

Guidelines

Research Units

I. Funding Objectives¹

The objective of this programme is to fund medium-sized research groups in which those involved collaborate closely on specific medium-term research projects whose anticipated findings would not be able to be achieved within the scope of the Individual Grants Programme or Priority Programmes.

This allows Research Units to contribute towards:

- providing young scientists with an opportunity to develop their research skills
- strengthening cooperation with non-university partners
- expanding international cooperation
- improving the infrastructure of university-based research

The key objective of this programme is to enable coordinated research, taking into account the structural conditions in different areas of research and varying structural objectives (depending on the specific requirements) within specific disciplines or in different locations. This programme therefore allows a high degree of flexibility in terms of project planning and objectives. Despite the differences in context for different subject areas, Research Units share the following features:

- Research Units are medium-sized research groups set up by the scientists involved.
- Each Research Unit consists of a manageable number of projects and other funding modules that all deal with the same subject and that can only be worked on as a group in the proposed manner.

¹ For more information on funding proposals for Research Units in clinical medicine, please refer to DFG form 1.051 (available in German only).

- Their constitutive feature is cooperation between the individual proposed projects. Research Units are led by outstanding scientists who have established an international reputation and have project experience.
- Research Units bring together the disciplines relevant to research on the topic at hand.
- The topic chosen by a Research Unit must be current and relevant. Its basic concept must be highly innovative and coherent, thus justifying medium-term planning of between six and, in exceptional cases, eight years.
- The same criteria that apply to scientific excellence in the Individual Grants Programme also apply to the individual projects and the Research Unit as a whole.
- Research Units offer ideal conditions for young scientists.

One of the researchers participating in the Research Unit will assume the position of speaker and represent the Research Unit in dealings with the DFG and other bodies. The speaker should be a full-time university teacher.

Particular requirements apply to the Research Unit's speaker with regard to his/her scientific track record, experience in leading projects (including projects financed by third-party funding), and integration and leadership skills. These criteria are generally considered during the review process.

The speaker is responsible for managing the unit's coordination funds. Since one of the Research Unit's main aims is to collaborate on the common research topic, it may become necessary to reallocate individual funding provided for a certain purpose to another within the Research Unit.

II. Types of Funding

Scientists may work together as part of a Research Unit at a single site or in various locations.

Research Units have a modular structure, with each module being selected from a subject-specific viewpoint. There may therefore be some degree of variation between the modules within a Research Unit, depending on the topic chosen, the research areas involved and the desired structure. Modules include:

1. Research projects

Research Units typically have less than ten projects. The projects must be in accordance with the guidelines in the Individual Grants Programme. However, the individual projects are integrated under the umbrella of the Research Unit's common research topic.

2. Fixed-term leave

Researchers participating in a Research Unit can apply to be released from their ordinary duties so that they can dedicate themselves to their research projects for a fixed period of time (replacement costs).

3. Research Unit professorships

A professorship, either financed in advance or co-financed by the DFG, allows new appointments to be made at an earlier stage, or structural improvements, such as the establishment of department structures or new avenues of research, to take place. This is subject to the condition that the university funds the professorship from its own budget once funding for the Research Unit has ended. The professorship is primarily intended to support the Research Unit, which means that the topical orientation of the professorship will be central to the Research Unit and the appointee must concentrate on cooperation within the unit.

4. Promoting young researchers

Research Units provide an ideal environment for young researchers. Young researchers are therefore able to apply for funding to establish an independent junior research group in the Research Unit, following the same guidelines as applicable under the Emmy Noether Programme. If adequately justified, it is also possible to apply for funding for a temporary position as principal investigator within a project in exceptional cases (see DFG form 1.02e for further details).

5. Fellowship programme

The exchange of long-term visiting researchers from other parts of Germany and abroad, who work closely with the Research Unit during their stay, can provide new insights and make an important contribution to building a visible focus on the research topic. To enable this it is also possible to apply for funding for a fellowship programme. Outstanding scientists from other locations may be awarded fellowships for extended periods, for instance a one-year fellowship. They are funded in accordance with the procedure for visiting professors in the DFG's other funding programmes. In general sufficient funding is awarded for each fellow, from which the university also covers the costs incurred.

6. Transfer projects

Transfer projects are projects involving direct cooperation with industrial partners. Their objective is to bring basic research conducted at universities and industrial research closer together. The following conditions apply:

- There must be firm evidence of mutual benefit, rather than a one-way transfer of knowledge.
- Basic research must remain the prime focus of the university project. The normal review criteria therefore apply.
- The industrial partner must submit a funding proposal, which is also reviewed by the review panel.

The industrial partner must bear the costs for its own contribution; the sharing of any profits arising from the research must be established in advance, and the agreement must not put the university at any disadvantage. The project findings must be published as appropriate; it is possible to delay publication subject to prior agreement.

7. Coordination funding and post

The Research Unit's speaker is responsible for the coordination of the unit, including public relations obligations and reporting to the DFG. The speaker is also responsible for managing the Research Unit's general funds (including funds for travel, publications, symposia, visiting researchers, colloquia, and creating and updating websites). The speaker may apply for "coordination funds" to assist with coordination work, to cover a secretarial post or to appoint a scientific coordinator (provided the tasks of the scientific coordinator are adequately defined).

8. Funding for Measures to Promote Equality

As part of the central project (coordination funds), funding of up to €15,000 per year may be applied for to

- increase the number of female researchers at the project management level,
- increase the career qualifications (in addition to scientific qualifications) of young female researchers working in the network
and
- create/maintain a family-friendly workplace in science and/or academia.

A detailed proposal is not required. Funds are earmarked and approved as a lump sum.

Funding can be used to enable young female researchers to participate in mentoring or coaching programmes. It can also be used by all participating researchers to cover child care that extends beyond the regular day care hours. In addition, funds can also be used to relieve female PIs with children of work-related tasks. This also applies to male project leaders who meet the requirements due to their family situation. The Research Unit's management is responsible for examining requests.

In addition, funding can be used to implement all measures that the members of the Research Unit deem suitable to meet the objectives listed above. Members of the Research Unit can be advised by the equal opportunities officer.

9. International projects

It is possible, in principle, to receive funding for projects conducted with scientific partners abroad. This is primarily intended to be for funding exchanges and communication, which are managed by the unit's speaker.

It is currently possible to receive funding for projects for scientists from Austria and Switzerland under special agreements (D-A-CH) ("money follows cooperation line").

Funding may also be requested for research work in other countries where no funding is available. Such research work must be necessary for the entire Research Unit, promise significant added value and satisfy the same high scientific standards as domestic projects.

Most research projects should be based at universities. However, cooperation with non-university research institutions is also welcomed.

For such funding, the costs must be divided in such a way that the core support, especially the premises, establishment and running costs, is covered by the university's own funding sources. For Research Units with a local focus, the value of the unit to the host university or institution should also be reflected in the scope and extent of the core support provided. The project-specific costs may be financed as auxiliary support by the DFG as stipulated in these guidelines and in DFG form 1.02e.

With the initial funding approval, the DFG also issues a declaration of intent to fund the project for a period of six, or in exceptional cases, up to eight years, subject to positive review of the renewal proposal and the interim evaluation of the project.

III. Proposal Process

Funding proposals² are to be submitted jointly by all researchers involved in the Research Unit. They are jointly responsible for the scientific conduct of the project. One of the researchers in the Research Unit assumes the position of speaker and represents the Research Unit in dealings with the DFG and other bodies (see also section I. of these guidelines).

The proposal process is in two stages:

1. In the first stage of the proposal process the researchers involved in the Research Unit submit a draft proposal to the DFG Head Office. This should outline the Research Unit's research programme in accordance with the questions set out in section III.3 below (approximately 10 pages in length) and include a summary (about 1 to 2 pages in length) for each of the proposed individual projects, a biographical sketch of the project leaders (their CV and a list of publications in the last 5 years, specifying publications relevant to the project), and a cost estimate.

The draft proposal, which may be submitted at any time, is sent to reviewers. If the draft proposal is approved, the applicant may submit a full funding proposal for the second stage of the proposal process.

2. The full proposal should particularly describe the proposed research work, relevant preliminary work and the type and nature of the cooperation between the applicants, in accordance with the questions set out in section III.3 below and in a format suitable for peer review. The submissions regarding individual projects and modules comprising the Research Unit should be in accordance with the guidelines on submitting proposals for research grants (DFG form 1.02e). A review panel evaluates the proposal, usually at the site of the proposed unit, and develops a funding recommendation for the appropriate decision-making bodies at the DFG.
3. The following questions apply to the Research Unit as a whole:
 - a) What is the specific relevance and topicality of the joint research project and what are the objectives? Is the collaboration based on an innovative and coherent concept? Can the stated objectives only be achieved through the proposed cooperation? Do you intend to involve all of the relevant disciplines necessary to work on the topic?

² The language in which the funding proposal may be submitted should be agreed with the department responsible prior to submission.

- b) What are the specific areas of qualification of the participating scientists/working groups with regard to the project? What preliminary work has contributed towards this? If applicable, why is a working group from another European country or a commercial or industrial company involved, and how is this of particular importance to the Research Unit as a whole?
- c) What are the expected benefits of working with the participating scientists? How is the collaboration structured, especially in cases where Research Units are situated at more than one location? Are the locations proposed justified and appropriate in terms of establishing a research priority and/or facilitating local collaboration with the university?
- d) In the case of Research Units that are located at multiple locations, how are the opportunities afforded by network communication (such as the internet) used? What other forms of communication are used in addition to this? If appropriate, how will information and communication technology be used within the research work itself, other than for communication between the participants? (Examples may include interactive planning and conduct of experiments, data sharing for division of work or comparative analysis.)
- e) How do you plan to integrate and promote young researchers?
- f) What key results do you expect in the short to medium term? What long-term results are anticipated?

IV. Obligations

In accepting DFG funding, award recipients agree to:

1. Adhere to the rules of good scientific practice³.

In cases of scientific misconduct, the DFG may impose sanctions. Scientific misconduct is defined as the intentional and grossly negligent statement of false facts in a scientific context, the violation of intellectual property or impeding another person's research activities. The circumstances of each case will be considered on an individual basis.

Depending on the nature and extent of the misconduct exposed, the DFG may:

- issue a written reprimand to those involved;
- exclude those found responsible from the right to apply for DFG funds for a period of one to eight years, depending on the severity of the scientific misconduct;
- revoke funding decisions (completely or partially revoke approvals and demand the return of authorised funds or the repayment of funds spent);

³ The rules of good scientific practice are presented in detail in the white paper "Proposals for Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice" and in the Usage Guidelines for Research Grants, DFG form 2.01 and 2.02 (available on the internet at http://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/forms/index/html or under "Proposal Process"). They are based on the recommendations of an international commission on self-regulation in science and on a decision by the DFG's General Assembly, endorsed by the German Rectors' Conference, dated 17 June 1998. According to a decision made by the General Assembly on 4 July 2001, research institutions that have not implemented the rules of good scientific practice or do not abide by them will not be able to apply or receive DFG funding as of 1 July 2002.

- demand that those concerned either retract the publications containing false data, correct the false data (by publishing an erratum) or include a reference regarding the DFG's retraction of funds;
 - exclude those found responsible from acting as a reviewer or from membership on DFG committees;
 - deny those responsible the right to vote in DFG elections.
2. Devote the funds granted exclusively to the expeditious realisation of the research project supported by the grant. Therefore the use and accounting of funds must conform to the relevant regulations of the DFG.
 3. Inform the DFG if results of the funded research become the subject of an application for a patent or other proprietary protection, or if other financial gain results from research work supported by the DFG. Such gain (excess of income over expenditure) must be used for research purposes up to the amount of the DFG grant; however, one-third of the gain up to the amount of the DFG grant is due to the DFG. Inasmuch as the gain cannot be used for research purposes, it shall be used to cover the repayment obligation to the DFG.

This obligation is independent of possible DFG support for the costs of obtaining a patent or trademark registration.

Income from publications (lectures, articles, books, etc.) does not count as financial gain.

The DFG expects that the results of the research projects carried out with its support be made available to the public.

V. Publication of Data on Grant Holders and Research Projects

The data necessary for processing your grant proposal will be stored electronically by the DFG. If a grant is awarded, your work address (e.g. telephone, fax, e-mail, internet website) as well as information on the content of your research project (e.g. topic, summary, keywords, international cooperation) will be published in the DFG's project database GEPRIS (<http://www.dfg.de/gepris>) and – in excerpts (name, institution and location of the applicant) – in the section "Programmes and Projects" of the DFG's electronic annual report (<http://www.dfg.de/jahresbericht>). If you do not wish this information to be published, please notify us in writing no later than four weeks after receipt of your award letter.