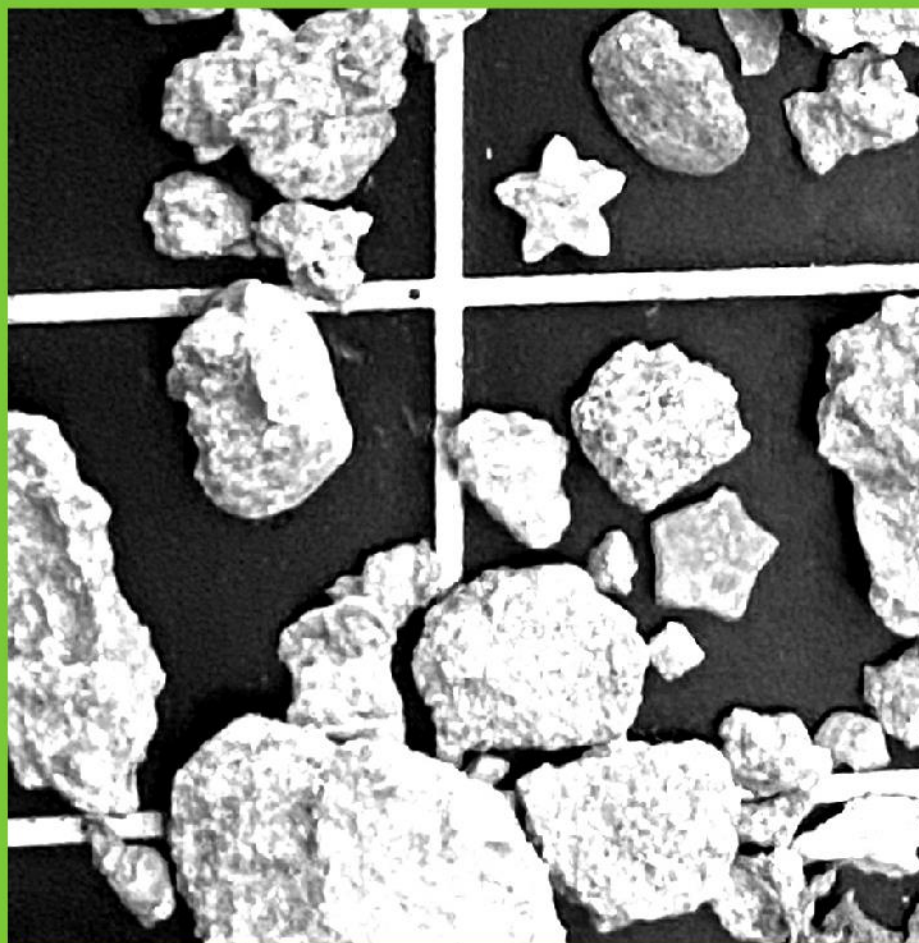


# Selection Guidelines



Luxembourg  
National  
Research Fund



# SELECTION GUIDELINES

## AFR 2024 CALL

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### **Changes to the previous call:**

None

## 1. AFR PhD Objectives

In line with FNR's vision, mission and strategic priorities, the key objectives of the AFR individual PhD programme are stated as follows:

- Attract and train the most talented doctoral candidates from any nationality in Luxembourg
- Support excellent Luxembourg stemming doctoral candidates to undertake their PhD training abroad
- Enhance high quality standards for PhD training in Luxembourg, by ensuring that the principles of the National Quality Framework for Doctoral Training (NQFDT) (adopted in 2015) are respected in the framework of the AFR programme.

The AFR programme has a bottom-up approach, i.e. proposals in all domains of research and technological development are eligible for funding.

The FNR has signed the "[Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#)" and therefore has introduced changes in how it assesses research proposals. This means that the FNR evaluates quality and impact independently of journal-based metrics and gives value to all research outputs.

## 2. Selection Process

The AFR review process consists of the following stages:

1. Proposals undergo an administrative eligibility check, based on formal requirements.
2. Eligible proposals are peer-reviewed by members of the expert panel and the
3. Thematic expert panels rate and rank the proposals and recommend funding.
4. The FNR decision bodies formally approve the proposals to be funded.
5. The funding decision is communicated to the applicants.

### 2.1 Eligibility Check

Following each call, proposals undergo an eligibility check. To be eligible, proposals must:

1. be submitted **before the deadline**,
2. be written in **English**,
3. be **complete** and respect the requested format (use the **templates** provided for the 1) narrative CV, 2) PhD Project Idea and 3) Joint Declaration and respect the maximum length (**characters** count)
  - the **Individual Narrative Profile (template provided)** + ORCIDID: these annexes are required for the a) Applicants and the b) Main Supervisor. An updated ORCID

profile is required in addition to this Individual Narrative Profile<sup>1</sup>. For further details, explanations and template see Individual Narrative Profile Guidelines<sup>2</sup>.

- the **PhD Project Idea (template provided)**: Applications must be written in English. Late or incomplete or proposals exceeding the indicated character limit in the Project idea Form are not eligible.
- the **Joint Declaration (template provided)** must be signed by the person authorised to legally commit the Host Institution of the involved applicant. For stipend applications only, the signature of the Joint Declaration by the main supervisor may be sufficient<sup>3</sup>

4. be submitted by an eligible AFR candidate: fulfil the criteria to register officially into a PhD (at the latest at project start) or be not enrolled in the PhD for more than (12) twelve months prior to the call deadline.

- **Applicants need to hold a university degree** of a recognised higher education institution, allowing them to enter into doctoral training. Please note that Medical Doctor (MD) studies are not taken equivalent to PhD studies and are not eligible within the AFR PhD scheme. If an applicant does not hold a degree yet at application stage, she/he must have obtained the degree prior to the start of the PhD research project and, in addition, she/he must join in the application a statement by their current supervisor addressing this issue.
- PhD candidates funded through AFR will need to be enrolled with a degree-awarding institution (either the University of Luxembourg or an academic institution abroad).
- Applicants for the AFR PhD scheme can already be enrolled in their PhD, but they must not be enrolled for more than (12) **twelve months**- taking into account the month of the deadline - prior to the deadline. This eligibility criteria is important also for a resubmission.
- PhD candidates already supported by FNR funding (PRIDE, CORE, OPEN, INTER, ATTRACT, PEARL etc.) are not eligible.
- Eligibility criterion for "AFR Outgoing": PhD candidates are eligible for support of their doctoral project outside Luxembourg if they are either Luxembourg nationals or if they are living in Luxembourg since at least 5 years (residence certificate to be submitted with the application).

5. be submitted together with an eligible supervisor in an eligible host institution

- The main supervisor in an AFR individual application needs to fulfil the [FNR requirements for supervisors](#).
- The main supervisor in an AFR individual application can only support one (1) application per AFR call.

Applications not conforming to one of these elements are rejected at this stage and are not peer reviewed.

<sup>1</sup> <https://orcid.org>. ORCID profile serves as a replacement for a traditional CV, where you can list your outputs (scientific and otherwise), funding acquired, and history of academic affiliation.

<sup>2</sup> <https://storage.fnr.lu/index.php/s/vg3nJgsYVKvgYIX/download>

<sup>3</sup> If compliant with the Host Institution's rules

## 2.2 Research Integrity

**Research misconduct**, e.g. provision of false information, plagiarism or falsification of data, may result in a rejection of the proposal. Applicants must comply with the [‘FNR Research Integrity Guidelines’](#). In addition, an automatized check for plagiarism is conducted on randomly chosen applications.

## 3. General Guidelines for selection panel

The FNR is committed to implement a merit review process that adheres to international standards of transparency, impartiality, confidentiality and integrity, as defined in the [Statement of Principles for Scientific Merit Review](#), issued by the 2012 «Global Summit on Merit Review».

All panel experts must read and abide by the [FNR Ethics Charter and Code of Conduct for Research Assessment](#). In particular, they are expected to observe the principle of **confidentiality** and **impartiality** and **must declare conflicts of interest**.

Panel members are required to sign in advance a ‘Review Participation Form’ and have to declare a potential conflict of interest (COI) at any moment in the selection process. In case of a conflict of interest, panel members withdraw from their reviewer and selection panel tasks. If for some reason a panel member is not able to fulfil their obligations for a given task, the FNR should be informed immediately. The work cannot be delegated to another person without the prior written agreement of the FNR.

For evaluating the proposal, **please consider only information submitted by the applicant**. This includes the proposal, and all attachments, as well as the ORCID profile of the applicant.

FNR is a signatory of the [DORA Declaration](#). Reviewers should therefore evaluate quality and impact independently of journal-based metrics and give value to all types of research outputs. In particular:

- Focus on the content and quality of scientific outputs, rather than their number, the venue of publication, or the aggregate metrics of the journals and researchers.
- Take into account the diverse range of all possible research-related and non-research related outputs. Important outputs vary between disciplines and individuals, and may go beyond research articles, including data, reagents, software, mentoring, group leadership, mentoring, societal outreach, intellectual property, and policy changes.
- Be sensitive to legitimate delays in active research activity, and personal factors (parental or other types of leave, part-time working, and disability) that may have affected the applicant’s research actions and output record.

### 3.1. Rating of Proposals

**Ethical considerations:** comments should be provided only if the proposal gives rise to any ethical issues.

The assessment of the selection criteria goes from excellent to fair/poor.

An overall assessment of the proposal and **justification for the funding recommendation** is provided in the table below.

Final Score	Explanation
A+	Proposal of excellent quality and outstanding international standards that should be funded as proposed. The proposal scores excellent on all or most criteria.
A	Proposal of very good quality and high international calibre that should be funded. The proposal scores very good (and even excellent) on all or most criteria.
B	Proposal of very good quality, but with shortcomings on one of the selection criteria. The proposal could be improved to become an excellent proposal.
C	Proposal of insufficient quality and with major shortcomings on one or more selection criteria.

The following points should be addressed in the overall assessment of the proposal:

- most important **strengths and weaknesses** of the mobility proposal,
- any **modifications** to the proposal that are necessary,
- any other **comments justifying the funding recommendation**.

## 4. Specific Guidelines for Panel Experts

Please read this section if you have been invited to participate in the AFR expert panel.

### 4.1. AFR Panel and the members' roles

AFR PhD proposals are reviewed by an international expert panel composed by a chair and up to two dozen domain experts. The panel is nominated annually by the FNR.

The task of the panel is to analyse the proposals, propose a selection of projects that fulfil the AFR selection criteria best, rate and rank them, and issue a funding recommendation.

To this end, before the panel meeting panel experts are requested to:

1. Carefully read the Programme Description, the [FNR Ethics Charter and Code of Conduct for Research Assessment](#) and the present Peer Review Guidelines;
2. Sign a 'Participation Form'
3. Thoroughly read the assigned proposals

4. Complete and submit a Review providing comments and scoring the proposals at least 10 working days before the panel meeting in order to allow enough time for the other panel members and FNR staff to read the documents.

During the panel meeting panel experts are requested to:

5. Orally present the review during the 'Panel meeting';
6. Participate in the discussion of all proposals during the Panel meeting;
7. Prepare the **'Panel Conclusion'** for the projects assigned to them after the panel meeting;

## 4.2. Panel Meeting

Prior to the panel meeting, the FNR prepares a ranking based on the reviews received. Proposals not fulfilling the minimal quality criteria (with low scorings by all reviewers) do not need to be discussed in the panel meeting. However, the justification of the low scoring will be checked by the panel.

## 4.3. Roles and responsibilities

### Panel Chair

- Reads all applications in detail;
- Guides the discussion, ensures high-quality discussion and appropriate behaviour;
- Ensures clear and fair outcomes from the meeting; if necessary, decides to proceed to a vote in order to reach a clear outcome;
- With the Panel Secretary, keeps the meeting to time.

### Panel Expert

- Thoroughly reads the assigned proposals and provides review reports;
- Thoroughly reads all proposals and provided reports for assigned proposals, prepares and presents the 'Review';
- Participates in discussion of all applications (unless conflict of interest);
- Participates in the rating and ranking of all applications (unless conflict of interest).

### FNR Programme manager (acting as Panel Secretary)

- Liaises with Chair and members; provides papers and communicates dates; is point of contact for queries and problems;
- Briefs Chair about important issues prior to the meeting;
- Briefs new members on expectations, roles and responsibilities;



- Provides context on applications, FNR programmes, on the Luxembourg research landscape and on the national situation in general;
- Supervises adherence to FNR rules, policies and positions;
- Manages conflicts of interest (panel members);
- Refers the management of a conflict of interest (Panel Chair) to the FNR Secretary-general;
- Manages the agenda and, with the Chair, keeps the meeting to time;
- Records and disseminates decisions;
- Does not contribute to assessing or scoring proposals.

#### Observers

- May include other FNR staff, potential future committee members, and representatives of partner organisations;
- Do not contribute to assessing or scoring proposals.

### 4.4. Panel discussions

Panel meetings start with a **briefing by the Panel Secretary** about relevant FNR policies and funding programmes. Panel members will be reminded that they must **declare conflicts of interest** and are invited to come forward.

The panel then proceeds to the actual **discussion of the proposals**. The panel expert whom the proposal was assigned to, presents his/her synthesis of the written evaluations, focusing on the following issues:

- Objective of the proposal;
- Fulfilment of the selection criteria, including highlighting possible conflicting statements of reviewers;
- Strengths and weaknesses;
- Overall assessment of the application;
- Necessary modifications of the proposal (if applicable).

After this short presentation, panel members are invited by the Panel Chair to discuss the evaluation findings and readjust the rating of the proposal if deemed necessary (including argumentation).

After rating all the proposals, the Panel Members discuss which proposals should benefit from a financial support of the FNR. At the end of the meeting, taking into account the available budget, the panel draws a list of proposals recommended for funding and those not recommended for funding. A+ and A proposals which, due to budget restrictions, cannot be funded will be ranked, in case additional funding will become available (reserve list). If no



consensus regarding the funding recommendation emerges, the Chair will proceed to a vote. A positive funding recommendation requires a majority of two thirds of panel members.

#### 4.5. Standards of Panel discussions

- Engage in discussion of all applications, whether they're in your field or not.
- Make any comments you think are important but nobody else has yet made, raise any concerns, and ask any questions.
- Feel free to challenge the consensus, if there's an application that only you are enthusiastic about or disappointed by – but be prepared to justify your view. Don't defer to confidently expressed opinions if you have grounds for disagreeing.
- If your assessment of an application is influenced by any personal knowledge of the applicant (over and above what's in the application or is publicly available), please declare this at the time.
- When doing your final assessment, remember to consider the comments of your fellow committee members.

#### 4.6. Panel Conclusion

For all proposals, the panel finalises the **'Panel Conclusion'** after the panel meeting.

The **'Panel Conclusion'** serves as the basis for the formal decision process within the FNR. This document should therefore be as comprehensive as possible, clear and unambiguous indicating the strengths, weaknesses and a conclusion. A standardised panel conclusion will be used for proposals that have not fulfilled the minimal quality criteria. In case of a voting, the indication of the number of votes in favour and against a positive funding recommendation must be stated (but not the names of those who voted one way or another).

The 'Panel Conclusion' is the only feedback that will be sent to the applicant.

The funding decision will be sent to the applicant and the supervisor(s).