

NEUES ENTDECKEN
TALENTE FÖRDERN
IDEEN UMSETZEN

FWF

Der Wissenschaftsfonds.

In accordance with its [Funding Guidelines](#) of 1 January 2021
(as last amended), the FWF has issued the following

Application Guidelines

Letter of Intent

Clusters of Excellence



Content

- 1. Clusters of Excellence: Overview and submission of Letter of Intent 3
 - 1.1. Mission-Statement..... 3
 - 1.2. Objectives of the COE programme 4
 - 1.3. Structural elements of a Cluster of Excellence..... 4
- 2. Eligible research institutions and requirements for LOI 5
- 3. Eligible costs and duration 6
- 4. Content and structure of the LOI..... 7
- 5. Electronic forms and submission via elane 7
- 6. Deadline 8
- 7. Allocation..... 8
- 8. Appendix A: Maximum number of COEs as lead research institution10
- 9. Appendix B: Research institutions' own contribution.....11

1. Clusters of Excellence: Overview and submission of Letter of Intent

This document provides an overview of the Clusters of Excellence (COE) programme and describes the requirements for submitting a Letter of Intent (LOI). The LOI can be submitted to the FWF between 1 June 2021 and 16 August 2021 and is a necessary prerequisite in order to submit a COE pre-proposal later on.

As a rule, the COE pre-proposal should not contain any changes to the central elements described in the LOI (lead and collaborating research institutions; coordinator, i.e., Director of Research; already named members of the Board of Directors [BOD]; research area). Changes are possible only in exceptional and unforeseeable circumstances and require the prior approval of the FWF.

1.1. Mission-Statement

Clusters of Excellence (COE) are the first of three pillars of the [excellence=austria](#)¹ funding initiative to strengthen Austria's position as a top location for research within the international scientific community. The dimension and scope of the research conducted in a cluster go far beyond what was previously possible within the FWF's existing programme portfolio.

COEs enable groups of researchers at Austrian research institutions to achieve outstanding cooperative research results (including arts-based research) in one area or interdisciplinarily and to firmly establish this research area in Austria in the long term at a top international level. COEs thus play a central role in shaping and strengthening core research areas at the participating research institutions.

COEs provide young researchers with outstanding research training, career development, and research-based education to create optimal conditions for the next generation of researchers to be competitive on the international level. COEs are committed to equal opportunities and diversity in all its activities. COEs have an impact beyond the realm of science and actively pursue the exchange of knowledge and technology through cooperation with social and/or economic partners. Thus, to achieve the programme's objectives, synergies should be developed between world-class research, research-based education, the promotion of young researchers, (inter-) national networks, and the transfer of knowledge.

¹ For more information on [excellence=austria](https://www.fwf.ac.at/en/research-funding/excellentaustria) see: <https://www.fwf.ac.at/en/research-funding/excellentaustria>

1.2. Objectives of the COE programme

- World-class research
- International competitiveness of Austrian research
- Sustainable funding
- Creation of synergies by enabling achievements that could not be reached by individual research institutes
- Brain gain from Austria and abroad
- Equal opportunities and diversity
- High-quality promotion of young researchers and research-based education
- Promotion of science communication and knowledge transfer
- Support in use of results from basic research in business and society

1.3. Structural elements of a Cluster of Excellence

A COE consists of a lead research institution and at least two but no more than seven Austrian collaborating research institutions. The COE is led by a coordinator who also acts as the Director of Research² and is thus responsible for the entire research programme of the COE. The Director of Research is an outstanding researcher who works at the lead research institution.

The coordination work of the Director of Research is supported by a Board of Directors (BOD), in which each of the collaborating research institutions is represented by at least one person; the lead research institution can appoint, in addition to the Director of Research, other members to the BOD³. The BOD may also include members with non-research-specific expertise upon the approval of the COE. The final composition and distribution of tasks within the BOD do not have to be specified until the pre-proposal.

The research work within the COE is conducted by key researchers whose work is coordinated by the Director of Research and the BOD. The names of the key researchers and the description of their integration into the organisational structure of the COE do not have to be specified until the pre-proposal. The primary criteria for the evaluation of the COE pre- and full proposal are the quality of the research proposal and the research work of the key researchers and the research members of the BOD.

² The term *coordinator* is used on the forms of the FWF. The term *Director of Research* is also used to emphasise the researcher's central role in the cluster.

³ These individuals (coordinator, members of the Board of Directors) must be employed at least 66% of the time or hold a leadership position relevant to the CoE / BOD at the lead or, respectively, collaborating research institution.

Please note that a good gender balance or at least one that reflects the distribution in the particular discipline should be striven for when putting together the BOD and selecting the key researchers.

The COE is comprised of at least the four functionally distinct units described below:

- *Research unit:* This is led by the Director of Research and is the central element of the COE. The COE is comprised of all researchers at the research institutions. The composition and the structure of the research unit can be changed, if need be, during the course of the COE.
- *Training unit:* The scholarly/scientific research in a COE must be combined with the training and promotion of top young researchers. The careers of excellent researchers at all career stages should be advanced through well-structured doctoral education, competitive postdoc programmes, and the active international recruitment, establishment, and integration of R3 researchers.
- *Communication and transfer unit:* Beyond the academic sphere, the cluster should employ suitable forms of science communication and/or work together with social stakeholders to communicate insights and knowledge to the public and/or generate them together with said stakeholders. Where appropriate, the exchange of knowledge and technology through cooperating with business and industry should be encouraged.
- *Management unit:* Professional management structures must be established to ensure that the COE functions optimally not only in terms of research but also with regard to organisation, human resource management, financial management, etc.

Each unit is led by one member of the BOD. (The units do not have to be described in detail until the pre-proposal).

2. Eligible research institutions and requirements for LOI

- All Austrian research institutions are generally eligible to act as lead research institutions and collaborating research institutions.
- Lead research institutions must, however, have experience with carrying out competitively acquired cooperative research grants involving multiple collaborating research institutions (e.g., cooperative programmes of the FWF and internationally comparable programmes).
- Besides the lead research institution, at least two but no more than seven other research institutions may participate as collaborating research institutions in the proposal.
- At least one of the research institutions must have the right to confer doctoral degrees according to the Austrian Universities Act 2002.
- The number of proposals a research institution is eligible to submit in the role of lead research institution is limited and is based on the maximum amount of FWF funding acquired by that institution over the last few years (see the table in [Appendix A](#)).

- However, the number of proposals in which a research institution can appear as a collaborating research institution is unlimited.

A top researcher of the lead research institution acts in their capacity as Director of Research as the coordinator of the COE. For each collaborating research institution, one researcher must be named in the LOI as a member of the BOD. Any additional members of the BOD and the distribution of tasks in the BOD do not have to be stated in the LOI. Starting at the pre-proposal stage, a BOD must consist of a minimum of five and a maximum of eight people, including the Director of Research. Members of the BOD nominated by the research institutions must have an outstanding record of research achievements⁴ according to FWF standards. Exceptions are those members of the BOD appointed for other types of expertise (e.g., management, communication). All members of the BOD may only participate in one COE proposal.

The coordinator (Director of Research) must have proven experience with the competitive acquisition and coordination of internationally visible research projects, ideally as part of inter-institutional collaborations (e.g., SFB, research groups, or equivalent international programmes). These researchers must also possess management and leadership experience in cooperative research and be able to represent the COE to the public. The qualifications of the coordinator are evaluated as part of the pre-proposal by international reviewers.

Double funding is prohibited. If a consortium or a subproject leader already have ongoing cooperative projects (SFB, ZK, FG,DK, doc.funds, or doc.fund.connect) and wish to apply for a COE, special rules apply (see [here](#)). It is not possible to submit a proposal with overlapping content simultaneously to the SFB, FG, and COE programmes.

3. Eligible costs and duration

- The annual budget of a COE must be between €2 and €7 million per year.
- 60% of the total costs can be requested from the FWF.
- This applies to the FWF cost categories of personnel, equipment, materials, and other costs. In addition to the FWF categories, funding can also be requested for large-scale research facilities. More detailed information on eligible costs will be provided in good time before the pre-proposal stage begins.

⁴ The minimum standards to be met regarding researcher's qualifications are described in the Stand-Alone Projects programme. See https://www.fwf.ac.at/fileadmin/files/Dokumente/Antragstellung/Einzelprojekte/p_application-guidelines.pdf

For arts-based research, the requirements for scientific qualification of the application guidelines for the Programme for Arts-based Research (PEEK) apply: https://www.fwf.ac.at/fileadmin/files/Dokumente/Antragstellung/PEEK/ar_application-guidelines.pdf

- The applying lead and collaborating research institutions must contribute 40% of the total costs on their own. How the research institutions divide this contribution among themselves is left up to the COE. See [Appendix B](#) for options on providing the research institution contribution (hereinafter referred to as “RI contribution”).
- The LOI must contain a rough financial project forecast, which includes at least the anticipated total project volume.
- The duration of the COE is five years. A continuation of the project for an additional five years is possible after an interim evaluation.

4. Content and structure of the LOI

A [template](#) is provided for the LOI, which must be written in English. The research area of the COE is described in a project outline. This contains the following sections:

- Description of the research area
- International state of research and previous research achievements of the consortium in this field
- Research objectives
- Planned research approaches
- Added value for the participating institutions and synergies created by the cooperation within the cluster
- Literature cited in the LOI

The LOI template also asks for information on the following:

- List of reviewers to be excluded, if applicable
- International cooperation partners
- Estimated amount of funding required, broken down according to
 - Funding requested from FWF
 - RI contribution of the participating research institutions

5. Electronic forms and submission via [elane](#)

Several forms are required to submit a LOI. These must be completed by the coordinator. The *application form* must only be filled in once, whereas the form *project-specific data* must be filled in several times, one for each member of the BOD already known. At the time of submitting the LOI, at least one BOD member must be named for each collaborating research institution. The *Academic abstract* and the *Contact details* forms must also be filled in.

In addition, the following documents must be uploaded in elane:

- (Free-form) declaration of consent to apply for a COE from the collaborating research institutions (signed by the head of the partner research institution and scanned in)
- Academic CV⁵ of all members of the BOD known at the time of submission
- Publication list of the members of the BOD over the last five years according to FWF standards⁶
- List of all researchers already known (key researchers) (surname, first name, research institution, e-mail address)

6. Deadline

The deadline for submitting the LOI is 16 August 2021, 14:00 (Vienna local time). The time of submission is considered as the time at which the proposal is approved and submitted by the lead research institution via the FWF's application portal [elane](#).

7. Allocation

The FWF does not evaluate the content of LOIs but merely checks whether they are complete and whether they fulfil the requirements regarding the research qualifications of the members of the BOD and the minimum (three) and maximum number (eight) of all participating research institutions. If this is not the case, the decision-making bodies of the FWF will not allow the LOIs to move on to the pre-proposal stage. This decision will be made at the FWF Board meeting in September 2021.

All consortia whose LOIs meet the criteria will be invited to submit COE pre-proposals (publication of guidelines: 1 September 2021; deadline for submitting pre-proposals: 15 December 2021). The pre-proposals are subject to an international review according to the usual quality criteria of the FWF. The FWF Board will create a shortlist on the basis of the reviews if an exceptionally large number of proposals are received. At the end of June 2022, the selected projects will be invited to draft a full proposal, which must be submitted by October 2022. The final funding decision will be made at the end of March 2023 by the FWF Board on the basis of hearings before an international jury

⁵ The requirements to be met regarding the academic CV are described in the Stand-Alone Projects programme. See https://www.fwf.ac.at/fileadmin/files/Dokumente/Antragstellung/Einzelprojekte/p_application-guidelines.pdf

⁶ The requirements to be met regarding publication lists are described in the Stand-Alone Projects programme. See https://www.fwf.ac.at/fileadmin/files/Dokumente/Antragstellung/Einzelprojekte/p_application-guidelines.pdf

Contact

Dr. Tina Olteanu

Programme Management

T: +43 1 505 67 40 - 8310

tina.olteanu@fwf.ac.at

8. Appendix A: Maximum number of COEs as lead research institution

The following table shows the maximum number of LOIs which a research institution can submit to the 2021 call as lead research institution. This number is based on the volume of FWF funding acquired by the institution over the last few years.

Research institutions	Possible number of COE proposals as lead research institution
University of Vienna	6
Vienna University of Technology (TU Wien)	3
Medical University of Vienna (MU Wien)	3
University of Innsbruck	3
Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW), incl. CeMM, GMI and IMBA	3
University of Graz	3
University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU)	2
Medical University of Innsbruck (MU Innsbruck)	2
University of Linz,	2
Graz University of Technology (TU Graz)	2
University of Salzburg	2
Medical University of Graz (MU Graz)	2
University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna (Vetmed)	2
Institute of Science and Technology Austria– ISTA	2
All other Austrian research institutions, each	1

9. Appendix B: Research institutions' own contribution

This appendix describes how the lead research institutions and the collaborating research institutions can provide their own RI contribution of 40% towards the total project volume. How this RI contribution is divided among the research institutions and the components listed below is left up to the COE.

- **Fresh money (at least 50% of RI contribution):** All investments made after approval. These refer, in particular, to personnel, equipment, large-scale research facilities, and related conversion costs.
- **Recent money personnel (max. 40% of RI contribution):** Share of working hours of positions established from 2019 on
- **Recent money infrastructure (max. 30% of RI contribution):** Large-scale research facilities purchased from 2019 on and related conversion costs
- **Teaching load reduction (max. 20% of RI contribution):** Teaching load reduction of key personnel in the COE for carrying out the COE