

Clusters of Excellence Funding Line

Guidelines

I Programme Objectives

The Clusters of Excellence funding line is designed to support project-based funding in internationally competitive research fields at universities and university consortia. Clusters of Excellence are intended to form an important part of the strategic and thematic planning of the applicant university/universities, hone their profiles and promote prioritisation. They are also intended to create excellent training and career opportunities for early career researchers. Together with the Universities of Excellence, Clusters of Excellence serve to strengthen Germany's position as a research location in the long term and further improve its international competitiveness.

II Funding and Proposals

1 Funding Duration

Clusters of Excellence will be funded for a period of seven years (1 January 2019 to 31 December 2025). A second funding period of another seven years is possible.

2 Funding Scope

Germany's federal and state governments plan to provide a total of approximately €385 million per year for the Clusters of Excellence funding 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 full proposal (see DFG form ExStra 130 "Clusters of Excellence Funding Line: Instructions and Template for Full Proposals"), additional funds can be requested as a university allowance. This is designed to strengthen university governance and the strategic orientation of the institution.

The university allowance for a Cluster of Excellence totals €1 million per year. 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 university allowance on a proportional basis. 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).

3 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 research 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 researchers 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.

A full proposal can only be submitted if it builds on the draft proposal as positively assessed by the Committee of Experts. Only those universities that served as applicant universities in the draft proposal can serve as applicant universities in the invited full proposal stage.

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

4 Participants/Cooperation

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

Where partners from the private sector or other areas of society are involved, the relevant DFG model agreement (DFG form 41.026e or 41.026a_e) should be referred to for the purposes of drawing up an agreement.

www.dfg.de/formulare/41_026e

www.dfg.de/formulare/41_026a_e

5 Type of Funding

Within the framework of a Cluster of Excellence, applicants may request **project funding** for staff, direct project costs and instrumentation. Staff funding is used to fund individuals directly involved in the project. It may also include funding for additional professorships, leaders of independent junior research groups and other staff costs and incidental staff costs. Funding for direct project costs covers expenses directly attributable to the project, including, for example, small equipment, consumables, travel and funds for research events and further training. Instrumentation funding is used for equipment and instruments whose acquisition value exceeds €10,000.

It is important that each Cluster of Excellence establishes a transparent system for the allocation of funds down to the project level. This should be explained in the proposal.

In the event of an award, a **programme allowance for indirect project costs** of 22% of the approved and expended project funds will also be granted to supplement the project funds.

The **university allowance** is intended to cover expenditures that directly serve to strengthen the governance and strategic orientation of the applicant university/universities. The university leadership is responsible for deciding how the university allowance will be used. The details of the use of funds are set out in the funding guidelines for Clusters of Excellence (available in German only).

For universities with more than one Cluster of Excellence, and Clusters of Excellence proposed by more than one applicant university, the allocation of the university allowance is based on the calculation model explained below.

- If a university is involved in more than one Cluster of Excellence for which the university allowance is awarded, then the Clusters of Excellence must be arranged in sequence to allocate the allowance. To calculate the university allowance for an applicant university, the Cluster of Excellence for which the university is the sole applicant or which has the lowest number of additional applicant universities is put in first place. The order is determined correspondingly for the second and third places, etc. Clusters of Excellence with the same ranking are ordered by DFG project reference number (see below, University C with EXC 3 and 4).

Example of possible grouping of universities and Clusters of Excellence, with sequence

	EXC 1	EXC 2	EXC 3	EXC 4	EXC 5
University A	II				I
University B	II				
University C	III		I	II	
University D					

- If two or three universities are jointly proposing a Cluster of Excellence, the allowance must be divided up between them. Each applicant university is awarded the amount resulting from the sequence (€1 million for first place; €0.75 million for second place; €0.5 million for third place), divided by the number of applicant universities for this Cluster of Excellence.

Examples of university allowance funding totals (in € millions per year)

	EXC 1	EXC 2	EXC 3	EXC 4	EXC 5	Total
University A	0.75/3				1.00/1	1.25
University B	0.75/3	1.00/2				0.75
University C	0.50/3		1.00/1	0.75/1		1.92
University D		1.00/2				0.50

If the Clusters of Excellence are arranged by DFG project reference number, the total university allowance for one university is not dependent on this sequence.

III Proposal and Decision-Making Process

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.

Funding decisions are based on the academic 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/universities' supporting structures and the environment of the Cluster of Excellence

The funding criteria for draft proposals and full proposals are set out in DFG form ExStra 110.

www.dfg.de/formulare/exstra110

Decisions on draft proposals and full proposals will be made by the Committee of Experts for the Excellence Strategy and the Excellence Commission. The Committee of Experts consists of 39 members with proven research track records who represent the entire range of academic disciplines. In addition, they have extensive experience in international settings, in university management, in teaching or in the private sector. The Excellence Commission consists of the Committee of Experts and the government ministers responsible for research at the federal and state levels.

The submission deadline for draft proposals was on 3 April 2017. Following evaluation by panels with relevant expertise in summer 2017, the Committee of Experts will convene in September 2017 to conduct a comparative assessment of review results and decide 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 noon on 21 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 principal investigators. 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 requests for a university allowance will be assessed on the plausibility of the university's strategic objectives and evaluated as part of the review of the Cluster of Excellence. The Excellence Commission will make the final decision as to whether a university allowance should be awarded on the basis of the recommendation by the Committee of Experts. The decision will be made at the same time as the decisions on proposals for Clusters of Excellence.

If you have been invited to submit a full proposal, please use DFG form ExStra 130: Clusters of Excellence Funding Line: Instructions and Template for Full Proposals; it can be downloaded from the DFG website at:

www.dfg.de/formulare/exstra130

Proposals must generally be written in English. In justified cases, proposals may additionally be submitted in German by prior arrangement with the DFG's Head Office.

A draft set of bylaws (in German) must be appended to proposals. For information on designing the bylaws for Clusters of Excellence, please refer to DFG form ExStra 140 (available in German only).

www.dfg.de/formulare/exstra140

All proposals must be endorsed by the responsible research authorities at the state level before being submitted to the DFG.

IV Obligations

In submitting a draft or full proposal, applicant universities agree that all participating researchers will adhere to the DFG's rules of good scientific practice. The general principles of good scientific practice include, among others: maintaining professional standards, documenting results, rigorously questioning all findings, and attributing honestly any contributions by partners, competitors and predecessors. The rules of good scientific practice are presented in detail in the white paper [Proposals for Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice](#) and in the Cluster of Excellence funding guidelines (in preparation).

Scientific misconduct is defined as the intentional and grossly negligent statement of falsehoods in a scientific context, the violation of intellectual property rights or impeding another person's research work.

The circumstances of each case will be considered on an individual basis. In cases where scientific misconduct has been established, the DFG may impose one or more of the following sanctions, depending on the nature and severity of the scientific misconduct:

- issuing a written reprimand to those involved;
- exclusion from the right to apply for DFG funds for a period of one to eight years, depending on the severity of the scientific misconduct;
- revoking funding decisions (complete or partial cancellation of the grant, recalling granted funds, demanding repayment of funds spent);
- demanding that those concerned either retract the discredited publications or correct the falsified data (in particular by publishing an erratum), or appropriately indicate the DFG's retraction of funding in the discredited publications;
- exclusion from acting as a reviewer or from membership in DFG committees for a period of one to eight years, depending on the severity of the scientific misconduct;
- denying voting rights and eligibility in elections for DFG statutory bodies and committees for a period of one to eight years, depending on the severity of the scientific misconduct.

By accepting funding, recipients agree to

- use the grant exclusively and in a targeted manner to realise the funded project. The use and accounting of funds must conform to the relevant regulations of the DFG.
- submit progress reports on the research according to the dates specified in the award letter and to present financial accounts to the DFG detailing the use of funds.

The DFG expects that the findings of the Clusters of Excellence be made available to the public.

Further Information

www.dfg.de/excellence_strategy

www.wissenschaftsrat.de/arbeitsbereiche-arbeitsprogramm/exzellenzstrategie.html

www.gwk-bonn.de