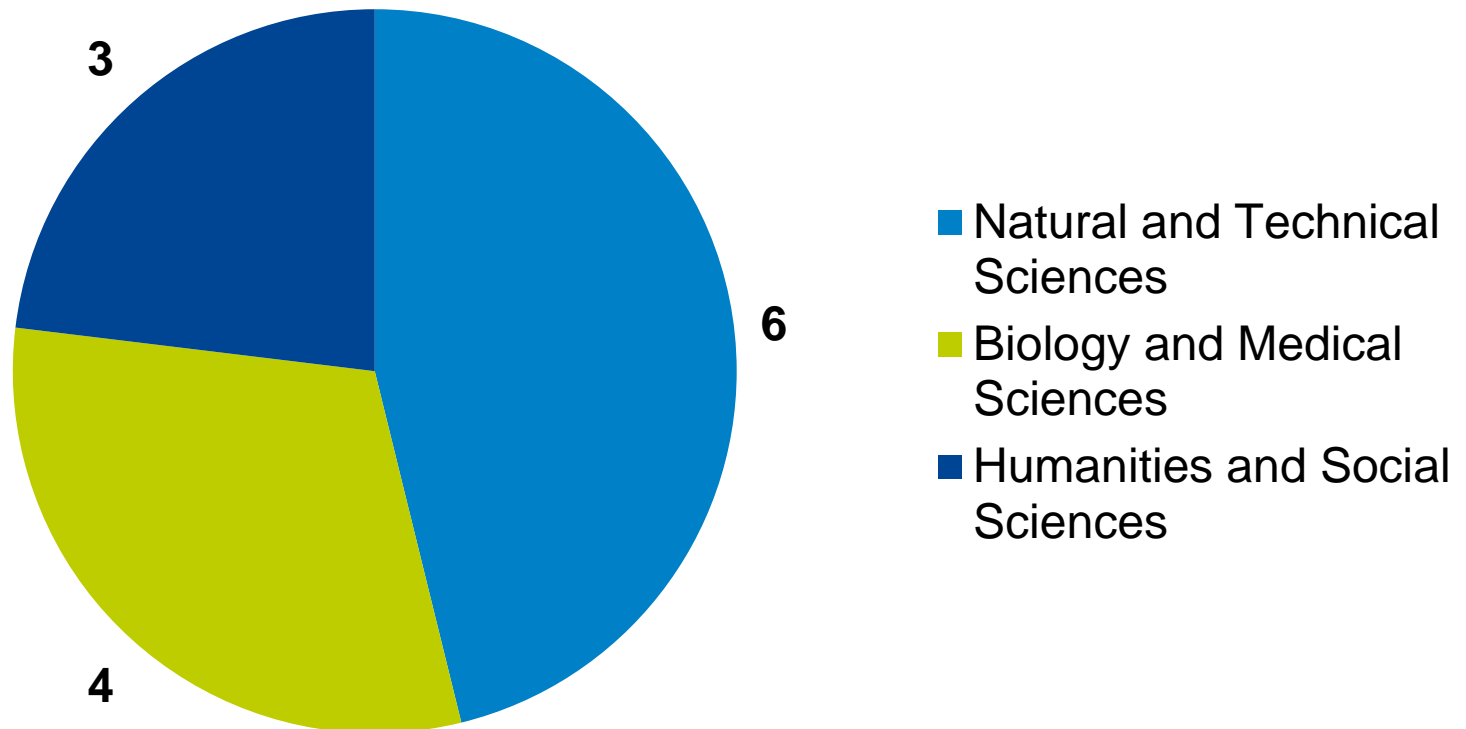


- Service & strategy departments
- Internal departments (incl. staff units)
- Executive Board

Status as of 16.02.2022: 142 active FWF employees, including part-time employees and excluding employees on leave.

## International Jury

13 distinguished scholars/scientists from abroad



<http://www.fwf.ac.at/en/about-the-fwf/organisation/start-wittgenstein-jury>

## „Interaction“ reporters / secretariat / jury / ministry

### **FWF Office – scientific and administrative Project Officers**

- Advise applicants
- Process applications
- Interact with FWF boards
- Organize the review procedure
- Communicate with reviewers and applicants
- Prepare decision suggestions for the Decision Board

### **FWF Reporters (alternates)**

- Suggest reviewers
- Present results of reviewing procedure to the decision board, suggest decision
- Participate in decision making

# „Interaction“ reporters / secretariat / jury / ministry

## Jury

- Rejections of applications without reviews (weaknesses with regard to contents and/or insufficient expertise)
- Confirms and/or nominates additional reviewers
- Final selection of candidates to be invited for a hearing (= final shortlist)
- Final selection of START grantees (recommendation for the board)

## Federal ministry

- Official awarding ceremony

## (Pre-)selection of candidates for a hearing

- Discussion of the results of the review procedure FWF board (at least 3 reviews)
- Review texts are important basis for decisions (numeric ratings are merely indicative)
- No quotas
- Shortlist – candidates on shortlist will be invited for a hearing
- Final selection of hearing candidates by international jury (= final shortlist)
- Invitation to a hearing (around 3-4 weeks before the jury meeting) or final rejection

# Hearing

## Aims

- Complement the written evaluation with a personal presentation, interaction between candidates and jury
- Provide the jury with supplementary information reinforcing or revising the impression based on the written reviews
- Show the “vision” – why should the candidate get a START grant now
- **Main objective: interaction with jury**



# Hearing

## Conditions

- For each candidate around 25-30 min
- Presentation in English (PowerPoint or PDF)
- No more than 12 minutes for presentation
- Content – the following points must be addressed:
  - very brief introduction of yourself and your academic career to date (important milestones of your academic career and update)
  - brief description of your working environment (your position)
  - brief presentation of your project which is clearly understandable to scholars/scientist from outside your discipline (at least half of the time)
  - 15-20 min. discussion with the international jury

# Hearing

## Discussion

- Usually focuses on the scientific/scholarly aspects of your project

### **Array of questions**

- Project plan and management;
- Impact on the field
- Exit strategies for risky parts of your project
- Competence in leadership and independence
- Project team and composition, could also include questions concerning leadership
- Wider context of the project: impact on other fields (academic and non-academic)

# Hearing

## Tips for the presentation

- **Consider the target group!** Jury members represent a variety of disciplines but all are distinguished researchers. The project presentation should demonstrate your scientific/scholarly expertise, but it should also be understandable for researchers from outside of your discipline.
- **Speak freely** (do not read out a written text!): prepare as good as possible (mock presentations), it is essential to observe the time (12 minutes)!
- **Enthusiasm:** convince the jury of your project and of you, what is exciting about your project, why would a START grant be important and why would now be the right time?
- **Vision for the future**
- **Impress** the Jury

# START-Programme

## Decision

- “Closed session” of the international jury
- For each application at least one “Jury Member in Charge” (interdisciplinary applications: two members)
- Selection of START grantees based on reviews and hearings
- Information on the results immediately after the meeting (Saturday)
- Official awarding of the START grant by the federal minister
- Funding contract usually within two weeks

# START-Programme

## Project Management

- Additional funds for refereed publications
- Finalize other projects before the start of the START-project (usually within 6-12 months after decision)
- Consider that the composition of a project team may take some time (eg. international announcement)
- Use the flexibility you have for the execution of the project („global budget“)
- Run the project as efficiently as possible
- Mid-term evaluation: after three years
- Mind the necessary reports and the information needed therefore (documentation of publications, invited lectures, international conferences and workshops etc.)

## Contact persons at the FWF

### START Programme

- Project officers of the FWF in the department for career development:  
<https://www.fwf.ac.at/en/about-the-fwf/organisation/fwf-team/specialist-departments/strategy-career-development/>
- Mario Mandl (programme management)  
+43-1 505 67 40 – 8605; E-Mail: [mario.mandl@fwf.ac.at](mailto:mario.mandl@fwf.ac.at)
- Dr. Inga Paslaviciute (administrative programme management)  
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### ERC Starting Grant

- Dr. Reinhard Belocky (ERC National Expert)  
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