



FUNDING SCHEME

«RESTART 2016-2020» Programmes for Research, Technological Development and Innovation of the Research and Innovation Foundation

PROGRAMME

Excellence Hubs

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

EXCELLENCE/0524



Co-funded by
the European Union



Republic of Cyprus



RESEARCH
& INNOVATION
FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION

The Research and Innovation Foundation (RIF) announces the Call for Proposals «**Excellence Hubs**» for the «**Excellence**» Programme within the framework of the «**RESTART 2016-2020**» Programmes for Research, Technological Development and Innovation – Programmes for the Period May 2022 – December 2024 and invites potential beneficiaries to submit relevant Project Proposals (Proposals).

The present Call will be co-financed by the Republic of Cyprus and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), in the frame of the Operational Programme «ΘΑΛΕΙΑ» 2021-2027 under Priority 1: «Competitive, Smart and Digital Economy» and the Specific Objective (1i): «Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies».

GENERAL CALL INFORMATION

Pillar	II. Sustainable RTDI System
Programme	EXCELLENCE HUBS
Call Identifier	EXCELLENCE/0524
Source of Funding	Operational Programme «ΘΑΛΕΙΑ» 2021-2027 European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
Call Budget	12.000.000 Euro <ul style="list-style-type: none">🟡 5.000.000 Euro for “Life Sciences”🟡 5.000.000 Euro for “Physical Sciences and Engineering”🟡 2.000.000 Euro for “Social Sciences and Humanities”
Maximum Funding Per Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none">🟡 200.000 Euro for “Life Sciences” and “Physical Sciences and Engineering”🟡 120.000 Euro for “Social Sciences and Humanities” <p>In case of a collaboration between at least one privately funded research center / university and a publicly funded research center / university, the Maximum Funding per Project becomes as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">🟡 250.000 Euro for “Life Sciences” and “Physical Sciences and Engineering”🟡 150.000 Euro for “Social Sciences and Humanities”
Publication Date	2 May 2024
Submission Deadline	5 July 2024, 13:00

The English version of the Call, even though an official translation endorsed by the Research and Innovation Foundation, is provided for information purposes only. Only the Greek version of the Call is legally binding and shall prevail in case of any divergence in interpretation.

OBJECTIVES

The “Excellence Hubs” Programme aims to promote scientific excellence, which is a fundamental part for the sustainable development of the Research, Technological Development and Innovation (RTDI) System, through the funding of pioneering research projects in cutting-edge fields.

Additionally, the Programme aims to contribute towards creating growth prospects for the local economy and to tackle social and other contemporary challenges.

DESCRIPTION

The “Excellence Hubs” Programme will fund projects that fall under the following three Scientific Fields:

- Life Sciences,
- Physical Sciences and Engineering, and
- Social Sciences and Humanities.

The analysis of the abovementioned scientific fields is based on the Science and Technology Field Classification, included in Annex I of the Work Programme, as follows:

- Life Sciences: Fields coded 1.6, 3.1 to 3.5 and 4.1 to 4.5.
- Physical Sciences and Engineering: Fields coded 1.1. to 1.5, 1.7 and 2.1 to 2.11.
- Social Sciences and Humanities: Fields coded 5.1 to 5.9 and 6.1 to 6.5.

The basic objective of the Programme is to reward and invest in research excellence. The Programme can also contribute to the collaboration of national research/academic institutions and enterprises as well as to the development of consortia with foreign organisations. The implementation of projects is expected to result into new, internationally significant knowledge, which can form the base for future exploitation in terms of social and economic development. The projects can be intersectoral and interdisciplinary.

MANAGEMENT & EXPLOITATION OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Ownership of background and foreground Intellectual Property (IP), as well as relevant conditions for the use of IP, shall be settled accordingly through bilateral or other agreements among Consortium Partners.

BENEFICIARIES

Research Organisations (A1, A2), Enterprises (B1, B2, B3), Other Organisations (C1, C2)

SPECIFIC RESTRICTIONS AND CONDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION

The Host Organisation (HO) can be a Research Organisation or an Enterprise or Other Organisations.

Research Organisations, Enterprises or Other Organisations may participate as additional Partner Organisations.

Participation of Large Enterprises (including Private Universities) is only permitted when an SME is also participating in the Cypriot Consortium, in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Projects can include Basic Research and/or Industrial Research.

Projects must fall within Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) 1-4 in compliance with the relevant definitions adopted by the EU¹.

DURATION OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

18 -24 months

BUDGET

€12.000.000

MAXIMUM FUNDING PER PROJECT

¹ The Technology Readiness Levels adopted by the EU are the following:

TRL 1 - basic principles observed,

TRL 2 - technology concept formulated,

TRL 3 - experimental proof of concept,

TRL 4 - technology validated in lab,

TRL 5 - technology validated in relevant environment,

TRL 6 - technology demonstrated in relevant environment,

TRL 7 - system prototype demonstration in operational environment,

TRL 8 - system complete and qualified,

TRL 9 - actual system proven in operational environment (competitive manufacturing in the case of key enabling technologies)

- 200.000 Euro for “Life Sciences” and “Physical Sciences and Engineering”
- 120.000 Euro for “Social Sciences and Humanities”

In case of a collaboration between at least one privately funded research center / university and a publicly funded research center / university, provided that no partner organisation’s budget exceeds 70% of the total budget, the Maximum Funding per Project becomes as follows:

- 250.000 Euro for “Life Sciences” and “Physical Sciences and Engineering”
- 150.000 Euro for “Social Sciences and Humanities”

ELIGIBLE COSTS

Personnel costs, Cost for Foreign Research Organisations, Instruments and Equipment Costs, Costs for External Services, Costs for Travelling Abroad, Consumables, Other Specific Costs, Overheads.

The calculation of the Proposal Budget will be based on the simplified cost method “Personnel costs plus 40% on Personnel Costs for covering the rest of the Project costs”.

All beneficiary entities that have not previously participated in the RESTART 2016-2020 Programmes, are obliged to make use of the simplified Method "Standard Scales of Unit Costs" for the calculation of staff remuneration.

SERVICES OF THE CENTRAL KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER OFFICE (KTO)

The beneficiaries of the following Programmes will automatically become beneficiaries of the services and tools for support and knowledge transfer that will be provided by the RIF in the framework of the Central Office for Knowledge Transfer (KTO) and the Innovation Factory.

Aiming at enhancing the projects’ potential for exploitation of research results, all Project Consortia funded under the present Call will be required to contact the Central Knowledge Transfer Office (KTO) for the preparation of a specialised Service Delivery Plan.

Acceptance of the Service Delivery Plan by the Project Consortia and utilization of the central KTO services will be optional.

RESTART 2016-2020 WORK PROGRAMME

All general rules and procedures for the participation of organisations and individuals, the eligible activities and costs, as well as the specific information regarding the «Innovation Vouchers» Programme, as well as the other RESTART 2016-2020 Programmes, are included in the **[RIF’s Work Programme for the «RESTART 2016-2020» Programmes for Research, Technological Development and Innovation – Programmes for the Period May 2022 – December 2024](#)**, which is the main reference document and an important information source for interested parties and can be found on the Research and Innovation Foundation’s IRIS

SPECIFIC CONDITIONS

In the frame of the present Call, the following specific conditions apply:

- Proposals can be submitted with a Project Coordinator:
 - (a) An **Experienced Researcher (ExRe)**, holding a PhD degree², with more than twelve (12) years since obtaining his/her PhD by the date of announcement of the Call.
 - (b) A **Young Researcher (YR)** holding a PhD degree², with up to twelve (12) years since obtaining the PhD degree by the date of announcement of the Call. The maximum of twelve (12) years may be extended taking into account career breaks for maternity, paternity leave, military service or documented sick leave for a continuous period of more than three months, as follows: (a) for maternity leave, eighteen months for each child born after obtaining his/her doctorate, (b) for paternity leave, the corresponding certified time, (c) for military service, the duration of service certified by the respective authority, and (d) for sick leave, the respective certified time which is longer than three months. The Young Researcher must hold a doctoral degree at the date of submission of the proposal. ***In case of withdrawal, the Young Researcher must be replaced by a person who meets the definition of the Young Researcher at the date of announcement of the Call. If this is not possible, the project and its funding will be terminated.***
- Each proposal related to a specific research project or a similar one can be submitted only to one of the Calls EXCELLENCE/0524 and POST-DOC/0524. If a specific project proposal is identified as having been submitted in both calls, then none of the proposals will be sent to scientific evaluation.
- Project Coordinators of projects funded under the following calls: SMALL SCALE INFRASTRUCTURES/1222, STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURES/1222, CODEVELOP-AG-SHHE/0823 and CODEVELOP-REPOWEREU/1223 are not eligible to submit a proposal under this call, considering that these are large projects with several commitments and therefore the project coordinator is expected to devote significant time to them.
- All private organisations (Host Organisation and Partner Organisations) are required to register the updated data regarding their ultimate beneficial owners in the Competent National Registry / Archive, as per «The prevention and suppression of money laundering and terrorist financing Law of 2007 (188(I)/2007)». The RIF maintains the right to proceed with the appropriate checks in the competent Registries to verify the registration. For this purpose, all private organisations should submit an official proof for the data registration during the Contract Preparation stage. Furthermore, all

² The [ERC policy on PhD and equivalent doctoral degrees](#) applies

private organisations (Host Organisation and Partner Organisations) who request funding exceeding 150.000 Euro, during the Contract Preparation stage will be required to also submit the data (Name and Surname, ID / Passport Number and Date of Birth) of their ultimate beneficial owners through the relevant Declaration.

- Funded Projects should comply with the «Do No Significant Harm» principle, according to which they must not include or support activities that could cause significant harm to any of the six environmental objectives, as per Article 17 of Regulation (EU) No 2020/852, on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment.

SUBMISSION

Proposals are submitted through the Research and Innovation Foundation's IRIS Portal (<https://iris.research.org.cy>).

It is noted that, the Project Coordinator and all local participating organizations of the Cypriot Consortium, should register in advance on the IRIS Portal.

Potential applicants are advised to read the «**Guide for Applicants**» and «**IRIS Portal User Manual**» which can be found on the IRIS Portal (<https://iris.research.org.cy/#/documentlibrary>).

The Research and Innovation Foundation encourages in all its Calls for Proposals:

- *the participation of women as Project Coordinators, and*
- *a gender-balanced participation in Projects.*

The Project Proposal consists of the following parts:

1. Part A – General Information & Budget (electronic form (fields) to be completed online through the IRIS Portal).
2. Part B – Technical Annex (document to be uploaded as an Annex on the IRIS Portal in PDF format). *It is noted that the template provided for this Call must be submitted, without any differentiation. The Part B template can be found on the IRIS Portal, under the relevant Call for Proposals (Call Documents).*
3. Annex I – Curricula Vitae (document to be uploaded as an Annex on the IRIS Portal in PDF format and includes the CVs of the Coordinator and the key personnel of the project team – **Optional Submission**).
4. Annex III – Call Specific Information (documents to be uploaded as an Annex on the IRIS Portal in PDF format –):
 - (a) Declaration that "*The specific project proposal or a similar proposal has been submitted only once in one of the Calls EXCELLENCE/0524 and POST-DOC/0524*", **as per template provided under the call documents in IRIS – Obligatory Submission.**
 - (b) Copy of the PhD Certificate of the Project Coordinator – **Obligatory Submission.**

- (c) Where applicable, copies of the documents which account for the extension of the time limit of twelve (12) years from the acquisition of the PhD title of the Young Researcher, until the date of the Announcement of the Call.

PROJECT SELECTION

Evaluation Procedure

For the evaluation of Proposals to be submitted under the «Excellence Hubs» Programme, a Proposal Preliminary Check and a remote scientific evaluation procedure by three (3) independent evaluators (with a Consensus Report) will be followed, as described in the **RESTART 2016-2020 Work Programme – Programmes for the period May 2022 – December 2024.**

Prior to the scientific evaluation of each Proposal according to the evaluation criteria, evaluators are requested to assess the Proposal's compatibility with:

- the Objectives of the Programme and the Call for Proposals, and
- the «Do No Significant Harm» principle, and

the compatibility of the proposed type(s) of research with the proposed Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) and those allowed by the Call for Proposals.

The evaluator will not proceed with the assessment of the evaluation criteria should the Proposal fail the compatibility assessment.

Evaluation Criteria

1. Excellence – Weight 50%

- ⬡ Quality of Project Objectives.
- ⬡ Degree of Project Innovation and Originality in relation to the existing knowledge (state-of- the-art) at international level.
- ⬡ Soundness, credibility and feasibility of the proposed idea.
- ⬡ Relevance of the proposed research activities (basic research and industrial research) with the Project's, Programme's and specific Call's objectives (activities falling under Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) 1-4).

2. Added Value and Benefit – Weight 20%

- ⬡ Scientific and/or technological and/or social and/or economic impact and measures to maximize it.
- ⬡ Effectiveness of the proposed measures for the exploitation of results (including management of Intellectual Property Rights) and maximizing for achieving maximum Project visibility according to Open Science Principles.

3. Implementation – Weight 30%

- Completeness and appropriateness of the Work Packages' content, the allocation of the various activities (**including the allocation of person-months for each participating Organisation per Work Package**), the timetable and the budget.
- Effectiveness of the proposed methodology for the implementation of the deliverables.
- Completeness, quality and capacity of the Consortium for the implementation of the Project (at the level of Organisations and/or individuals) and achievement of the proposed objectives.

The following should also be considered:

- Suitability and level of contribution of the organisations and individuals of the Consortium (including the Foreign Research Organisations, where applicable) in the implementation of the project, according to their specialization and actual capabilities.
- Adequacy of the existing/proposed research infrastructure.
- Suitability and adequacy of the proposed coordination and management activities, including identification and handling of potential risks.

Selection

The following shall be selected for funding:

(a) a maximum of five (5) projects with an **Experienced Researcher as Project Coordinator** in each Scientific Area.

- The top **three (3) ranked** proposals (**with a minimum score of 13.00/15.00**) with an Experienced Researcher as Project Coordinator and Host Organisation a **privately funded research center / university** (if any) will be selected.

- The remaining proposals **with** an Experienced Researcher as Project Coordinator in order of score and with a maximum of **five (5)** Projects.

(b) the first eligible proposals (**with a minimum score of 13.00/15.00**) **with a Young Researcher as Project Coordinator and a Host Organisation a privately funded research center / university** (if any) up to a minimum of 30% of the total budget of each Scientific Area. The 30% includes the budget of the proposals selected under (a), if any.

(c) the remaining eligible proposals, in order of score, with a **Young Researcher as Project Coordinator**, regardless of Host Organization type and until the total available Budget of the Scientific Field is exhausted.

(d) the remaining eligible proposals, in order of score, with a **Young Researcher** as Project Coordinator, regardless of Host Organization type and until the total available Budget of the Call is exhausted.

INFORMATION – CONTACT DETAILS

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The Research and Innovation Foundation may at its discretion, proceed to the extension or revocation of the present Call by applying the same publication procedure.