

Information for Researchers Call for Proposals

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Excellence Strategy of the German Federal and State Governments – Call for Proposals under the Clusters of Excellence Funding Line

On 4 November 2022, the German federal and state governments renewed the administrative agreement that established the Excellence Strategy (“Verwaltungsvereinbarung zwischen Bund und Ländern gemäß Artikel 91b Absatz 1 des Grundgesetzes zur Förderung von Spitzenforschung an Universitäten – Exzellenzstrategie”), by which they intend to continue and further advance their efforts to strengthen universities by promoting scientific excellence, profile-building and cooperation within the research system. The Excellence Strategy seeks to strengthen Germany as a hub of science and research on a lasting basis, further expanding its international competitiveness and continuing the successful development aimed at educating top performers in research and raising the quality of Germany as a centre of higher education and research across the board. The momentum achieved in the German research system in the first round of the Excellence Strategy is to be maintained, with the aim of further strengthening the universities by supporting their subject-specific and strategic profiling in various areas of performance. Funding extends to scientific and research-related activities pursued by the universities and their cooperation partners in cases of nationwide significance under the funding lines Clusters of Excellence and Universities of Excellence.

The Clusters of Excellence funding line aims to promote internationally competitive research fields at universities or in university consortia in the form of projects, also across scientific disciplines.

Funding starts on 1 January 2026.

The German Science and Humanities Council (Wissenschaftsrat) issues a separate call for proposals for the Universities of Excellence funding line.

Eligibility Requirements

Universities or consortia of universities in Germany are eligible to apply, represented by their management.

Clusters of Excellence can be applied for by a single university or by consortia of several universities. The following applies to Clusters of Excellence comprising several universities: All applicant universities must be substantially involved in the proposed Cluster of Excellence. In the case of joint proposals, there must be clear evidence of visible overarching cooperation having been pursued between the institutions to date, as well as recognisable scientific and structural synergies that benefit each of the applicant universities.

With regard to the Universities of Excellence funding line, it should also be noted that participation in a joint Cluster of Excellence is recognised as a funding requirement for a University of Excellence for no more than three applicant universities. If more than three universities submit a joint proposal for a Cluster of Excellence, they themselves are to determine which of them – up to a maximum of three applicant universities – are to be credited with participation as a funding requirement for a University of Excellence.

In the case of Cluster of Excellence proposals submitted by several applicant universities, one of them is to be designated as the managing university.

It is possible to involve other individual and/or institutional cooperation partners such as external researchers, non-university research institutions, other higher education institutions and also institutions from the private sector or other sectors of society.

Scope of funding

Under the Clusters of Excellence funding line, the German federal and state governments intend to make a total of around €539 million available per year. Up to 70 Clusters of Excellence are to be funded in all. These funds provided by the German federal and state governments are to be used to finance:

- direct project costs (staff costs, material costs and instrumentation costs)
- the programme allowance amounting to 22 percent of the approved and expended project funds for the respective Cluster of Excellence
- the university allowance of up to €1 million per year to strengthen governance and strategic orientation
- completion funding for Clusters of Excellence that are not continued after seven years

Under the Excellence Strategy, proposals for Clusters of Excellence can be submitted in the amount of €3 to 10 million per year each (including the programme allowance and plus the university allowance, where applicable).

Funding Criteria

Funding for the programme is awarded based on a competitive, science-led process. The basis for funding decisions is the scientific evaluation of the draft proposals and proposals, taking into account both outstanding preliminary work and the development prospects presented. Applicants are expected to undertake an assessment of their own strengths and weaknesses in all relevant performance dimensions. The following general eligibility criteria apply:

- Research excellence
- Proven track record of the participating researchers
- Quality of the supporting structures
- Environment of the Cluster of Excellence

In each review of a proposed Cluster of Excellence, applications for a university allowance are assessed in the light of the plausibility of the university's strategic objectives. The Excellence Commission decides on the granting of the university allowance based on the recommendation put forward by the Committee of Experts. The decision is made at the same time as the decision on the Clusters of Excellence proposal.

Procedure

New proposals:

Proposal submission for new initiatives under the Clusters of Excellence funding line involves a two-stage process (draft proposals, proposals).

Universities or university consortia planning to submit a new proposal under the Clusters of Excellence funding line are requested to submit a non-binding letter of intent electronically via the elan portal by **4:00 p.m. on 1 February 2023**.

Draft proposals must have been received electronically by the DFG Head Office via the elan portal by no later than **4:00 p.m. on 31 May 2023** (cut-off deadline). They are reviewed by panels based on scientific

criteria. A comparative assessment of the results of the review provides the basis for the decisions made by the Committee of Experts in February 2024 as to which proposals may be submitted.

In order to plan the review of the proposals, universities or university consortia admitted to submit new proposals under the Clusters of Excellence funding line are requested to submit an updated non-binding letter of intent electronically via the elan portal by no later than **4:00 p.m. on 15 April 2024**.

Renewal proposals:

A single-stage procedure is envisaged for the Clusters of Excellence that have received funding since 2019 and have decided to submit a renewal proposal. Universities or university consortia planning to submit renewal proposals under the Clusters of Excellence funding line are requested to submit a non-binding letter of intent electronically via the elan portal by no later than **4:00 p.m. on 29 January 2024**.

Universities or university consortia planning to submit renewal proposals under the Clusters of Excellence funding line are requested to submit a non-binding letter of intent electronically via the elan portal by no later than **4:00 p.m. on 29 January 2024**.

New proposals and renewal proposals for Clusters of Excellence must have been received electronically by the DFG Head Office via the elan portal by no later than

4:00 p.m. on 22 August 2024 (cut-off deadline)

They are reviewed by panels based on scientific criteria. A comparative assessment of the results of the review provides the basis for the recommendations put forward by the Committee of Experts to the Excellence Commission, which decides on funding in May 2025. Funding starts on 1 January 2026. Funding is granted for a period of seven years.

Draft proposals and proposals can only be processed if they have been endorsed by the authorities responsible for science and the humanities in the respective German federal states.

The DFG issues a call for proposals for Clusters of Excellence every seven years based on the Administrative Agreement.

Further information

For further details, see the programme guidelines:

www.dfg.de/formulare/exstra100

For details of the eligibility criteria, see:

www.dfg.de/formulare/exstra110

Please refer to our forms and be sure to make use of them when preparing draft proposals and proposals. You will find these documents at:

www.dfg.de/foerderung/programme/exzellenzstrategie/formulare_merkblaetter

Letters of intent, draft proposals and proposals are to be submitted via the DFG's elan portal:

<https://elan.dfg.de>

See the following website for answers to frequently asked questions about proposal submission, explanations of individual points in the guidelines and additional programme information:

www.dfg.de/excellence_strategy

For details of the German federal and state governments' Excellence Strategy, see:

www.gwk-bonn.de/en

Please note the information on the Universities of Excellence funding line provided by the Wissenschaftsrat:

www.wissenschaftsrat.de/excellence_strategy

The following are available to you as contact persons at the DFG Head Office:

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