

# recommendation

Austrian Council for Research and Technology Development

30 November 2015



## Recommendation Regarding the Use of the Funding Provided by the National Foundation for RTD for 2016

### Preamble

In the context of funding for 2016, on the basis of the Foundation Board's decision of 29 September 2015, an invitation was made to the Austrian Council for Research and Technology Development on 19 October 2015 in acc. With § 11 para. 1 Z 1 of the RTD National Foundation Act to submit a recommendation on the use of the Foundation's funding for 2016. This is to be made on the basis of the applications submitted.

The total application volume for 2016 is **EUR 125,911,570 m**. The Foundation Board asked the Austrian Council for a statement on available Foundation funds for 2016 on the basis of four possible scenarios:

- 1) EUR 40 million
- 2) EUR 50 million
- 3) EUR 60 million
- 4) EUR 15 million (worst case scenario)

In view of the difficult financial situation, the National Foundation is also assigned special significance, which is manifested in the support of long-term effect inter-disciplinary research measures (see § 2 of the RTD National Foundation Act).

The Austrian Council advocates a sufficient and sustainable financing of the National Foundation. The Austrian Council is very much concerned with the extremely fluctuating allocation of funds. The amount of allocated funds since 2008 at the latest tends to hover far below the EUR 125 million per year provided for in the legal stipulations.

The basis for the decision on awarding funds is the strategic importance and socio-political relevance of the projects submitted and their classification in the overall context of Austrian research funding. The Austrian Council for Research, Technology and Development also defined the following priorities for awarding funds for 2016:



- Reinforcing of the research **infrastructure** by focusing on initiatives with corresponding critical variables and risk potential
- Reinforcing of the **national human potential basis**
- **Risk capital reinforcement**
- Reinforcing the contribution of **intellectual property** to growth and innovation
- Reinforcing innovation potential with **“Open Innovation”**
- Coordination and harmonisation of **regional and federal RTI activities**
- Excellence in **basic research**
- Measures to **strengthen location Austria for research-active companies**
- **Research and technology initiatives** for the industry location
- Measures to strengthen **complexity research**

## Recommendation

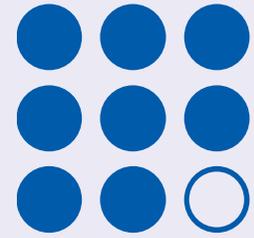
The applications of the beneficiaries for the funding by the National Foundation basically comply with the Council’s recommendation on the prioritisation and in principle can therefore be supported.

Following in-depth consultation and with consideration of the 4 financing scenarios set out by the National Foundation, the Austrian Council for Research and Technology Development recommends the following distribution of funds (see table below).

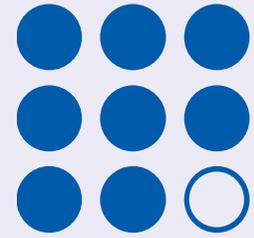
Should the worst case scenario of EUR 15 million be the case, the Austrian Council for Research and Technology Development recommends no allocation be made to the beneficiaries and the funds be held over to 2017 instead. In the event of a figure above EUR 15 million but below EUR 40 million with the allocation of funds of the National Foundation, the Austrian Council recommends to be consulted once again.

| Institution | Title   | Applied for total in EUR m | Scenario 1 Recommendation EUR 40 m | Scenario 2 Recommendation EUR 50 m | Scenario 3 Recommendation EUR 60 m | Reason – Comment   |
|-------------|---|----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| FFG*        | Programm "Competence Headquarters"                        | 10.00                      | 4.00                               | 4.00                               | 5.00                               | The Headquarter Programme has been in place for some time, and comparably high amounts have been invested in this programme. The background research work shows that the average funding sum per funded project was just under EUR 1 million. With a view to a critical mass, the Austrian Council believes an allocation of funds with less than 4 projects does not appear very beneficial.  |
| FFG         | Bridge building programme / BRIDGE                        | 20.00                      | 5.00                               | 7.00                               | 8.00                               | Bridge is a long-established programme. The cooperation between science and economy is an attractive option. For this reason the Bridge Programme must be preferred in view of scarce resources. An allocation of funds as high as possible is recommended according to the resources available.   |
| FFG         | Research partnerships – Industry-related dissertations    | 5.00                       | 3.00                               | 4.00                               | 4.00                               | This relatively new programme line promises a boost to human resources in terms of training; the industry shall be integrated in this programme, too. It is recommended this be financed with at least EUR 3 million.  |
| FFG         | R&D infrastructure funding                                | 15.00                      | 0.00                               | 0.00                               | 0.00                               | As the Austrian Council has already determined, an own funding mechanism for setting up research infrastructures of critical dimensions is not provided in Austria. These findings are also reflected in the focus points of the National Foundation recommended for 2016. A project of this kind, however, would have to have greater dimensions for a beneficial implementation, which currently exceeds the budgetary options of the National Foundation. In terms of a long-term and appropriately dimensioned financing, a consideration within the scope of the Research Financing Act would be conceivable. The Austrian Council believes the application itself is not specific enough. A prioritisation is indispensable for the scarce, limited funds. The application harbours the danger that, while all areas are actually considered according to the scattergun approach, not enough money is available for the individual areas. |
| FFG         | Spin-off & Start-up Initiative as part of GIN             | 8.00                       | 0.00                               | 0.00                               | 0.00                               | The establishment of the Global Incubator Network (GIN), in whose framework the Spin-off & Start-up Initiative is embedded, was only recently recommended during the course of the special tranche of the National Foundation 2015 for funding. The Austrian Council believes it first remains to be seen if the framework for this, the GIN, can be successfully established before further components of this concept are implemented.   |
| FWF**       | Special research areas and PhDs                           | 17.10                      | 7.00                               | 10.00                              | 12.00                              | The special research areas ("SFB") are a superb funding concept with very high quality and maximum requirement for research and teaching. Financing of the SFBs is an essential factor of top-quality interdisciplinary research in Austria. The PhD programme ("DK") received a very positive evaluation in 2014 with a view to its value for training highly qualified scientists. It is also evident that, although the PhD courses are among the core tasks of the universities, the additional and complementary financing of the structured PhD programme by the FWF appears to be essential for the universities until further notice.  |
| FWF         | Matching Funds for supporting young researchers and women | 3.001                      | 3.00                               | 3.00                               | 3.00                               | Matching Funds is an innovative governance model that promotes an efficient interconnection of federal and state funding, and it in particular pursues the priorities and recommendations of the RFTE.   |
| ÖAW**       | PostDoc Fellowships                                       | 3.00                       | 0.00                               | 0.00                               | 0.00                               | The Austrian Council believes the PostDoc Fellowships concept is not especially innovative. There is already a series of comparable measures in this area, especially at European level. The actuality of the orientation towards Eastern Europe must also be questioned. Bringing researchers to Austria in particular requires appropriate framework conditions, such as suitable payment and Tenure Track.  |
| ÖAW         | goldigital: Projects for scientific digitalisation        | 2.00                       | 2.00                               | 2.00                               | 2.00                               | The basic idea of an integration of the humanities, social sciences and cultural sciences is welcomed. Innovative and promising projects can be initiated here together with businesses.   |
| ÖAW         | HumanIS – Humanities and Information Science              | 4.00                       | 0.00                               | 0.00                               | 0.00                               | The application, and its unique position in particular, are viewed critically here. The objectives are broad and not well focused.   |

\*FFG = Austrian Research Promotion Agency \*\*FWF = Austrian Science Fund \*\*\*ÖAW = Austrian Academy of Sciences



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