

Guidelines

Collaborative Research Centres



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.

Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

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I Programme Information

1 Objective

Collaborative Research Centres (CRCs, Sonderforschungsbereiche) are joint interdisciplinary research centres based at universities and other doctorate-granting higher education institutions (hereinafter: universities). They promote research cooperation within the framework of interdisciplinary research programmes. Collaborative Research Centres enable researchers to pursue ambitious, elaborate and long-term projects by focusing and coordinating the resources of universities. Proposals under the Collaborative Research Centres Programme must therefore meet high scientific standards.

Promotion of equity and diversity in research and support for researchers in early career phases are integral to the mission of a Collaborative Research Centre. The latter includes early scientific independence as well as reliable working conditions for achieving individual qualification goals.

A characteristic feature of Collaborative Research Centres is cooperation across subject areas, institutes, departments and faculties. In support of prioritisation at a university, research programmes may also involve contributions from other universities and non-university research institutions as well as collaboration with application partners. Collaborative Research Centres maintain scientific relationships with universities and other research institutions in Germany and abroad.

The sustainable handling of research data is becoming increasingly important in science and the humanities. This involves establishing a concept for handling research data within the network (more details are available at [„Handling of Research Data“](#)).

A variant of the traditional Collaborative Research Centre, based at one university, is the CRC/Transregio, which is proposed and supported jointly by two or three universities and promotes prioritisation at each one of them. All applicant universities are expected to make approximately equal contributions, qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Proposals for both programme variations, i.e. traditional Collaborative Research Centres and CRC/Transregios, compete with each other for funding.

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in the Collaborative Research Centres division and the Excellence Strategy and Research Impulses division.

2 Proposals

2.1 Eligibility requirements

Eligible applicants are universities and other doctorate-granting higher education institutions (hereinafter: universities).

Traditional Collaborative Research Centres are proposed by a university (coordinating university), where at least 60% of the projects must be based. In addition, projects and project leaders from other universities and non-university institutions may be integrated into the network. Their scientific fit and contribution to the Collaborative Research Centre as a whole will be subject to review, as will the proposed measures for integration into the cooperative structure of the Collaborative Research Centre. The non-university share may not exceed 30% of the projects.

CRC/Transregios are proposed jointly by two or three universities with approximately equal representation in the network. One of these universities acts as coordinating university and manages the grant money. Furthermore, CRC/Transregios can also integrate projects by project leaders from other universities and non-university institutions. However, the majority of projects must be based at the applicant universities in order to promote the desired prioritisation. Hence, the share of external projects may not exceed one-third in the case of two applicant universities, or one-quarter in the case of three. The non-university portion of projects, as a share of the entire network, may not exceed 30% (or 25% in case of three applicant universities).

Each institution's share of projects is determined on the basis of the proposal. All projects except for the Central Administrative Project are counted. A project jointly led by members of different institutions will be allocated to the respective institution on proportionate basis, based on the number of project leaders belonging to the respective institution. For projects whose head has a contractually secured position both at the applicant university and at another institution, the institution at which the project is to be carried out is decisive.

Universities intending to submit a proposal must choose between the traditional funding scheme, which focuses on strengthening the profile of one university, and the

CRC/Transregio funding scheme with its dual aim of strengthening the profile of several applicant universities and fostering a transregional network.

If a Collaborative Research Centre plans to integrate projects from other universities or non-university institutions, a strategy for collaboration must be developed, which will also be subject to review. For CRC/Transregios involving a location outside of Germany, see [III.1](#))

2.2 Duration

A Collaborative Research Centre may be funded for up to twelve years. In intervals of usually four years, the DFG will conduct an on-site review of the Collaborative Research Centre's research programme and financial planning, including an assessment of the research performed to date and the structural effects achieved.

2.3 Participants

A Collaborative Research Centre consists of projects (see also [1.2.4](#) and [III.1](#)), whose project leaders are members of the Collaborative Research Centre. The bylaws of the Collaborative Research Centre specify any other members as well as the rights and obligations of members. Only doctorate-holding researchers at universities or other research institutions who hold a position that lasts for at least the proposed duration of the project may generally head projects. Staff funding for project leaders is not available as part of a Collaborative Research Centre grant. Project leaders who have obtained their doctorates (the year of the oral exam) no later than eight years prior to the start of their proposed grant period are considered researchers in early career phases. If maternity leave and parental leave were taken during this time, this period can be extended by two years per child up to a maximum of 12 years.

One member of the Collaborative Research Centre acts as its spokesperson and assumes the tasks specified in the bylaws. He or she must hold a permanent professorship at the applicant university, appointed in accordance with the applicable employment law, and have unrestricted membership rights at the applicant university. Special requirements apply to the spokesperson regarding his or her credentials as a researcher, experience in leading projects as well as integration and leadership skills. Members of non-university research institutions can participate in the Collaborative Research Centre as project leaders, as members of the management board and/or in the position of deputy spokesperson.

Since Collaborative Research Centres offer an attractive research environment for junior research groups, such groups may be associated with the Collaborative Research Centre. Beyond being associated, Emmy Noether, Heisenberg or ERC fellows may furthermore be integrated to head their own projects.

2.4 Projects and project types

A Collaborative Research Centre is divided into projects. At its core are research projects, which may be grouped into project areas. The number and scope of the research projects depend on the needs of the respective Collaborative Research Centre. In addition to research projects, various other types of projects may be included in the proposal (see section [III.1](#)). Further information can be found in the German versions of proposal templates 60.100 and 60.200.

www.dfg.de/formulare/60_100

www.dfg.de/formulare/60_200

The review criteria for the various project types are set out in DFG form 60.14.

www.dfg.de/formulare/60_14

2.5 Role of applicant institutions and participating institutions

All institutions involved in a Collaborative Research Centre are required to provide the Collaborative Research Centre with adequate personnel and material resources.

2.6 Format and deadline

The proposal process for a Collaborative Research Centre has two phases, a consultation phase and a review phase. Submission of a draft proposal is imperative. Following a consultation panel with researchers from relevant subject areas and a comparative discussion in the Senate Committee on Collaborative Research Centres, the DFG either recommends or discourages submission of a proposal. Draft proposals may be written in German or English and submitted at any time. Proposals must be submitted in English. German may be used only in cases where this is justified on a subject-specific basis, after consulting with the DFG Head Office first. Appropriate templates are available.

www.dfg.de/foerderung/formulare

If, in preparing your draft proposal or 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 in your draft proposal or proposal. For more information, see the “Research Integrity” portal.

[“Research Integrity” portal](#)

For Collaborative Research Centres that are already being funded, supplementary proposals of projects may be submitted within one year if professors have been newly appointed to the applicant university/universities. Transfer projects and science communication projects by project leaders at the applicant university/universities may also be integrated by submitting supplementary proposals.

If the leader of a project transfers to another research institution in Germany, he or she may continue to work within the Collaborative Research Centre at the request of the CRC and in consultation with the relevant institutions.

3 Review and decision process

Proposal submission under the Collaborative Research Centres Programme must be preceded by a consultation phase on the basis of a draft proposal. Further information can be found in DFG forms 60.003 and 60.17.

www.dfg.de/formulare/60_003

www.dfg.de/formulare/60_17

The consultation phase is followed by a review of the written establishment or renewal proposal. The review takes place on site and includes a presentation by the Collaborative Research Centre. Two members of the Grants Committee on Collaborative Research Centres, including one from a related and one from an unrelated subject area, participate in the review. The Grants Committee, which is composed of academics and representatives of the responsible federal and state ministries, decides twice a year on proposals under the Collaborative Research Centres programme based on the evaluation results: in May for proposals with a funding start date in July and in November for proposals with a funding start date in January. More information on review procedures and criteria can be found in DFG forms 60.022 and 60.14.

www.dfg.de/formulare/60_022

www.dfg.de/formulare/60_14

II Proposal Modules

The funds required for a Collaborative Research Centre may be requested by submitting the following proposal modules. Details are specified in the proposal templates (DFG forms 60.100 and 60.200 – with detailed instructions in the German versions)

www.dfg.de/formulare/60_100

www.dfg.de/formulare/60_200

and in the guidelines on the following modules listed below.

CRC funding cannot be used to finance the positions of project leaders.

- Use the *Basic Module* (DFG form 52.01) to request funding for direct project costs, project-specific staff and instrumentation necessary to carry out a research or other project (see section [I.2.4](#)).

www.dfg.de/formulare/52_01

- Use the *Module Research Training Group* (DFG form 52.15) to request funding for structured training of researchers in early career phases within an Integrated Research Training Group (see section [III.1.2](#)).

www.dfg.de/formulare/52_15

- Use the *Module Standard Allowance for Equity and Diversity* (DFG form 52.14) to request, within the Collaborative Research Centre's Central Administrative Project (see section [III.1.1](#)), funding for targeted and project-specific measures to promote gender equality for researchers and diversity in research and to make jobs in science and academia more family-friendly. More information can be found in section [III.4](#)

www.dfg.de/formulare/52_14

- Use the *Coordination Module* (DFG form 52.12) to request, within the Collaborative Research Centre's Central Administrative Project (see section [III.1.1](#)) or within an Integrated Research Training Group (see section [III.1.2](#)), funding to coordinate the respective activities. Independent of that, this module enables spokespersons to apply for gender inclusion funding for individual and subject and/or project-related activities serving to facilitate the spokesperson's role.

www.dfg.de/formulare/52_12

- Use the *Network Funds Module* (DFG form 52.13) to request, within the Collaborative Research Centre's Central Administrative Project (see section [III.1.1](#)) funds to be administered centrally by the entire consortium.

www.dfg.de/formulare/52_13

- To relieve participants in the Collaborative Research Centre from teaching or administrative duties, use the *Replacements Module* (DFG form 52.03) to request, within the Central Administrative Project (see section [III.1.1](#), funding for replacement staff to take over these responsibilities.

www.dfg.de/formulare/52_03

- If clinicians are temporarily to assume research tasks in the Collaborative Research Centre use the *Temporary Substitutes for Clinicians Module* (DFG form 52.04) to request, within the Central Administrative Project (see section [III.1.1](#)), funding for staff.

www.dfg.de/formulare/52_04

The personnel funds acquired in this way are used either to finance medical staff who take over the patient care responsibilities of the physicians working in the DFG project or to finance the medical staff working on the DFG project directly. Temporary substitutes for clinicians can be requested in the fields of medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine. In addition, grants for temporary substitutes may also be requested to participate in established integrated re-search and training programmes for clinician scientists.

- Use the *Mercator Fellows Module* (DFG form 52.05) to request, within the Collaborative Research Centre's Central Administrative Project (see section [III.1.1](#)), funding for intensive and long-term exchange with researchers in Germany and abroad.

www.dfg.de/formulare/52_05

Although Mercator Fellows are on-site for only part of the project (for a total of up to two years per funding phase), they remain in contact with the project team members once their research stay is over.

- Use the *Project-Specific Workshops Module* (DFG form 52.06) to request, within the Collaborative Research Centre's Central Administrative Project (see section [III.1.1](#)), funding for any events to be held by the Collaborative Research Centre.

www.dfg.de/formulare/52_06

- The *Module Start-Up Funding* (DFG form 52.11) aims at supporting promising researchers in early career phases in pursuing independent projects.

www.dfg.de/formulare/52_11

For a Collaborative Research Centre, such funding may be requested within the Central Administrative Project as lump-sum funding (see section [III.1.1](#)).

- To make the topics, subjects, methods and findings of a Collaborative Research Centre accessible to various segments of society, the lump-sum funds within the Central Administrative Project can be used (see section [III.1.1](#) and the information relating to the *Science Communication Module* in DFG form 52.07). In addition, a Science Communication Project may be proposed (see section [III.1.4](#)).

www.dfg.de/formulare/52_07

III Special Provisions

1 Types of projects

1.1 Central Administrative Project

Under the Central Administrative Project, funds are requested that will be administered centrally by the Collaborative Research Centre. This includes funding for items such as visiting researchers, travel, events, student assistants, temporary substitutes for clinicians, replacements, equity and diversity measures and lump-sum funds.

Lump-sum funds enable Collaborative Research Centres to respond quickly, appropriately and flexibly to novel scientific, methodological and technological innovations, to new appointments, and to similar developments. Lump-sum funds should also be used for start-up funding of projects by researchers in early career phases, for publications and science communication measures.

1.2 Integrated Research Training Group

Integrated Research Training Groups offer a visible way of supporting the academic independence and further qualification of doctoral researchers. In an Integrated Research Training Group, doctoral researchers who work in the Collaborative Research Centre can be supported regardless of the funding source. This can make Collaborative Research Centres even more attractive to researchers in early career phases. The integration of a Research Training Group in a Collaborative Research Centre should be the norm, unless the Collaborative Research Centre's doctoral researchers are included in other structured doctoral programmes at the applicant universities.

All direct-project and staff funding needed for the research activities of the Collaborative Research Centre's doctoral researchers must be requested and justified within the individual projects. As part of the Integrated Research Training Group, funding may be requested not only for the direct costs of coordination and the qualification programme, but also for a small number of short-term fellowships, which may be awarded for up to twelve months each to individuals from three target groups. These target groups are doctoral researchers from abroad or with their own project ideas, medical students, and qualifying fellows with a bachelor's degree. The short-term fellowships should be used primarily to get to know colleagues and for orientation at the beginning of a job at the Collaborative Research Centre. It is expected that the doctoral researchers in an Integrated Research Training Group benefit from the Collaborative Research Centre's central funds for visiting researchers, travel and events, and that they have a say on the use of a portion of these funds.

1.3 Information Infrastructure Project

The main purpose of an Information Infrastructure Project is the systematic management of data relevant in the context of the Collaborative Research Centre. Such data include all results and sources of the research process (including software, research objects, samples) that are collected, evaluated and/or developed by the project. The project may also entail the use and testing or development of new forms of scientific communication related to such data. Funding may be available for the development and implementation of a design and for the provision of an efficient information infrastructure to make it feasible.

This is intended to facilitate scientific synergies in the Collaborative Research Centre through shared data platforms and/or communication forums as well as through efficient use of data.

Professional management of the data collected, evaluated and/or developed in the Collaborative Research Centre is expected. As a rule, the Collaborative Research Centre should therefore take advantage of the relevant local information facilities (such as the applicant universities' libraries, computer centres and biobanks). The use of existing repositories, tools and technologies should generally be given preference over the development of new instruments.

www.re3data.org

resources.dfg.de

Even after project funding expires, access to data or transfer of data to existing infrastructures should be ensured. This issue of sustainability should be addressed at proposal time or, in the case of experimental developments, at least before the project is completed.

Specifically, an Information Infrastructure Project may focus on one or more of the following objectives:

- Access to research data
- Processing and maintenance of research data
- Reuse of research data
- Virtual research environments
- Development of interoperable components
- Adaptation and implementation of new technologies and methods

Funding may be provided not only for staff (including research assistants / applied computer / technical personnel), but also for direct project costs and instrumentation (including servers and hardware components, software and updates, storage media, licensing, support and external services), provided that they are necessary to the project.

1.4 Science Communication Project

If a comprehensive science communication concept is planned that goes well beyond the typical activities of the Central Administrative Project (which must be funded from the lump-sum funds), a separate Science Communication Project may be proposed. In well-

justified cases, this may include a staff position for planning, coordinating and implementing the science communication concept. The hired individual should have experience in the science communication field.

A Science Communication Project may be included in the establishment or renewal proposal for a Collaborative Research Centre or submitted as a supplementary proposal during an ongoing funding period if at least one project leader works at one of the applicant universities. Standard press and public-relations activities of universities are not eligible for funding as a Science Communication Project.

1.5 Transfer Projects

Transfer Projects in Collaborative Research Centres serve to test the findings of basic research under real-life conditions or to develop them, in collaboration with an application partner, into a prototype or an exemplary application. Their goal is to transfer knowledge between research and application, to the mutual benefit of both sides. On the one hand, this allows scientific findings to be tested under real-life conditions, and on the other, it provides the basic research conducted by the Collaborative Research Centre with important practical stimulus and suggestions. At the core of a project is a joint research programme focused on intensive mutual exchange of scientific knowledge as well as corresponding issues of application.

Transfer projects are open to all fields of scientific research. The collaboration between the research institution and the partner requires a cooperation agreement. It is recommended to discuss this with the partner at an early stage. The cooperation agreement must be approved by the DFG Head Office. The DFG model cooperation agreement 41.026e (commercial partner) or 41.026a e (non-commercial partner) should be used for this purpose.

www.dfg.de/formulare/41_026

www.dfg.de/formulare/41_026a

Funding may be requested for the research institution involved in the transfer project. The application partner is expected to contribute an appropriate share of funding for personnel, direct project costs and instrumentation. Funds for the application partner cannot be requested. A transfer project may be funded for a period of up to 48 months. To enable flexible responses to various situations, shorter funding periods are possible. Transfer projects can be proposed as part of an establishment or renewal proposal for a

Collaborative Research Centre or as a supplementary proposal during an ongoing funding period if at least one project leader works at an applicant university.

1.6 Service Projects

Unlike research projects, Service Projects are focused on providing methodological and technical support for the entire Collaborative Research Centre. For this purpose, Service Projects generally offer functionalities and services that benefit many of the research projects and are important for their success. The number and scope of Service Projects are based on the specific needs of the Collaborative Research Centre.

2 **Annuality principle and lump-sum funds**

Funding for a Collaborative Research Centre is awarded or pledged for one financial year at a time. The funds are tied to the financial year and cannot be transferred to subsequent years. Lump-sum funds are the only exception. Further information can be found in the usage guidelines (DFG form 5.01).

www.dfg.de/formulare/5_01

3 **International collaboration**

The development and expansion of international networking structures and partnerships with researchers based outside of Germany can be funded in various ways as part of a Collaborative Research Centre.

Funding to cultivate international contacts and present findings internationally can be requested under the Central Administrative Project. In addition, funding may also be awarded for setting up or maintaining a long-term collaboration with a similar centre of excellence abroad.

In addition, research partners from abroad may be integrated into a Collaborative Research Centre as project leaders, either in individual projects or in the form of a foreign location as part of a CRC/Transregio. Prerequisites for this are research excellence, compelling thematic integration into the overall design, and significant added value for the Collaborative Research Centre. At the same time, the programme objective of prioritisation at the applicant universities must be sufficiently honoured.

Funding for cross-border collaborative projects is usually based on the principle of complementarity. It is expected that the foreign partner's research activities are funded by its host institution and/or a relevant foreign funding agency. Special policies may be in effect based on cooperation agreements between the DFG and foreign partner organisations; this is the case for example for Austria and Israel. For research collaborations with developing countries, DFG funding for the foreign partner may be available under certain conditions (see DFG form 54.013).

www.dfg.de/formulare/54_013

Any research projects by project leaders based outside of Germany must be included in the grant proposal even if no project-specific funds are requested from the DFG. Information about the participating foreign institutions, the modalities of co-financing and the specifics of the collaboration must be provided.

Funding for activities to initiate an inter-national collaboration, especially with regard to an international CRC/Transregio, may also be requested from the DFG (see DFG form 1.813).

www.dfg.de/formulare/1_813

4 Equity and diversity measures

For measures to promote equity and diversity, up to €120,000 can be requested per funding period as an earmarked allowance. Funds saved elsewhere may also be used to pay for these measures. Further information can be found in the module guidelines for the Standard Allowance for Equity and Diversity (DFG form 52.14) and on the website.

www.dfg.de/equity/allowance

www.dfg.de/formulare/52_14

In consultation with the DFG Head Office, the employment of female researchers in early career phases, who newly take on the role of a project leader, can be initially or partially financed from equity and diversity funds on a case-by-case basis. Such a position can be funded for up to two years out of the Collaborative Research Centre's budget (or proportionally longer in case of co-funding).

Information on compensation for prolonged periods of absence due to family leave or illness can be found at:

www.dfg.de/equity/family_leave

IV Obligations

In submitting a draft proposal or full proposal to the DFG, individuals with a high degree of scientific/academic responsibility – i.e. all project leaders – agree to adhere to the principles of good research practice. These principles can be found in detail in the DFG Code of Conduct *Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice*, which came into force on 1 August 2019.

www.dfg.de/gwp

The DFG's Rules of Procedure for Dealing with Scientific Misconduct (Verfahrensordnung zum Umgang mit wissenschaftlichem Fehlverhalten) apply to individuals with a high level of scientific/academic responsibility.

www.dfg.de/formulare/80_01

Prior to submission of a draft proposal or proposal, all project leaders must sign a Declaration of Obligation of Compliance (see link to recommended DFG template):

www.dfg.de/formulare/80_02

The applicant institution(s) is/are responsible for gathering the signatures for the compliance forms. The forms must be kept on file by the institutions (either centralised at the applicant institution(s) or decentralised at the employing institution) for ten years following completion of the last funding period. Should project leaders transfer employing institutions, the compliance form must be updated accordingly. Upon request by the DFG, e.g. in connection with random audit checks and in cases of alleged scientific misconduct, these forms must be handed over to the DFG.

By accepting funding, the recipient agrees 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 by the dates specified in the award letter and present financial accounts to the DFG detailing the use of funds.

The DFG expects that the findings of the projects it funds be made available to the public.

V Publication of Data on Grant Holders and Research Projects

Please note the DFG's Data Protection Notice for Research Funding, which you can access at www.dfg.de/privacy_policy. Where appropriate, please also forward this information to those persons whose data will be processed by the DFG because of their involvement in your project.

www.dfg.de/privacy_policy