

Final Report ORA V

This report summarises and analyses the main results and procedural steps of the fifth ORA call. After four successful calls, and based on an evaluation of the ORA funding scheme in 2016, the ORA partners ANR, DFG, ESRC and NWO decided to launch the fifth call in the spring of 2017. The results of the programme evaluation confirmed the relevance of having a joint European research funding scheme, but also pointed to some procedural weaknesses of the scheme.¹ Therefore, the funding organisations implemented a procedural change: The fifth call has been a two step process, comprising an outline stage and a full proposal stage. Only the teams whose outline proposal was positively assessed were invited to submit a full proposal.

Call Timeline

This fifth call was managed by the DFG as the coordinating agency. The call was pre-announced on 27 March 2017, and the call documents for the outline and the full proposal stage were published on 2 May 2017. All partners published the information about the Call on their websites.

5 July 2017	Submission Deadline for Outline Proposals
16/17 October 2017, London	Panel Meeting and Decision about Outline Proposals
20 November 2017	Notification of Results
31 January 2018	Submission Deadline for Full Proposals
February to May 2018	Eligibility Check and Peer Review
27/28 June 2018, Paris	Panel Meeting and Decision about Full Proposals
28 September 2018	Notification of Results
As of October 2018	Start of Joint Research Projects

Outline Proposal Stage

319 outline proposals were submitted to the DFG. Eligibility was checked by all partners, with the partners focussing on their national eligibility requirements and DFG also checking ORA-level eligibility. A number of applications were sent back for essential corrections, and the eligibility of 291 applications was confirmed.

Table 1: Eligible **ORA outline** proposals by ORA partner and number of participating countries

	ANR	DFG	ESRC	NWO	Total #	Total %
2-countries	14	83	98	113	154	53
3-countries	51	99	98	91	113	39
4-countries	24	24	24	24	24	8
Total	89	206	220	228	291	100
Total involvement	31%	71%	76%	78%		

¹ For the evaluation report see www.dfg.de/ora.

Panel Assessment

The ORA competition was delivered as a two stage call for the first time. The ORA partners agreed to employ a process that largely mirrors an established ESRC multi-panel competition (Grant Assessment Panels). The purpose of the Panel meeting was to determine which proposals should advance to the next stage on the basis of scientific quality. Proposals were split across three sub-panels according to disciplines: Panel 1- Psychology and Linguistics. Panel 2 – Economics, Sociology, Social Policy, Social Statistics, Communication Studies, Science and Technology Studies, Management and Business, Education, and Panel 3 – Political Science, Human Geography, Environmental Planning, Legal Studies, Anthropology, Demography.

The role of panel members was to appraise outline proposals and classify them by score according to the procedures and assessment criteria. 60 Panel members from all disciplines included in the outline proposals were invited, also panel chairs and vice chairs. Like in previous rounds, each partner was responsible for providing around 15 panel members and chairs. Ahead of the meeting, Panel members were asked to provide written comments. Each proposal got statements by three rapporteurs.

The aim of the funders was to allow ca. 60 proposals to progress to the full proposal stage. This was roughly three times the number of proposals for which funding was expected to be available. The recommendations for selection of the sub-panels were considered by the chairs and vice chairs following the conclusion of sub-panels, who agreed upon final recommendations. At the end, 63 outline proposals were invited to the full proposal stage. After the Panel meeting, all applicants received feedback.

Full Proposal Stage

Table 2: Eligible Full proposals by ORA partner and number of participating countries

	ANR	DFG	ESRC	NWO	Total #	Total %
2-countries	3	14	16	17	25	40
3-countries	16	27	27	26	32	51
4-countries	6	6	6	6	6	10
Total	25	47	49	49	63	101
Total involvement	40%	75%	78%	78%		

Table 3: Budgets available for full Proposals by ORA partner

	ANR	DFG	ESRC	NWO
Budget requested	7.149.043 €	16.873.487 €	19.321.749 £	13.609.604 €
Budget available	2.500.000 €	acc. to proven scientific quality	5.500.000 £	4.500.000 €

Review Process

To assist the Panel in making its funding recommendations, each proposal was reviewed by a minimum of two external peer reviewers. In some cases extra reviews were commissioned due to

the interdisciplinary nature of the proposal, its complexity, or the gaps in the panel composition. In total, this meant that around 180 reviews were gathered.

Panel Assessment

The purpose of the panel meeting was to determine which proposals should be funded, based on the assessment criteria set out in the call. 16 Panel members were invited, with some overlap with the Panel for the outline stage. The disciplinary composition of the Panel was matched to the applications being assessed. Each proposal had been allocated prior to the meeting to two Panel members. Each proposal was called up in the meeting; the two assessors presented their comments. After this, the rest of the Panel was invited to discuss and agree on a final grade for each proposal. In light of the budget restrictions, and having identified more proposals worthy of funding than for which funding was available with all partners involved, the Panel had to vote to achieve the final ranking for funding (according to a procedure agreed beforehand). At the end of the meeting, the Panel recommended 16 proposals for funding to the ORA partners that fell within the available budgets. As in the previous ORA rounds, the scientific quality of proposals would have allowed funding more proposals than were actually funded.

12 invited full proposals included a Japanese side-project. Ahead of the ORA panel meeting, in a separate evaluation, JSPS had identified 3 proposals out of these 12 full proposals as having a high priority for funding, and 5 proposals with a lower priority. It turned out that there was a match between both evaluation outcomes, and all JSPS proposals identified as high priority were among the 16 recommended for funding by the ORA panel. As a result, three projects will include a Japanese side-project.

In the period following the Panel meeting, the ORA partners took formal decisions on the funding of projects they were involved in. This process was completed once all agencies had decided, which was the case on 27 of September. On 28 of September, applicants were informed about the outcome of the assessment. The feedback to the applicants comprised the reviews and the Panel statement.

Table 4: Funded Full Proposals²

Acronym	ANR	DFG	ESRC	NWO	Japanese funding	Discipline
ADAPT-LOCKIN		x	x	x		Political Science
AmbiDyn	x	x	x		X	Economics
DICE	x	x	x	x	X	Empirical Social Science
EmOrigin			x	x		Psychology
FLoRA		x	x	x		Education Science
GUARDINT	x	x	x			Political Science
HC		x		x		Psychology
IN-CARE		x	x	x	X	Empirical Social Science

² For more details see

https://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/announcements_proposals/2018/info_wissenschaft_18_66/index.html

MOBILISE	x	x	x	x		Political Science
NaPre		x	x	x		Political Science
STAYin(g) Rural		x	x	x		Geography
StressAcGen		x		x		Psychology
TAO		x	x	x		Psychology
ToRealSim	x	x	x	x		Empirical Social Science
WHIG	x		x	x		Urban Planning
WMREPS		x	x	x		Cognitive Neuroscience

Table 5: Funded Full Proposals by ORA partner and number of participating countries

	ANR	DFG	ESRC	NWO	Total #	Total %
2-countries	0	2	2	2	3	19
3-countries	4	10	11	8	11	69
4-countries	2	2	2	2	2	12
Total	6	14	15	12	16	100
Total involvement	37.5%	87.5%	94%	75%		

Table 6: Success rate by gender: 40 % of applicants (PIs and Co-Is) were women, 38 % of the PIs and 43 % of the Co-Is.

	# outline proposals	# full proposals	Success Rate %	# funded proposals	Success Rate Outline %	Success Rate Full %
Women	581	115	20	33	5.7	29
PI	314	60	19	20	6.4	33
Co-I	267	55	21	13	4.9	24
Men	863	191	22	40	4.6	21
PI	514	119	23	28	5.4	24
Co-I	349	72	21	12	3.4	17

It seems to be worthwhile to look at some figures regarding the outcome: Considering the results in terms of disciplinary split, it turns out that we reached a sensible mix of disciplines, for example with 25% each of Psychology and Political Science proposals. These shares do not exactly match the shares we arrived at the end of the outline proposal stage, but do prove a balanced distribution across disciplines. Here, particularly worth mentioning, that the ORA scheme definitely does not aim for a disciplinary match between funded and submitted proposal. Choices are only made based on scientific quality.

In terms of the gender balance across applicants, it shows that at the full proposal stage female applicants were considerably more successful than male applicants. This is despite the fact that the success rate of female applicants at the outline stage is two percentage points lower than the male's success rate - demonstrating that female applicants did so much better at the full proposal that they were able to more than compensate the disadvantage from the outline stage.

Then, likewise noteworthy, with regard to the cooperation intensity: Almost 40% of the eligible outline proposals comprise trilateral cooperations (see *Table 1*), then half of the invited full proposals were based on a trilateral cooperation (see *Table 2*), and actually 11 out of 16 funded full proposals are trilateral ones, what shows that the trilateral proposals are proven to be disproportionately successful in the end. Though, this finding applies particularly for ORA V whereas the results from other ORA rounds were different, for example, demonstrating that bilateral proposals had done well equally.

Finally, a glance at the *success rates* (*number of funded proposals compared to submitted proposals*) across the partners reveals that they are quite balanced ranging between 24% and 31% (only full proposal stage), resp. ranging between 5.2% to 6.7% for the entire ORA round. Though, when the overall success rate is compared to the previous rounds, this success rates went down once more. Astonishing are the even *funding rates* (*amount of funds granted compared to funds requested*) across the partners which amount to 28% resp. 29%. It remains to be noted once more that all these figures are the result of a purely scientifically driven evaluation process without any obvious distortion by other criteria than listed in the call for proposals.

Observations and recommendations for ORA VI

Two stage procedure

The evaluation of the funding scheme showed criticism from the applicants concerning the length of the call – which in previous ORA calls had sometimes been 1 ½ years from the pre-announcement of the call to the notification of the applicants of which projects would be funded. The two stage procedure was intended to shorten the time the majority of applicants would have to wait until they knew the outcome of their application. In the end, for applicants who were not invited to the second round, the overwhelming majority, the procedure was a lot shorter than in previous rounds. For applicants who were invited to submit a full proposal, the procedure was not longer than in ORA IV based on a time calculation from the date of the pre-announcement to the date of the funding decision.

The adjustment of the procedure was also intended to reduce the work load of applicants and reviewers. The amount of work for applicants unsuccessful in the outline stage was substantially reduced whereas for applicants invited to the second round it was increased. They had to write an outline and a full proposal, although they had done much preparatory work in the outline stage already and only needed to flesh out the outline while having the opportunity to include helpful advice from the panel in their full proposal. For reviewers the amount of work was substantially reduced because the outline proposals were only reviewed by the Panel. Instead of around 200 proposals from the fourth round only the 63 full proposals went into the written review in ORA V, thus reducing the amount of work for reviewers by two thirds. Moreover, reviewers could focus their efforts on those applications that are considered being of high scientific quality, and did not need to spend time on applications that would not have any prospect of success.

Simultaneous submission of an outline and a full proposal

After the ORA V panel meeting for the full proposals some members of the Panel suggested that ORA follow the procedure implemented by the European Research Council (ERC). This means that applicants would be asked to simultaneously submit an outline and a full proposal. In a first stage, a Panel would assess which outline proposals have the greatest promise and select a specified number to advance to the second stage. For the second stage the full proposals the applicants handed in with the outline proposals would be sent to reviewers and later assessed by a Panel. This procedure could have distinct advantages: it is to be expected that outline proposals

submitted would be better thought out if the applicants also had to hand in a full proposal, thus reducing the number of too hastily written up and perhaps not fully thought-through applications. Due to the expected smaller number of proposals, the work load for the panel members would be also reduced while retaining the reduction in work load for the reviewers. Finally, the length of the call should be somewhat shortened. Funding partners are well aware that the work load for the individual applicant would increase, though.