

Information for Researchers

Calls for Proposals

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Germany's Excellence Strategy: Call for Proposals in the Clusters of Excellence Funding Line

On 16 June 2016, Germany's federal and state governments adopted the "Administrative Agreement between the Federal and State Governments in Accordance with Article 91b Paragraph 1 of the Basic Law on the Funding of Top-Level Research at Universities - Excellence Strategy". The Excellence Strategy is designed to continue the advancement of German universities begun particularly through the Excellence Initiative by supporting research of the highest standard, enhancing research profiles and facilitating cooperation in the research system. The goal is to bolster Germany's position as a research location in the long term, further increase its international competitiveness and continue the successful development of a research culture that supports high performance and quality across the board. The intention is to maintain and build on the new dynamism generated by the Excellence Initiative within the German research system and to provide longer-term prospects for successful Excellence Initiative projects. This strengthening of the universities is also intended to support the enhancement of their research strategies and profiles, which may relate to all performance areas.

The Excellence Strategy consists of two funding lines, Clusters of Excellence and Universities of Excellence. Funding extends to all academic and science-related activities of nationwide relevance that are conducted by universities and their cooperation partners.

The Clusters of Excellence funding line is designed to support project-based funding in internationally competitive research fields at a university or university consortium.

Funding will begin on 1 January 2019.

The Wissenschaftsrat (WR, German Council of Science and Humanities) will publish a call for the Universities of Excellence funding line.

Eligibility requirements

Universities and/or university consortia in Germany, represented by their institutional heads, are eligible to submit proposals.

Proposals for Clusters of Excellence can be submitted by a single university or jointly by two applicant universities. Joint proposals by three universities are permissible in exceptional cases. Applicant universities must participate equally. Joint proposals must reflect the previous visible cooperation between the applicant universities and address the academic and structural productivity resulting from this collaboration. The equal participation will be assessed during the review process. Examples of relevant indicators include research contributions made by the individual institutions, the number of principal investigators participating per university, the intended distribution of the requested funds and the infrastructure contributed to the Cluster of Excellence. The ongoing strategic cooperation between institutions must also be defined in a binding set of regulations. Joint proposals must also state which university will administer the funds in the event of an award.

Additional cooperation partners, such as researchers from other universities, non-university research institutions, the private sector and other areas of society, may also participate.

Proposals for Clusters of Excellence may be in the same research field as projects funded under the Excellence Initiative.

Extent of funding

The federal and state governments plan to provide a total of approximately €385 million per year for the Clusters of Excellence programme line.

Between 45 and 50 Clusters of Excellence can be funded, each receiving €3 million to €10 million annually.

The funding amount for a Cluster of Excellence includes a programme allowance for indirect project costs of 22% of the approved and expended project funds. The requested funds should take account of the differing circumstances in various subject areas and institutions. The appropriateness of the requested funds is considered during the review process.

On the basis of an outline of the university's strategic objectives, to be appended to the proposal, additional funds of €1 million per year can be requested as a university allowance. This is designed to strengthen university governance and the strategic orientation of the institution.

If more than one Cluster of Excellence is approved at a given university, the university allowance for the second Cluster will be €750,000 per year and for each additional Cluster €500,000 per year. If a grant is awarded to a consortium of universities, the partners will share the allowance on a proportional basis. Please note that institutions that are also successful under the Universities of

Excellence funding line may only receive the university allowance until such funding begins (1 November 2019).

Funding criteria

The programme envisages an academically driven, two-stage competitive process. Funding decisions are based on the scientific assessment of the draft proposals and full proposals, which takes into account both outstanding previous work and the development prospects outlined. Proposals should address the institutions' strengths and weaknesses in all relevant performance areas. The following general funding criteria apply:

- Excellence of research
- Track record of participating researchers
- Quality of the university's supporting structures and the environment of the Cluster of Excellence

Funding requests for university allowances will be assessed on the plausibility of the strategic objectives of the institution and evaluated as part of the review process for the Cluster of Excellence.

Detailed funding criteria can be found in DFG form ExStra 110.

Procedure

The proposal process for the Clusters of Excellence funding line consists of two stages (draft proposal, full proposal); the same applies to projects currently funded through the Excellence Initiative.

For the purposes of planning the review of draft proposals, universities and university consortia that intend to submit a proposal in the Clusters of Excellence funding line are requested to submit a (non-binding) letter of intent by **1 December 2016**.

Draft proposals must be received by the DFG Head Office in electronic form by the cut-off date of **3 April 2017** via the DFG's elan portal. They will be reviewed by panels with relevant expertise. The comparative assessment of the review results will form the basis for the decisions made by the Committee of Experts in September 2017 as to which projects will be invited to submit full proposals.

Full proposals for Clusters of Excellence must be received by the DFG Head Office in electronic form by the cut-off date of **19 February 2018** via the elan portal. Proposals will be reviewed by panels with relevant expertise. The review includes a presentation of the proposal by and discussion with the

university leadership and participating researchers. The comparative assessment of the review results will form the basis for the recommendations made by the Committee of Experts to the Excellence Commission, which will make the final funding decision in September 2018. Funding will begin on 1 January 2019. The funding period is seven years. A second funding period of another seven years is possible.

Please note that draft proposals and full proposals can only be processed if they are endorsed by the authority responsible for research in the relevant federal state.

On the basis of the administrative agreement, the DFG will publish a call for Clusters of Excellence every seven years.

Bridge funding for existing projects funded through the Excellence Initiative

Graduate schools, clusters of excellence and institutional strategies funded through the Excellence Initiative on the basis of the Excellence Agreement II may apply for bridge funding for a maximum of 24 months with funding to begin on 1 November 2017, up to an annual amount of the funds approved for the last 12 months of funding. Funding is subject to the provision of funds through the legislative entities and the corresponding allocation of funds to the DFG by the federal and state governments.

Bridge funding for projects which are wholly or partially funded as Clusters of Excellence within the framework of this call will end when this funding begins (1 January 2019).

Proposals for bridge funding for existing grants under the Excellence Initiative must be received by the DFG Head Office by the cut-off date of **1 November 2016**. Please refer to the information on bridge funding (DFG form ExStra 101, available in German only).

Note that bridge funding is provided in lieu of completion funding as envisaged per section 6, paragraph 2 of the Excellence Agreement II. The federal and state governments plan to provide a total of €734 million for bridge funding for 2017 to 2019.

Further information

Please refer to our forms and use these to prepare draft proposals and full proposals. You will find these documents at: www.dfg.de/excellence_strategy

Draft proposals and full proposals must be submitted electronically through the DFG's elan portal.

For more information about the Excellence Strategy, please visit: www.gwk-bonn.de

The call for the Universities of Excellence funding line, published by the German Council of Science and Humanities, is available at: <http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/arbeitsbereiche-arbeitsprogramm/exzellenzstrategie.html>

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