

Translation

aws First Incubator – Call 1 2025

Guideline specifications pursuant to sections 3.2.1, 3.2.2. and 3.2.3 of the aws guideline for funding schemes from resources of the National Foundation for Research, Technology and Development

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1 Introduction

The federal government's goal is to increase the number of knowledge-intensive start-ups and to bring the expertise of international founders to Austria. The aim is to make Austria more attractive and competitive as a business location. In order to achieve this goal, conditions must be created that enable people to establish their companies in Austria. Innovative-minded people with an already valid residence title or work permit in Austria are to be assisted and supported on the path from their idea to a possible implementation of the business model in a company when they set up the company in Austria. In particular, the programme aims to support the development of such a business model as well as personal development financially, materially and by imparting the necessary knowledge. The programme does not make its contribution "from scratch" but, as a module of the AWS First Incubator, is intended to give a further target group - international students and internationals in Austria - the opportunity to further develop their start-up idea. It is intended to increase the number of knowledge-intensive start-ups in Austria.

2 Programme goal

The programme is to assist international individual founders and teams with at least 50% internationals consisting of a maximum of four people from the idea to the business model and to the potential founding of a company in Austria.

The AWS First Incubator programme therefore specifically targets:

- Improving an effective entrepreneurship environment by:
 - Coaching people on entrepreneurship in Austria
 - Implementing an incubator programme for intensive support of up to ten projects
 - The provision of assistance during company foundation by experienced experts
 - Organising events that serve the objectives of the programme
 - Implementing training sessions and professionalisation measures
 - Implementing project-specific mentoring
 - Establishing a community characterised by the willingness to promote entrepreneurship.
- Accelerating technology- and knowledge-intensive start-ups
- Professionalising companies in innovation protection
- Increasing entrepreneurial innovations to resolve challenges to society
- More strongly enhancing participation of women in start-up teams and in selection and decision-making processes

3 Legal basis

3.1 National legal basis

This programme document is based on the aws guideline for funding schemes from resources of the National Foundation for Research, Technology and Development, which is specified in more detail in these guideline specifications.

3.2 European legal basis

Module A

According to the aws guideline for funding schemes from resources of the National Foundation for Research, Technology and Development, the public funding scheme AWS First Incubator Module A is not subject to EU state aid law, as the grant recipients are natural persons who have not yet founded a company or generated sales, and thus no distortion of competition can occur.

Module B

The following regulations shall be applied:

- Commission Regulation (EU) No. 651/2014 of June 17, 2014 (amended and by Regulation (EU) No 2023/1315 of 23 June 2023) declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the of certain categories of aid with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, OJ L 187 of 26.6.2014 (General Block Exemption Regulation, in short: GBER)
- Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/2831 of 13 December 2023 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid, OJ L, 2023/2831, 15.12.2023 (in short: De Minimis Regulation);

This Guideline, together with the guideline specifications, shall be notified to the European Commission for exemption.

SMEs within the meaning of this Guideline are those covered by the European Commission Recommendation in accordance with the "Definition of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME)" (Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC of 6 May 2003, OJ L 124/36, 20/05/2003, as amended). For the purposes of this Recommendation, linked companies are regarded as a single unit.

Modul A

4 Object of the funding

Funding is provided for the incubation of innovative business ideas from the idea phase to the start-up phase.

Module A supports pre-competitive entrepreneurial start-up projects. All funding measures serve to introduce people to economic activities, such as the development of a business model that is ready for business or the development of initial prototypes.

5 Grant recipients

The programme is aimed at international individual founders and teams of up to four people.

The minimum percentage of internationals in a team is 50%.

In the present case, the following requirements apply in relation to internationals:

- Non-Austrian citizens,
- with a valid residence and work permit in Austria for the duration of the funding agreement,
- with max. 5 years of residence in Austria at the time of the application.

Only natural persons are eligible for funding if they are willing to start a company in Austria. However, the foundation following the programme is not a mandatory requirement for funding under the programme. Nevertheless, a company with the planned project may only be founded in Austria within the next 3 years after the end of the project period.

The grant recipients must have reached the age of 18 years.

6 Design of funding

6.1 Type and amount of funding

Funding is carried out by means of:

- The granting of a subsidy of up to 90% of the eligible costs or a maximum of EUR 49,000.

Gender bonus: If, at the time the grant is awarded, the project includes (one or more) women who (will in future) hold more than 25% of the shares, the grant awarded increases to up to 100% of the eligible costs or a maximum of EUR 55,000.

Proof of qualifications relevant to the project must be provided when claiming the gender bonus. Proof must also be provided of the acquisition of the relevant shares and the participation of the (future) female partners in a managerial role at the time of foundation or during the term of the project. This does not apply to absences due to periods of maternity leave or parental leave.

and

- From innovation consulting services
Innovation consulting services for innovation protection with a flat-rate equivalent value of max. EUR 1,700.

Innovation consulting services for start-ups and professionalization measures with a maximum flat-rate equivalent value of EUR 20,000.

These innovation consulting services represent non-monetary support. The funding applicants do not incur any costs from this title.

The amount of funding is based on the project's eligibility for funding and its funding requirements, which are documented by financial planning (defined under point 7.1.).

6.2 Eligible projects

Projects are eligible if they:

- are conducive to the development of an entrepreneurial personality and/or
- show potential for market success, in particular through realisable product or process innovation and/or
- improve the quality, design or usability of products or services already on offer and increase customer benefit.

6.3 Eligible costs

All costs or expenses that can be classified as measures for the introduction to entrepreneurial activities are eligible for funding according to section 3.3. of the guideline. This includes:

- Personnel costs

Personnel costs for founders, insofar as they are employed for the respective project.

To simplify accounting, hourly rate calculations can be used by aws in the forms for cost plans and accounts. An hourly rate of EUR 25.00 must be assumed, which may be adjusted annually by AWS and will be published on the website.

- Training costs

Specialised start-up advice and professionalisation measures by AWS in the form of workshops, training, coaching and mentoring sessions. These services can also be carried out by service providers commissioned by AWS. If specialised coaching services cannot be provided by AWS itself or by the service providers commissioned by AWS, further consulting fees conducive to the success of the project may be covered by the grant.

- Material costs (tangible and intangible investments)

Costs within the framework of establishing, start-up and growth of a company. These can include conception, pilot and prototype costs, industrial design costs, training costs, intellectual property rights management, market development or costs to obtain growth financing.

- Third-party costs

e.g. cost of contractual research; costs of specific coaching and equivalent services (especially theme-specific mentoring or coaching); market studies and research; marketing and communication costs

- Rental costs for workplaces

e.g. costs incurred for renting workspaces in co-working spaces, office space, workshops or 'maker spaces'.

- Travel costs

Travel expenses incurred in travelling to various events to be attended as part of the programme.

6.4 Disbursement

- The personnel costs of a maximum of EUR 7,200.00 are usually paid out in monthly instalments after acceptance into the AWS First Incubator Programme and after fulfilment of the requirements and conditions stipulated in the funding agreement.
- Any non-repayable grant for non-personnel costs, third-party costs, rental costs and travel costs to AWS First Incubator events will be paid out to an account specified by the grant recipient after submission of the project cost statement in accordance with section 6.3.2. of the guideline. This project cost statement must include the original receipts for the expenses. The project cost statement must be submitted to Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS) in order to be eligible for the grant.
- Training costs and participation fees for other events recommended by Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS) are settled directly with third parties.

The exact disbursement conditions are specified in the funding agreement.

7 Process of granting funding

7.1 Application for grant to participate in the AWS First Incubator

A two-step process is used to identify those projects that will subsequently receive a funding agreement to participate in the AWS First Incubator.

Applications for funding must be submitted electronically using the documents provided by Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS) and by a deadline set by Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS), specifying the desired module in the application tool.

A submitted application for funding must include a statement from the applicant for funding that the information provided is correct and complete.

The funding application shall contain the following as a minimum:

- Name of the applicant for funding and of the person applying on behalf of the applicant for funding, including contact details,
- Description of the project, indicating the start and completion date,
- Location of project,
- a schedule of performance, costs, time and finance conforming to the specific character of the service and all other documents relevant to the funded service,
- Supplement on other project-relevant funding schemes, pursuant to section 5.2.2. of the guideline,
- Amount of funding required for the project

7.2 Decision-making process for participation in the AWS First Incubator

AWS first examines all incoming funding applications with regard to formal and content-related requirements. Only applications that are assessed positively and as complete according to this transparent procedure are to be submitted to the jury.

1. Evaluation stage

The jury evaluates the applications according to the selection criteria. The maximum of 20 projects with the highest scores will be selected to participate in the Assessment Centre, the second assessment stage.

2. Evaluation stage

In the Assessment Centre, the participants, supported by experts, go through a selection process in which the jury is given the opportunity to make its decisions based on the results of the assessment. Based on the evaluation criteria provided by Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS), the jury evaluates the individual projects after the Assessment Centre. A final jury session then identifies up to ten projects that will be accepted into the AWS First Incubator programme.

7.3 Procedure for applicants for funding who are to be rejected

• First evaluation stage

Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS) is obliged to reject applicants for fundings who have applied for funding to participate in AWS First Incubator and have been rejected in the first evaluation stage (subsequently ineligible to participate in the Assessment Centre) in writing, providing the reasons for the rejection.

• Second evaluation stage

Projects that are rejected after participation in the Assessment Centre must be informed of this in writing, alongside the reasons for the rejection.

7.4 Evaluation and decision-making criteria

The following evaluation criteria are used to assess applications:

- Innovation potential of the project,
- Market potential of the project,
- Business potential of the project,
- Viability of the project - in particular the size of the market, unique selling propositions, feasibility and profitability of the project,
- Entrepreneurial potential of the applicants for fundings - in particular, competences and experience of the applicants for fundings, if applicable, distribution of roles in the start-up team, communication of the start-up project and commitment to the implementation of the project,
- Additional points for projects involving women in key leadership positions and projects that address social challenges.

7.5 Assessment panel

The composition of the assessment panel (jury) is determined by Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS). The jury will consist of international and national experts from Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS) as well as start-up experts.

8 Processing of funding

8.1 Funding agreement

In the event of a favourable decision to participate in the AWS First Incubator, Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS) must send each grant recipient or applicant for funding a funding agreement in writing for a limited period of time. If the applicants for funding confirm the funding agreement, including any terms and conditions, with their signature by the specified deadline, the funding agreement shall be concluded.

8.2 Minimum rules for the design of the funding agreement

- Designation of legal basis
- Name of the grant recipients, including data that guarantees identification (e.g. date of birth, Commercial Register number, etc.),
- Start date of the funding term,
- Type and amount of funding
- Exact description of the funded project (object of funding)
- Eligible and ineligible costs
- Reporting obligations
- Terms of payment
- Monitoring and cooperation in evaluation
- Provisions on suspension and repayment of funding (section 8 of the guideline),
- Special funding conditions, which conform to the specific characteristic of the project to be funded and also ensure that federal funds are only committed for this in the extent that is absolutely necessary to achieve the targeted result
- Liability disclaimer pursuant to section 12 of the guideline
- Other contractual provisions to be agreed

Module B

9 Object of the funding

Funding is provided for the incubation of innovative business ideas from the idea phase to the start-up phase.

Module B supports entrepreneurial start-up projects, which use the development of products and services as well as market-ready business models to lead to the first economic implementation steps.

10 Grant recipients

The programme is aimed at companies that were established in Austria by international individual founders and founding teams of up to four people.

The minimum percentage of internationals in a founding team is 50%.

In the present case, the following requirements apply in relation to internationals:

- Non-Austrian citizens
- with a valid residence and work permit in Austria during the time of the funding agreement,
- with max. 5 years of residence in Austria at the time of the application.

Only legal entities and partnerships that operate a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) and whose founders and founding teams meet the above requirements are eligible for funding.

The minimum percentage of internationals in a founding team must be maintained throughout the duration of the project.

The company foundation must not be more than 6 months ago at the time of submitting the application. Turnover already generated with the project to be submitted must not exceed EUR 10,000.00 net.

The enterprise to be funded must have a registered office or business premises in Austria.

11 Design of funding

11.1 Type and amount of funding,

- The granting of a subsidy of up to 90% of the eligible costs or a maximum of EUR 49,000.

Gender bonus: If, at the time the grant is awarded, the project includes (one or more) women who (will in future) hold more than 25% of the shares, the grant awarded increases to up to 100% of the eligible costs or a maximum of EUR 55,000.

Proof of qualifications relevant to the project must be provided when claiming the gender bonus. Proof must also be provided of the acquisition of the relevant shares and the participation of the (future) female partners in a managerial role at the time of foundation or during the term of the project. This does not apply to absences due to periods of maternity leave or parental leave.

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- From innovation consulting services
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Innovation consulting services for start-ups and professionalization measures with a maximum flat-rate equivalent value of EUR 20,000.

These innovation consulting services represent non-monetary support. The funding applicants do not incur any costs from this title.

The amount of funding is based on the project's eligibility for funding and its funding requirements, which are documented by financial planning (defined under section 11.1.).

11.2 Eligible projects

Projects are eligible if they:

- are conducive to the development of an entrepreneurial personality and/or
- show potential for market success, in particular through realisable product or process innovation and/or
- improve the quality, design or usability of products or services already on offer and increase customer benefit.

11.3 Eligible costs

All costs and expenses incurred in connection with start-up projects as well as coaching, studies and innovation services and the formation of networks are eligible for funding according to section 3.3. of the guideline.

This includes:

- Personnel costs

Personnel costs for founders and employees, insofar as they are employed for the respective project. To simplify accounting, hourly rate calculations can be used by AWS in the forms for cost plans and accounts. An hourly rate of EUR 25.00 must be assumed, which may be adjusted annually by AWS and will be published on the website.

- Training costs

Specialised start-up advice and professionalisation measures by AWS in the form of workshops, training, coaching and mentoring sessions. These services can also be carried out by service providers commissioned by AWS. If specialised coaching services cannot be provided by AWS itself or by the service providers commissioned by AWS, further consulting fees conducive to the success of the project may be covered by the grant.

- Material costs (tangible and intangible investments)

Costs within the framework of establishing, start-up and growth of a company. These can include conception, pilot and prototype costs, industrial design costs, training costs, intellectual property rights management, market development or costs to obtain growth financing.

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- Rental costs for workplaces

e.g. costs incurred for renting workspaces in co-working spaces, office space, workshops or 'maker spaces'.

- Travel costs

Travel expenses incurred in travelling to various events to be attended as part of the programme.

11.4 Disbursement

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- Any non-repayable grant for non-personnel costs, third-party costs, rental costs and travel costs to AWS First Incubator events will be paid out to an account specified by the grant recipient after submission of the project cost statement in accordance with section 6.3.2. of the guideline. This project cost statement must include the original receipts for the expenses. The project cost statement must be submitted to Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS) in order to be eligible for the grant.
- Training costs and participation fees for other events recommended by Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS) are settled directly with third parties.

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A submitted application for funding must include a statement from the applicant for funding that the information provided is correct and complete.

The funding application shall contain the following as a minimum:

- Name of the applicant for funding and of the person applying on behalf of the applicant for funding, including contact details,
- in the event of funding applicant companies, the commercial register number and data on the size of the company, as well as all necessary documents to establish SME status,
- Description of the project, indicating the start and completion date,
- Location of project,
- a schedule of performance, costs, time and finance conforming to the specific character of the service and all other documents relevant to the funded service,
- Supplement on other project-relevant funding schemes, pursuant to section 5.2.2. of the guideline,
- Amount of funding required for the project.

12.2 Decision-making process for participation in the AWS First Incubator

AWS first examines all incoming funding applications with regard to formal and content-related requirements. Only applications that are assessed positively and as complete according to this transparent procedure are to be submitted to the jury.

3. Evaluation stage

The jury evaluates the applications according to the selection criteria. The maximum of 20 projects with the highest scores will be selected to participate in the Assessment Centre, the second assessment stage.

4. Evaluation stage

In the Assessment Centre, the participants, supported by experts, go through a selection process in which the jury is given the opportunity to make its decisions based on the results of the assessment. Based on the evaluation criteria provided by Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS), the jury evaluates the individual projects after the Assessment Centre. A final jury session then identifies up to ten projects that will be accepted into the AWS First Incubator programme.

In the event of a favourable decision to participate in the AWS First Incubator, Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS) must send each grant recipient or applicant for funding a funding agreement in writing for a limited period of time. If the applicants for funding confirm the funding agreement, including any terms and conditions, with their signature by the specified deadline, the funding agreement shall be concluded.

12.3 Procedure for applicants for funding who are to be rejected

- First evaluation stage

Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS) is obliged to reject applicants for fundings who have applied for funding to participate in AWS First Incubator and have been rejected in the first evaluation stage (subsequently ineligible to participate in the Assessment Centre) in writing, providing the reasons for the rejection.

- Second evaluation stage

Projects that are rejected after participation in the Assessment Centre must be informed of this in writing, alongside the reasons for the rejection.

12.4 Evaluation and decision-making criteria

The following evaluation criteria are used to assess applications:

- Innovation potential of the project,
- Market potential of the project,
- Business potential of the project,
- Viability of the project - in particular the size of the market, unique selling propositions, feasibility and profitability of the project,
- Entrepreneurial potential of the applicants for fundings - in particular, competences and experience of the applicants for fundings, if applicable, distribution of roles in the start-up team, communication of the start-up project and commitment to the implementation of the project,
- Additional points for projects involving women in key leadership positions and projects that address social challenges.

12.5 Assessment panel

The composition of the assessment panel (jury) is determined by Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS). The jury will consist of international and national experts from Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS) as well as start-up experts.

13 Processing of funding

13.1 Funding agreement

In the event of a favourable decision to participate in the AWS First Incubator, Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS) must send each grant recipient or applicant for funding a funding agreement in writing for a limited period of time. If the applicants for funding confirm the funding agreement, including any terms and conditions, with their signature by the specified deadline, the funding agreement shall be concluded.

13.2 Minimum rules for the design of the funding agreement

- Designation of legal basis,
- Name of funding recipients, including data that guarantees identification (e.g. date of birth, Commercial Register number, etc.),
- Start date of the funding term,
- Type and amount of funding
- Exact description of the funded project (object of funding)
- Eligible and ineligible costs
- Reporting obligations
- Terms of payment
- Monitoring and cooperation in evaluation
- Provisions on suspension and repayment of funding (see section 8),

- Special funding conditions, which conform to the specific characteristic of the project to be funded and also ensure that federal funds are only committed for this in the extent that is absolutely necessary to achieve the targeted result
- Liability disclaimer pursuant to section 12 of the guideline
- Other contractual provisions to be agreed.

14 Indicators for checking the achievement of objectives

In order to enable the collection of data, the funding agreements for modules A and B must include a corresponding condition according to which the grant recipient undertakes to provide data at a later date. The following indicators are to be used for monitoring and evaluating the programme in question:

14.1 Performance management indicators (=output indicators)

In the sense of alignment with the funding objective, the following indicators are to be used for the accompanying evaluation of the performance output:

Level 1: Activities in the run-up to the AWS First Incubator Programme

- Number of persons advised
- Number of events

Level 2: Selection process

- Number of jury meetings
- Number of applications
- Share of women in assessment panels

Level 3: AWS First Incubator programme

- Number of innovative start-up projects
- Number of young T&I companies with start-up and growth coaching and networking measures
- Number of projects with Innovation Protection coaching
- Share of projects that contribute to achieving SDGs, in particular climate and environmental goals
- Number of projects with digitalisation relevance
- Share of start-up projects with women in the management team
- Number of training units (=workshops) in the AWS First Incubator programme
- Number of mentoring meetings
- Total support measures taken up
- Number of networking events

Level 4: Activities outside the AWS First Incubator programme:

- Number of events
- Number of persons advised

14.2 Indicators for impact management (outcome/impact indicators)

In the sense of alignment with the funding objective, the following indicators are to be used for the (external) evaluation of the performance output:

Level 1: Selection process

Quantitative

- Number of applications
- Number of participants in the assessment process

Qualitative

- Satisfaction of the participants
- Learning progress of the participants

Level 3: AWS First International programme

Quantitative

- Number of business models
- Number of teams/grant recipients who drop out of the programme
- Number of people entering the programme halfway through (team-up)

Qualitative

- Willingness to start their own business was positively influenced by AWS First Incubator
- Increased quality of business models
- Access to professional expertise is created
- Locating and removing final obstacles before setting up a company
- Creation of contacts that are used to further the business idea (networking)

In order to compare the willingness to start a company as well as the quality of the business models of the grant recipients with people who are not able to participate in the AWS First Incubator, the grant recipients who receive a rejection after the Assessment Centre are asked to provide their data as well as to be available for qualitative interviews.

15 Monitoring and evaluation concept

For the purpose of programme evaluation, Austria Wirtschaftsservice Gesellschaft mbH (AWS) has to set up appropriate monitoring. Since AWS First Incubator is a pilot module of the AWS First Incubator Programme, the programme management has to conduct an accompanying evaluation and continuously collect data needed for an ex-post evaluation. At the level of the programme evaluation, the conception, implementation and impact are to be analysed generally and recommendations for the continuation and a new application to the National Foundation for Research, Technology and Development as well as for any modifications of the guideline and/or the guideline specifications are to be derived from this.

16 Project duration

Projects under the AWS First Incubator must be completed within ten months (starting from the date of the funding offer), unless agreed otherwise in the funding agreement.

17 Programme term

This guideline specifications shall enter into force on 1 March 2025 and end on 31 December 2026.