Researchers in the early stages of their careers are encouraged to submit independent proposals to the DFG. The information given here contains useful advice about submitting proposals within the research grant programme.

Description

General sources of information .............................................................................................. 1
The programme – Standard research grants ......................................................................... 2
The process .......................................................................................................................... 2
Submitting a proposal ............................................................................................................ 3
The review process ............................................................................................................... 4
The successful proposal ........................................................................................................ 5
What if my proposal is rejected? ............................................................................................ 6
Submitting a proposal: the 10 golden rules ............................................................................ 6

General sources of information

You can find the answers to basic questions about the submission process on the forms and guidelines for research grants (www.dfg.de/research_grants) and at www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/proposal_review_decision/applicants/submitting_proposal.

You will find answers to frequently asked questions on DFG funding programmes and the submission of proposals at (www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/faq/index).

Information about funding for early career researchers can be found at www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/research_careers/index.

There are also people at your own institution who can help you with the submission process:
- DFG Liaison Officers (www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/principles_dfg_funding/liasion_officers)
- Research funding department at your institution
- Colleagues with previous experience of DFG funding programmes

If you have any further questions, you can of course contact the relevant people at the DFG's Head Office:
- Please direct subject-specific questions to the relevant specialist department (www.dfg.de/en/dfg_profile/head_office/structure/index.jsp?id=02#content)
• Please direct administrative questions, e.g. relating to eligibility requirements, to the responsible persons in the Quality Assurance and Programme Development department (www.dfg.de/en/dfg_profile/head_office/structure/index.jsp?id=052#content)

If you are unsure whether you meet the criteria to apply for a research fellowship, a temporary position as principal investigator, or an independent junior research group in the Emmy Noether Programme, please send your CV with a brief explanation of your intentions to: info-verfahren@dfg.de.

The programme – Standard research grants

Standard research grants are the most flexible funding instrument offered by the DFG. This programme allows you to apply for all the funding needed for a specific research project. These funds can be used for staff, consumables, travel expenses and other costs. The advice below supplements the information available at www.dfg.de/research_grants and provides practical tips on submitting a proposal as well as explaining how the review board will appraise your proposal.

Individuals in any discipline who have completed their academic training (usually by completing a doctoral or PhD programme) and are working at a German research institution are eligible to apply for a research grant.

If you do not yet have a position at a research institution, you can apply for funding for a temporary position as principal investigator (guideline 52.02, available at www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/forms_guidelines).

A brief guide to the research grant programme and a list of available forms and guidelines is available at www.dfg.de/research_grants.

Proposals are usually submitted on "elan", the DFG's portal for applicants, reviewers and committee members. For more information, see www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/principles_dfg_funding/elan and the portal at https://elan.dfg.de/en.

The process

Early career researchers are expressly encouraged to submit their own project proposals. However, like any other applicant, they must submit a proposal that convinces the reviewers that the project is deserving of financial support and that they are capable of seeing the project through to a successful conclusion.

The applicant's level of experience is taken into consideration during the review process. An individual with an excellent project who has only just completed a doctorate, has taken a career break for family reasons, or has spent time working in industry has the same chances as experienced researchers, who are expected to have more preliminary work and publications.
In your proposal you must clearly outline your personal potential for carrying out the intended project. Your academic career to date and previous research achievements should be described. You should usually have published papers in your previous area of work, if this is the norm in your field. Preliminary work and previous publications do not necessarily have to be directly relevant to your project.

**Submitting a proposal**

**Writing the proposal**

Before you begin writing your proposal, take the time to plan carefully and answer the following questions.

- What scholarly aims do I want to achieve?
- Why is this project important to my area of work?
- Is the intended work concept suitable for answering the questions posed?

Gather information and form an up-to-date picture of your research field. The people you encounter at this stage of the preparation could be the reviewers who will evaluate your proposal.

Familiarise yourself with the DFG's recommendations on compliance with good scientific practice ([www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/principles_dfg_funding/good_scientific_practice](http://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/principles_dfg_funding/good_scientific_practice)).

Read the relevant guidelines carefully and familiarise yourself with the modular structure of DFG programmes ([www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/principles_dfg_funding/programmes_modules/index](http://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/principles_dfg_funding/programmes_modules/index)). The guidelines for research grants contain all the information and criteria you need to know to submit a successful proposal.

If you have any preliminary work or publications currently in progress, first focus your energies on completing them. Your proposal will be much stronger as a result.

Appraise your proposal critically, with the eyes of a reviewer. For useful information, consult guideline 10.20 (available at [www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/forms_guidelines](http://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/forms_guidelines)).

**Support from others**

You can discuss your proposal with experienced colleagues or DFG liaison officers at your university. These people can often provide valuable advice. Ask if you can consult successful past proposals. This will allow you to see examples of best practice in your discipline. Ask your collaboration partners and experienced colleagues to critically review your draft proposal.

If you need collaboration partners, discuss the project with them in detail and well in advance. Obtain written commitments from your partners and submit these along with your proposal if the success of the project is dependent on the collaborative element.
Make sure that the necessary basic facilities (e.g. office or laboratory space, computer capacity, libraries, access to sources) are available at your institution. This also applies if you are applying for a temporary position as principal investigator.

Planning ahead
Allow sufficient time to prepare and write your proposal and for the review process. It takes an average of four to six months for the DFG to process a proposal. (You can view average processing times at www.dfg.de/en/dfg_profile/evaluation_statistics/statistics/average_processing_times.)

Documents
As an applicant, you are expected to have demonstrated an ability to work independently in previous work. In addition to the successful completion of your doctoral project, this means having written recognised scholarly contributions in your discipline. These may be:

- Peer-reviewed publications in respected journals (particularly as first author)
- Monographs
- Articles in edited volumes
- Conference transcripts
- Conference papers
- Patents

Ideally your project idea should be based on your own published preliminary work, which demonstrates the feasibility and relevance of the project.

Don’t forget to include fellowships, scientific prizes and awards in your CV. These are important evidence of your personal abilities.

Periods of parental leave, illness or employment in the non-university field which have had an impact on your prior academic output should be mentioned and clearly explained. This will not diminish your chances of success but allow the reviewers to take these circumstances into account.

The review process
The awarding of DFG funding is subject to strict standards. The key criterion in the DFG’s multi-stage review system is academic excellence. You can find detailed information about the review process here www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/principles_dfg_funding/quo_vadis_proposal and further information is available here www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/proposal_review_decision/applicants/submitting_proposal.
The key questions that reviewers consider when evaluating a project are:

- Is this project important?
- Is the project idea topical and original?
- Will the project produce significant results or publications? What new knowledge will be generated - what gaps in current knowledge do you intend to fill?
- Is the applicant or team suitably qualified to carry out the project successfully?
- Are the proposed methods up to date and suitable for the research question?
- Can the work programme be completed within the proposed time-scale?

Your proposal should provide good answers to these questions.

The successful proposal

When writing your proposal you must refer to the guidelines for research grants (www.dfg.de/research_grants), which explain the programme and its modules and the rules relating to eligibility. You must also consult the Proposal Preparation Instructions (guideline 54.01, available at www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/forms_guidelines), which explain the submission process step by step. It is essential to take note of these instructions and guidelines. The notes below supplement and explain the information in guideline 54.01.

For the text of a proposal:

- Write clearly, concisely and precisely in a way that a non-specialist can understand. Not everyone who will read your proposal is as familiar with the subject matter as you are. This is because the DFG's decision-making process includes researchers from different disciplines.
- Explain the importance, added value and novelty of your project.
- Clear diagrams can help to explain complex facts or situations.
- In accordance with the rules of good scientific practice (www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/principles_dfg_funding/good_scientific_practice), you must clearly state which of the findings and preliminary works were produced by you and which by your collaboration partners or other researchers. Bibliographic references should be provided. The same applies to allocated shares of the proposed project.
- The work programme should be explained clearly and transparently and with a logical structure. Clearly state the central working hypotheses, theories, assumptions or key questions.
- A careful discussion of potential risks and alternative strategies will convince the reviewers that you have a sound and considered basis on which to proceed should any unexpected developments arise.

Bibliography

To compile a bibliography for your proposal, please follow the rules in the Proposal Preparation Instructions (54.01).
Planned allocation of funding

- The DFG will only cover costs that are directly associated with the project and justified on the basis of the proposed work programme. The DFG cannot fund anything that constitutes core support. An appropriate balance should therefore be struck. An obviously padded request for funds is counterproductive. We therefore strongly recommend that you realistically assess the resources required and provide a careful justification for all cost items.
- There are generally no upper limits or fixed rates for individual cost items. However, it can be useful to consult with colleagues to find out about typical amounts and conventions in your discipline.
- Information on staff funding is available at www.dfg.de/foerderung/grundlagen_rahmenbedingungen/rechtliche_aspekte/verguetung (only available in German).
- Applicants, particularly those at early career stages, are expected to devote all their working hours to the proposed project. The staff funding will therefore be critically evaluated to see whether the work is appropriately shared between you and the other people involved in the project.

What if my proposal is rejected?

Don’t be discouraged by a rejection. Anyone involved in a competitive process knows that not everyone can win, and that further preparation and a fresh attempt may lead to success.

You will be sent an anonymised copy of the individual reviewers’ appraisals and the review board’s evaluation. Take the reviewers’ comments seriously, but not personally. If the reviewers do not fundamentally question the project itself, then a second, revised proposal may be successful. Make use of the feedback you receive from the review process. In addition to explaining why your proposal was unsuccessful, the reviewers’ comments usually also contain specific and constructive advice as to how you could improve the project or the proposal. Discuss with your colleagues whether a resubmission would be advisable. The staff at Head Office can also provide advice on this.

If you decide to resubmit a proposal, in your covering letter you should acknowledge and respond to the critical feedback from the reviewers. It is important to avoid giving the impression of being aggrieved or accusatory. If you feel that you have been treated unfairly, you can ask Head Office to exclude particular reviewers from the review process. In justified cases, Head Office will endeavour to comply with such requests.

Submitting a proposal: the 10 golden rules

1. The proposal follows the guidelines and instructions and does not exceed the recommended maximum length of 20 pages.
2. The proposal is clearly structured, precisely formulated and easily understandable.
3. The project idea is original and makes an important contribution to the understanding of scientific (and if applicable societal) problems.

4. The academic objective of the project is focused on central questions / theses / assumptions.

5. The proposal describes the current state of the art and directly links this to the project objective.

6. The qualifications and academic independence of the applicant are demonstrated by preliminary work and a personal profile and leave no doubt that the project can be successfully carried out.

7. The work programme is coherently defined and follows a realistic timetable.

8. The proposed methods are suitable for the research questions.

9. The planned allocation of funding is consistent with the work programme.

10. Information of relevance to the proposal (e.g. unpublished manuscripts, written commitments from key collaboration partners) is included with the proposal.