

Draft Proposal Preparation Instructions

for Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups



Disclaimer: The English translation of this document is provided for informational purposes. In the event of a discrepancy between the English and the German versions, the German text takes precedence.

I General Information

The proposal procedure for Research Training Groups (RTGs) and International Research Training Groups (IRTGs) consists of two stages. In the first stage, the participating researchers write a draft proposal, which is then submitted to the DFG by the university, an equivalent higher education institution or a university of applied sciences (Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften (HAW) or Fachhochschule (FH)) that is able to guide doctoral researchers independently or in cooperation with a graduate institution towards obtaining a doctorate in the subject areas relevant for the Research Training Group (hereafter referred to as “university”). This draft proposal is then reviewed. The review criteria can be found in the “Guidelines for Reviewing Draft Proposals to Establish Research Training Groups or International Research Training Groups” (DFG form 1.304).

www.dfg.de/formulare/1_304

Based on the draft proposal, the review, and a recommendation by the relevant review board, the Senate Committee on Research Training Groups makes a recommendation as to whether an establishment proposal should be submitted in the second stage. If the recommendation is negative, the applicant may submit a revised version of the draft proposal once.¹ For guidance on the submission of an establishment proposal, please refer to the “Proposal Preparation Instructions – Proposals to Establish Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups” (DFG form 54.05).

www.dfg.de/formulare/54_05

For further information, please refer to the “Guidelines on Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups” (DFG form 50.07).

www.dfg.de/formulare/50_07

If you will be applying for the International Research Training Group programme variation, please note particularly the “Guidelines for Differentiating International Research Training Groups from Research Training Groups” (DFG form 1.312).

www.dfg.de/formulare/1_312

¹ The revised draft proposal should address the comments and suggestions made in the review of the previous draft proposal. If necessary, these points can additionally be addressed in a cover letter of no more than two pages to the DFG Head Office.

Proposing an International Research Training Group requires intensive preparation and close coordination among all participants. It is therefore recommended to inform the DFG Head Office as early as possible about planned proposals. If you require consultation, please contact the relevant DFG Head Office staff member.

II Proposals

Draft proposals under the Research Training Groups Programme must be submitted via the elan portal of the DFG. You can access the system at

elan.dfg.de

The draft proposal consists of the following three parts:

A – Proposal Data and Obligations (via the electronic proposal form)

B – Project Description (according to DFG form 53.60)

www.dfg.de/formulare/53_60_elan

C – Attachments (academic CVs and any additional documents)

As soon as the data and the uploaded documents are sent electronically to the DFG, you will receive an acknowledgment of receipt by e-mail with a compliance form attached to it. This document must be signed by the spokesperson and the head(s) of the university/universities, indicating their consent to the submission of the draft proposal, and sent to the DFG (in the case of **IRTGs**, only from the German side).

A Proposal Data and Obligations

An electronic proposal form is available via the DFG elan portal at

elan.dfg.de

for you to provide the following information:

- Title of the Research Training Group in German and English (max. 300 characters each)
- Research area, keywords, topical connections to other countries
- Summary of the main intentions of the Research Training Group, i.e. especially of the research and qualification programmes, in German and English (max. 3,000 characters)
- Applicant university/universities; any other participating institutions
(for IRTGs, information on the foreign partner institution)
- Designated spokesperson; participating researchers (academic title, first name, last name and location) (for IRTGs, include same information for foreign partner institution)
- Obligations and declarations

B Project Description

For the description of your project, use the appropriate template in English or German, which is available on the elan portal and on the website of the DFG.

www.dfg.de/formulare/53_60_elan

The length of the document (exclusive of section 5 “Publications and bibliography for the research programme”) must not exceed 15 pages (20 pages for IRTGs) (A4 format, Arial 11pt font or similar, single-spaced).

If, in preparing your draft proposal, you used artificial intelligence (AI) in the form of generative models for text and image creation, please disclose this fact in a scientifically appropriate manner. For more information, see the “[Research Integrity](#)” portal.

In the case of adverse effects on research projects and biographies due to the coronavirus pandemic, relevant statements can be included at a suitable point in the description of the project and in the CVs. Please underpin your description with concrete details on the duration and extent of the adverse circumstances.

The project description should include the following information:

1 General Information

Delete unnecessary rows or add additional rows to the table if needed.

1.1 Applicant university/universities, other participating institutions

Indicate the applicant university that will administer the funds in the event of a grant. Name additional applicant universities, if applicable, as well as any other participating institutions.

	Name of university
Applicant university with financial responsibility	[max. 1]
Additional applicant universities, if applicable	
Other participating institutions, if applicable	

For **International Research Training Groups**, specify the foreign partner institution(s) as well.

If the applicant university or a co-applicant university is a university of applied sciences (Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften (HAW) or Fachhochschule (FH)), evidence of the right to award doctorates or the agreement of the participating graduate institution has to be attached to the proposal.

1.2 Designated spokesperson

The designated spokesperson is responsible for the proposal and the scientific coordination of the Research Training Group. The spokesperson must hold a permanent, full-time professorship at the university that will manage the funds, appointed in accordance with the applicable employment law, and represent the concerns of the Research Training Group in all committees of the department as well as the applicant university at large.

Last name, first name, academic title	Research area
[max. 1]	

For **International Research Training Groups**, specify the spokesperson at the foreign partner institution as well.

1.3 Participating researchers

Name the – usually five to ten – professors who will run the Research Training Group, including their research areas. Please give appropriate consideration to diversity when composing the members of this group. In this context, please indicate the number of female researchers as well as the corresponding percentage.² Written explanations on diversity characteristics of individuals are expressly not desired within a proposal. Additional information can be found under

www.dfg.de/diversity/en

Last name, first name, academic title	Research area
[usually 5 - 10]	

If more than ten researchers are involved, please provide a justification.

² If male researchers are underrepresented at the management level in the relevant research area(s) compared to female researchers, please state the percentage of male researchers involved.

The DFG strongly recommends involving researchers in early career phases and giving them responsible positions within the RTG. These include advanced postdoctoral researchers, junior research group leaders or junior professors, for example, who may have gained initial experience in supervision. The applicant university is expected to grant such researchers the right to supervise and examine doctoral researchers.

The involvement of individuals whose participation is not ensured for the entire funding duration, e.g. due to a fixed-term contract or retirement, is possible. In such cases, please comment briefly on how the ongoing supervision of group members will be ensured after the individuals in question leave.

The participating researchers are considered “individuals with a high level of scientific/academic responsibility” as stated in the DFG’s Rules of Procedure for Dealing with Scientific Misconduct³. They must take note of these Rules of Procedure and acknowledge them as legally binding (see Declaration of Obligation of Compliance – DFG form 80.02).

www.dfg.de/formulare/80_02

For **International Research Training Groups**, include the same information for the foreign partner institution in a second table.

1.4 Number of doctoral researchers, doctoral researchers in medicine and postdoctoral researchers

Within the nine-year period of a Research Training Group, generally up to 30 doctoral researchers can be funded by the RTG, each for a period of 36 to 48 months. If more positions are envisaged, this must be justified in concrete terms; the level of justification required increases proportionally to the degree of deviation from the guideline figure. Several “generations” (cohorts) of doctoral researchers can be funded consecutively or at various intervals. The Grants Committee on Research Training Groups suspended the funding option for postdoctoral researchers until further notice by resolution dated 15 November 2024.

Please complete the table to provide details of the individuals who are to receive funding in connection with the Research Training Group as doctoral researchers and doctoral researchers in medicine. Please indicate in each case the individual funding period per person

³ [DFG Rules of Procedure for Dealing with Scientific Misconduct, DFG form 80.01](#)

(in months) and the number of persons whose funding starts in the first or second funding period.

DFG-funded Research Training Group members			
	Financing duration per person (in months)	Persons whose funding starts in the first funding period	Persons whose funding starts in the second funding period
Doctoral researchers			
Doctoral researchers in medicine			

Several “generations” (cohorts) of doctoral researchers can be funded consecutively or at various intervals during the RTG’s maximum 9-year duration. Please state the number of DFG-funded doctoral researchers per cohort (Σ) and present the planned cohort structure in the form of a bar chart. You may use the following template and add more lines if required.

	Σ	First funding period										Second funding period							
		Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4		Year 5		Year 6		Year 7		Year 8		Year 9	
Cohort 1																			
Cohort 2																			
...																			
...																			

Information on the various funding modalities can be found in the “Guidelines on Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups” (DFG form 50.07), the “Proposal Preparation Instructions for Proposals to Establish Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups” (DFG form 54.05) and the funding guidelines for Research Training Groups (DFG form 2.22, available in German only).

www.dfg.de/en/research-funding/proposal-funding-process/forms-guidelines

If doctoral and postdoctoral researchers with funding from other sources are to be involved in the RTG, please specify their anticipated number.

For **International Research Training Groups**, include the same information for the foreign partner institution as well.

2 Research programme

- Description of the core research idea or main topic
- Outline of the research programme. Please note that research programmes are expected to yield excellent topics for theses (potential topics for theses or projects should be exemplified, but not described in detail).
- Innovativeness of the research programme with respect to the current state of relevant international research and feasibility/plausibility of the innovative approaches.
- For International Research Training Groups: Description of the value added by international collaboration

In section 2 you may refer to an unlimited number of your own works and those of others that are publicly available. Please list the publications you cite here in section 5, “Publications and bibliography for the research programme”.

Clearly indicate throughout the draft proposal whenever you are referring to the work of other researchers (even if you collaborated in the work yourself as a co-author). The absence of any such indication may constitute a breach of good research practice, and in individual cases may constitute scientific misconduct according to the Rules of Procedure for Dealing with Scientific Misconduct (VerfOwF).

3 Qualification programme and supervision strategy

- Outline of the qualification programme based on the research programme
- Short description of the supervision strategy

4 Environment

- Description of why the proposed location is suitable for the topic of this Research Training Group
- Statement by the applicant university on how the Research Training Group fits into the university’s environment and what structural innovations are anticipated. Also note the “Guidelines on the Positioning of Research Training Groups in the Context of Other Doctoral Programmes” (DFG form 1.309).

www.dfg.de/formulare/1_309

- Under the Collaborative Research Centre programme, a module for structured doctoral training may be applied for. Collaborative Research Centres and Research

Training Groups that are based at the same location and have largely overlapping topics should not receive parallel funding. The goal is to increase efficiency by bundling funding for closely related research projects. A thematic overlap is acceptable if the Research Training Group's topic and/or structure are sufficiently unique. For instance, the establishment of an International Research Training Group may be considered to deliver added value. If your Research Training Group relates closely to a Collaborative Research Centre, please explain what constitutes its added value.

- If the draft proposal is linked to an existing Research Training Group or one that has ended, please explain what experiences have been applied to the new proposal, what new research objectives have been included in the research programme, and what changes have been made to the research team.

5 Publications and Bibliography for the Research Programme

This list should only contain those works that you cited in section 2. You can refer to your own works and those of others; there is no limit to the total number of publications listed. Works which are not in the public domain are not considered publications and cannot be cited. An exception is made for papers that have already been accepted for publication, in which case the manuscript and the editor's confirmation of acceptance must be enclosed.

A **maximum of ten** publications by each participating researcher that are most relevant to the research programme can be **highlighted** in bold or some other way. The name of the participating researcher whose work is highlighted should be clearly identifiable.

If available, please also provide a persistent identifier (e.g. DOI/Digital Object Identifier), preferably by stating the number, otherwise by naming the URL.

Note that reviewers are not required to read any of the works you cite. Reviews are only based on the text of the actual proposal.

C Attachments

1 Academic CVs

Academic CVs for all participating researchers (including participating foreign partners in **International Research Training** Groups) with a list of the most important scientific results are a required attachment to the draft proposal. The template provided (DFG form 53.200) must be used for this purpose.

www.dfg.de/formulare/53_200_elan

Please sort the academic CVs alphabetically according to the surnames of the participating researchers. In the case of **IRTGs**, the academic CVs of the German participants should be attached first, followed by those of participants on the partner side.

To enable reviewers to assess an applicant's scientific track record appropriately, applicants may indicate in their CVs any circumstances that might have hampered their scientific work, for example, periods in which they were unable to work continuously due to childcare obligations or due to prolonged serious illness or disability.

Furthermore, please provide information on the **supervision of researchers in early career phases in the last five years**. In particular, list the doctoral researchers who are supervised, indicating the subject of dissertation, time to degree (for completed doctoral degrees „from... to..." and for doctorates in progress „since..." and, where possible, information regarding the further career development of doctoral graduates. If delays as a result of birth and childcare have been specified, the five-year period is extended by two years for each child.

Each academic curriculum vitae must include the list of the **most important publications or published results** of the researcher in question. The information can relate to the person's entire academic career; the publications need not be directly related to the proposed Research Training Group. The list is to be divided into two parts and each part is to be numbered:

(A) The first **mandatory** "Category (A) – Articles in peer-reviewed journals, contributions to peer-reviewed conferences or to anthology volumes, and book publications" may contain a maximum of ten publications.

(B) The number of publications listed in the second **optional** “Category B – Any other form of published results” is likewise limited to a maximum of ten items. This may include contributions to non-peer-reviewed conferences, articles on preprint servers, data sets, protocols of clinical trials, software packages, patents applied for and granted, blog contributions, infrastructures or transfer. You may also indicate other forms of academic output here, such as contributions to the (technical) infrastructure of an academic community (including in an international context) and contributions to science communication.

Please note that the maximum total of ten items per person that may be listed under (A) and (B), respectively, must be observed.

If available, please also provide a persistent identifier (e.g. DOI/Digital Object Identifier), preferably by stating the number, otherwise by naming the URL.

Works which are not in the public domain are not considered publications and cannot be cited. An exception is made for papers that have already been accepted for publication, in which case the manuscript and the editor’s confirmation of acceptance must be enclosed.

2 Additional Attachments

Where applicable, works contained in the list of publications that have been officially accepted for publication but not yet published, including acknowledgement of acceptance, should be attached. It is also possible to attach a cover letter addressed to the DFG Head Office. If the applicant university or a co-applicant university is a university of applied sciences (Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften (HAW) or Fachhochschule (FH)), evidence of the right to award doctorates or the agreement of the participating graduate institution has to be attached to the proposal. Other appendices beyond this must not be included.

III Supplementary Proposal Instructions

A. Obligations

In submitting a proposal to the DFG, the applicant university/universities and the participating researchers

1. agree to adhere to **the principles of good research practice**⁴.
The principles of good research practice include, among others: maintaining professional standards, maintaining strict honesty with regard to one's own contributions and those of third parties, documenting results and rigorously questioning all findings.
2. recognise the DFG's **Rules of Procedure for Dealing with Scientific Misconduct** (Verfahrensordnung zum Umgang mit wissenschaftlichem Fehlverhalten - VerFOwF)⁵ as legally binding.

In the draft proposal stage, the spokesperson obtains signed Declarations of Obligation of Compliance from the participating researchers and keeps these on file for ten years following submission of the draft proposal to the DFG.

www.dfg.de/formulare/80_02

Should allegations of scientific misconduct arise, upon request the spokesperson will forward the relevant declaration to the DFG Head Office.

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 in accordance with its Rules of Procedure, depending on the nature and severity of the scientific misconduct:

⁴ The principles of good research practice are presented in detail in the DFG Code of Conduct [Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice](#).

⁵ [Rules of Procedure for Dealing with Scientific Misconduct \(VerFOwF\)](#), DFG form 80.01.

- 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 (full or partial termination of the grant contract, 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 serving as a DFG reviewer for a period of one to eight years, depending on the severity of the scientific misconduct;
- exclusion from membership in DFG bodies and 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 bodies and committees for a period of one to eight years, depending on the severity of the scientific misconduct.

B. Data Protection

Please note the DFG's Data Protection Notice on research funding, which can be viewed and downloaded at www.dfg.de/privacy_policy. If necessary, please also forward this information to those individuals whose data will be processed by the DFG due to their involvement in your project.

www.dfg.de/privacy_policy

C. Uploading Proposal Documents

Before submitting your proposal, you will be prompted to upload the required documents. You can only upload PDF files as attachments (which should have no access restrictions regarding reading, copying or printing). Please name the PDF documents according to the following naming protocol in order to facilitate the processing of your proposal.

Document	Document name
project description (Beschreibung des Vorhabens) (part B of the proposal)	Beschreibung_des_Vorhabens
academic CVs (Wissenschaftliche Lebensläufe) (part C of the proposal)	CV_PubList
scientific papers (Wissenschaftliche Arbeiten)	<year>_<author's_last_name>_<keyword>
additional attachments (Weitere Anlagen)	<descriptive_file_name>

Files larger than 10 MB cannot be submitted. If a larger file size is unavoidable, you may supply the file subsequently on a suitable medium. In this case, submit an explanatory note instead of the missing document.