



FFG

Promoting Innovation.

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COMET COMPETENCE CENTERS FOR EXCELLENT TECHNOLOGIES

GUIDELINES FOR COMET PROJECTS

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This document is a translated version of the original German version. In cases of unclear formulation, the German version is the decisive document.

Changes compared to version 2.0 (Call 2024)

- Chapter 2.1 and 2.11: Additions to the sustainability objectives and consideration in the evaluation criteria
- Chapter 2.2: Addition of „n.n. projects“ to strategic projects
- Chapter 2.5: Reformulation of the guidelines regarding ineligible organizations
- Chapter 2.11: Evaluation of diversity aspects in the research programme and in organization and management
- Chapter 3.3: Addition of a new section on disclosure requirements and freedom of information

1 PREAMBLE

The FFG is your partner for research and development. These Guidelines are designed to support you in submitting your COMET Project application. It describes:

- how to obtain funding
- what conditions must be met
- how the application process works

The goals and priorities, the budget and the submission deadlines that are relevant to your project are described in the corresponding call announcement. Please note that there might be call-specific specifications or restrictions of these guidelines' regulations (e.g. maximum project duration, maximum funding).

2 THE BASIS FOR GETTING FUNDED

2.1 What is COMET?

COMET (Competence Centers for Excellent Technologies) comprises three lines.

The 3-line model enables

- access to COMET via a COMET Project in a consortium (min. 1 scientific partner, min. 3 company partners)
- development of competences and human resources in a physical COMET Centre (min. 1 scientific partner, min. 5 company partners)
- opening up of new research areas for a COMET Centre via a COMET Module (min. 1 scientific partner, min. 3 company partners)

The COMET lines are assigned to FFGs instruments summarized under "Structure", which serve to establish and improve structures of research and innovation.

The COMET lines (COMET Project, COMET Centre, COMET Module) are characterised by high research expertise and links to science as well as by high relevance of implementation in industry.

All lines are open with regard to research fields and topics, but each individual project must focus on a clearly defined theme. The research programme is defined jointly by science and industry and does not simply constitute a conglomeration of

individual projects, but creates substantial added value as a result of cooperation and joint strategic orientation.

The degree of novelty of the research, and therefore the strategic orientation, is increasing from COMET Project to COMET Centre to COMET Module. While research programmes of COMET Projects and COMET Centres consist of a relevant mix of strategic and multi-firm projects, COMET Modules, due to their high degree of novelty, focuses exclusively on strategic research, which is also reflected by the high funding rate (80 %).

Bilateral research collaborations (single-firm projects) in COMET Projects and COMET Centres must be limited to a maximum of 20% of eligible costs. No single-firm projects are allowed for COMET Modules.

A fixed funding rate was specified for COMET Projects (45%), COMET Centres (50%) and COMET Modules (80%) due to their high degree of novelty.

Funding applicants are consortia including a minimum of one research institution and several companies. A key condition is that the consortium fulfils the multi-firm criterion: COMET Centres must involve a minimum of five companies, COMET Projects and COMET Modules at least three.

COMET addresses enterprises of all sectors and sizes. The rates defined for financial contributions from companies apply at project level and do not have to be met by each individual company.

The strategic objectives of COMET are:

- **Developing and focussing competences** through long-term research cooperation between science and industry at the highest level.
- **Strengthening Austria as a business location:** accelerating technology transfer to industry should serve to create new products, processes and services, open up new markets and increase the innovative capacity of companies.
- **Strengthening Austria as a research location:** excellent cooperative research should trigger new research impulses and establish promising/emerging fields of research.
- **Strengthening the competitiveness of science and industry by driving internationalisation** as a sign of high-quality cooperative research: involving internationally-renowned scientists, organisations and companies, positioning COMET Centres as internationally attractive partners, and ongoing benchmarking with top research institutions are designed to generate an edge in international competition.
- **Establishing and developing human resources:** increasingly attracting scientists of international renown, creating structured career models for scientists, and actively supporting intersectoral mobility for research personnel in order to intensify the transfer of know-how.

Sustainability:

COMET aligns with the global Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (SDGs) and the European elements of the EU Green Deal. Further detailed information can be found on the [FFG Website](#).

COMET Projects should contribute to solving societal challenges and supporting the transformation of the Austrian economy¹ in its sustainable change.

The six thematic clusters of Pillar 2 of the “Horizon Europe” programme are used as the basis for the definition of societal challenges. For further information see [FFG Website](#) (global-challenges).

2.2 What are COMET Projects?

Within COMET Projects, high-quality research is carried out through collaboration between academia and industry. The aim is to do research towards exploitable products, processes, and services that have strong development potential and can reach market maturity in the medium term.

Funding is provided for a cooperative research programme that creates clear added value for both industry and research.

COMET Projects address consortia that are seeking to enter the COMET programme and aim to build close partnerships between academia and industry. The funding is intended to contribute to the development of a sustainable profile for the consortium. There is also the possibility of long-term development into a COMET Centre.

A maximum of one (1) follow-up project is permitted per COMET project. A rejected COMET project application can be resubmitted.

COMET projects are characterized by research excellence and high-level of implementation relevance in the corporate sector. At the core is a joint research programme between academia and industry, which is not a collection of individual projects and has a clearly defined USP.

The research programme planned within the framework of the COMET project can consist of up to 10 individual projects and can be divided into up to 3 areas.

An Area represents a thematically and methodologically distinct unit in the research programme and must be coherent. It consists of individual projects.

¹The aim is to strengthen the competitiveness, resilience and autonomy of companies and establish sustainable value chains in Austria. Further information can be found on the [FFG Website](#) (transformation offensive).

There are generally two types of projects: company projects, which are divided into “multi-firm” and “single-firm” projects, and strategic projects (see glossary for definition of “projects”). The share of “single-firm projects” has to be limited to a maximum of 20% of the eligible costs. The share of strategic projects represents an important indicator of the novelty content of the research and is therefore also a key target value.

A part of the strategic projects can be planned as so-called “N.N. projects” (“not named”) and does not need to be defined in detail. This makes the research programme more flexible and provides room to respond quickly to new developments and trends.

A mandatory consultation meeting is required for the submission of the application. The meeting must take place at least one month before the submission deadline.

These requirements must be met:

- Maximum of 3, 3.5 or 4 years duration.
- Public funding: max. 45 % (a slight shortfall from 45 % is permitted due to rounding differences in the eCall)
- Funding amount: max. 1.8 m EUR federal funding and max. 0.9 Mio. EUR provincial funding for 4 years
Federal funding: max. 0.45 m EUR per year
Provincial funding: max. 0.225 m EUR per year
- Share of participating companies min. 45 %
The remaining funding must be secured.
- A consortium management with a branch office in Austria.
- The consortium management is the contact person for the FFG.
- The consortium management submits the funding application.

2.3 What are the requirements for a consortium?

The consortium consists of

- at least one (1) **research and knowledge dissemination organisation** (research organisation – see [General Block Exemption Regulation \(GBER\): Regulation \(EU\) No. 651/2014, OJ L 187/48](#), extended by the Regulation (EU) 2023/1315 from 23rd June 2023) and
- at least three (3) **companies** with one or more participants that are independent of each other. Participants are independent, if they own less than 25 % of capital or voting right of each other (for more information regarding affiliated entities see [SME definition](#)).

Additional requirements to the consortium

- Participation in the consortium is evidenced by a **Letter of Commitment (LOC)** including the relevant contribution.

A collaboration with other non-commercial institutions is possible. In this case, the requirements to the consortium still have to be fulfilled.

Requirements for the cooperation with research organisations:

- Research institutions must have the right to publish the results they have obtained in the project
- Contract research and the provision of research services are not considered as collaborations within the definition of a cooperative R&D project

The consortium (cooperation) agreement regulates the collaboration within the consortium and the intellectual property rights (IPR) relating to the project results. A [sample consortium agreement](#) is available to help you in drawing up a consortium agreement.

The conditions to the consortium have still to be fulfilled at the end of the project. If there are changes during the project not according to the demanded consortium structure, a reclaim of the funding is possible.

2.4 What are the responsibilities of the consortium leader?

The consortium leader has the following responsibilities throughout the project duration:

- project management
- communications with the funding agency and the project participants
- examining the reports and accounts provided by the consortium partners

In your capacity as consortium leader you confirm, that:

- you manage and distribute the funding yourself
- you communicate any changes in due time
- you provide accounts and reports in accordance with the funding contract

The consortium leader must ensure that a legally valid cooperation agreement has been concluded prior to the start of the project, in which the necessary provisions according to marginal no. 28 of the [Community framework for state aid for research and development and innovation 2022](#), OJ 2022/C 414 from 28th October 2022 (hereinafter referred to as Community framework) have been agreed. Moreover, the consortium leader confirms that:

- the costs charged can be clearly attributed to the COMET Project
- the project costs and content are in accordance with the approval

2.5 Who is eligible for funding?

Legal entities, partnerships and sole traders that are not part of the Austrian federal administration are eligible for funding.

Eligible for funding and for participation:

- Companies of any legal form (e.g. AG, GmbH, KG, OG, etc.), but principally not partnerships under civil law (GesbR)
- Institutions of research and knowledge dissemination
 - Universities (see glossary)
 - Universities of applied sciences
 - Non-university research institutions
 - Technology transfer institutions, innovation agents and other research-oriented organisations (e.g. cluster organisations, associations with a relevant purpose)
- Other non-commercial institutions
 - Non-research oriented associations
 - Local authorities and autonomous bodies (Note: Activities of local authorities falling within their statutory mandate are not eligible for funding)

The following may participate but may not receive funding:

- Subcontractors: they are not participants within the definition of a COMET Project. They provide defined tasks for project participants which are listed under the cost category “third-party costs” and are not entitled to exploit the project results.
- Other participants: Institutions that do not receive funding but are listed in the funding agreement with the extent of their participation. Their rights and obligations are also contractually agreed.
- Their participation must be justified in the application. Possible "other participants" also include institutions of the Austrian federal administration, provided that they neither claim eligible costs nor contribute funding to the project.

Not eligible:

Organisations which have been commissioned by the FFG, the funding authority, or as part of an EU project (including third-party providers) and could consequently secure an advantage related to the specific call – whether through involvement in a study, evaluation, the design, or in another manner – are not eligible to participate for reasons of conflict of interest unless their participation has been coordinated with the FFG Call Management and any related concerns have been clarified. In this case, the measures taken to eliminate the conflict of interest must be demonstrated.

The FFG reserves the right to exclude organisations from the call due to a conflict of interest.

Can established COMET Centres participate?

COMET Centres are eligible to participate. Consortium management by a COMET Centre, including those in a Phasing-Out stage, within a COMET Project is not intended. The participation of centres as participants is possible, as long as they do not bear the majority of the total eligible costs. If existing COMET Centres

participate as partners, the costs must in any case be covered by the centre's non-COMET area (see glossary for definition of “non-COMET area”).

2.6 Can partners from outside Austria participate?

A consortium may have participants from outside Austria.

Partners from outside the EU may also receive funding unless this is specifically excluded in the relevant call.

The following conditions apply:

- The non-Austrian partners create benefit for the Austrian consortium partners and/or Austria as a business and research location;
- This benefit is explicitly indicated in the application for funding;
- The partners from outside Austria prove their credit-worthiness and liquidity in accordance with the criteria applied to Austrian partners prior to contract formation;
- The non-Austrian partners accept the FFG’s obligation and entitlement to review the project as specified in the funding contract and submit relevant documentary evidence in German or English.

Alternatively, non-Austrian organisations may cover their costs from own funds and/or from funds provided by their home country. Collaborative agreements for joint funding are in place with several European and non-European countries.

The European [EUREKA](#) initiative provides funding support for cross-border collaborations across calls. The call guidelines will specify whether these collaborative agreements can be used for COMET Projects.

Organisations from outside Austria may also be involved as subcontractors.

2.7 How much funding is granted?

Funding is provided in the form of non-repayable grants and totals to a **maximum of 1.8 m EUR federal funding and 0.9 m EUR provincial funding** per project for the maximum term of four years.

The amount of **federal funding** is a maximum of **0.45 m EUR per year** for the maximum term of four years. The **provincial funding** totals to an additional maximum of **0.225 m EUR per year** according to the fixed participation ratio of 2:1. The total amount of provincial funding can be divided between several participating provinces.

The overall funding rate for the COMET project is a maximum of 45 % (a slight shortfall from 45 % is permitted due to rounding differences in the eCall) of the total eligible costs.

In the application, the total amount of funding must be allocated at partner level. The funding rate per partner results from the ratio of eligible costs per partner to the funding allocated. Subsequently, based on the total funding quota, funding quotas are determined at partner level in the funding contract.

The funding rate varies depending on the participating organization and research category:

- For companies, the funding rate is based on the research category and company size.
- For research institutions that are active in the project in their non-business area, there are no restrictions.
- If the participation of the research institution or other institution is to be classified as an economic activity, the funding quotas correspond to those of the companies.
- If other funding from other funding bodies is claimed for the project applied for, this must be stated in the funding application. In the case of multiple funding - funding from different funding providers - the cumulative amount of funding may not exceed the limits for state aid under European law (see [community framework](#)).

Funding quota

Table 1 Funding quota

Research categories	Small enterprises	Medium enterprises	Large enterprises
Industrial research in the case of effective cooperation between companies (cross-border in the case of large companies or with at least one SME) or between a company and a research institution or in the case of further dissemination of the results	80 %	75 %	65 %
Experimental research in the case of effective cooperation between companies (cross-border in the case of large companies or with at least one SME) or between a company and a research institution or in the case of further dissemination of the results	60 %	50 %	40 %

Non-commercial activities of research institutions include:

- primary activities such as education
- research and development, independent or as part of an effective collaboration
- knowledge dissemination and transfer (see [community framework](#))

Non-economic activities² of non-economic institutions include contributions to R&D projects related to the development of products, services and systems, where they act, e.g., as public or private end user organisations.

The company size is to be determined according to the SME definition as specified by EU competition law: see information on [SME definition](#)

The research category must be clearly specified for the overall project. A distinction is made between experimental research and industrial research.

Experimental Development

The goal is to develop something new from what already exists or to improve what already exists. This includes:

- acquiring existing knowledge and skills
- Combining existing knowledge and skills
- Shaping existing knowledge and skills
- using existing knowledge and skills

Whether scientific, technical, economic or other knowledge and skills: The goal is to use it to develop new or improved products, processes or services.

Experimental research is not about routine or periodic changes, even if those changes represent improvements (see [FFG Guidelines](#), 10.1 Definitions and Specifics for Grants for Research and Development and Innovation and for Training).

Industrial research

It has the following characteristics:

- It focuses on planned research or critical inquiry to gain new knowledge and skills
- Industrial research takes place predominantly in the laboratory or on a laboratory scale
- The development risk is higher than for experimental development
- It is technically less mature or has a lower degree of technological maturity
- The time distance to market is greater

Further details on the research categories can be found in the Annex.

The evaluation committee decides which research category a project should be assigned to. A project can also be assigned predominantly to Industrial Research if more than half of the eligible project costs are incurred for activities in this category.

² Any activity consisting in offering goods and services on a market is generally an economic activity regardless whether there is an intent to realise a profit or not (cf. section 2 of the [Commission Notice on the notion of State aid](#), OJ 2016/C 262 from 19th July 2016).

2.8 How are COMET Projects financed?

The total financing of a COMET Project comprises public funding (federal and provincial funding) as well as contributions of companies:

- Share of public funding: max. 45 % (a slight shortfall from 45 % is permitted due to rounding differences in the eCall)
- Share of companies: min. 45 %

The remaining financing must be secured.

Financing example of a COMET Project in EUR over 4 years with a funding rate of 45 %:

Table 2 Financing example with 5% contribution of scientific participants

Type of contribution / costs	amount in EUR	amount in %
Federal funding (max.)	1.800.000	30,00%
Provincial funding (max.)	900.000	15,00%
Contribution of scientific participants	300.000	5,00%
Contribution of companies	3.000.000	50,00%
Total costs	6.000.000	100,00%

Table 3 Financing example without contribution of scientific participants

Type of contribution / costs	amount in EUR	amount in %
Federal funding (max.)	1.800.000	30,00%
Provincial funding (max.)	900.000	15,00%
Contribution of companies	3.300.000	55,00%
Total costs	6.000.000	100,00%

2.8.1 Contribution of scientific participants

The shares of the scientific participants in the total eligible costs can be replaced by in-kind contributions.

In-kind contributions are contributions in the form of materials and/or manpower. Cash contributions are payments in cash.

2.8.2 Contribution of company partners

The shares of the participating companies in COMET projects accumulate to a **minimum of 45 %** of the total costs eligible for funding. Companies may provide both **cash** contributions and **in-kind** contributions. Only the part of the costs that is not covered by the funding can be recognized as an in-kind contribution on the financing side. Cash contributions from company partners serve to finance the costs of the scientific partners. As a matter of principle, companies are not allowed to provide general co-financing in the form of a basic subsidy.

2.9 What costs are eligible?

Eligible costs must be allocable directly to the project. This means that:

- they incur during the funding period, additionally to the normal operating costs
- they are in accordance with the funding contract
- they can be evidenced by receipts

The earliest possible date for the start of the project is after submission of the application for funding.

For details on the eligibility of costs see the [Cost Guidelines](#).

The limit for third-party costs is 20 % of the total costs per participating organization. If they are higher, the excess must be justified in the project description. Services provided by affiliated companies that are included as third-party costs are excluded from the limit.

The following regulations supplement the provisions of the cost guide:

- Third-party travel costs are eligible if a clear project connection can be demonstrated (e.g., participation in Scientific Advisory Boards).
- Public relations costs are eligible for funding if they are directly related to the COMET project and can be attributed to the funded research project (e.g., dissemination of research results, folders, press releases, homepage).
- Costs for hospitality can only be funded for COMET projects in connection with relevant networking activities at the level of the overall project (boards, project committees, ...).
- Bilateral research cooperations (“single-firm” projects) are to be limited to a maximum of 20 % of the eligible costs.

2.10 What about intellectual property rights?

Intellectual property rights relating to the project results belong to the consortium. The provisions of section 2.2.2. “Collaborations with undertakings” of the [Community framework for state aid for research and development and innovation 2022](#) apply to collaborations between commercial companies and research institutions.

The intellectual property rights are to be allocated to the research institutions in a manner which adequately reflects their work, contributions and interests. If the rights are assigned to the companies involved, the research institutions shall receive compensation equivalent to the market price.

Please note in this context that expenditure for the protection of intellectual property (IPR) is eligible for funding. This includes costs for patent applications and patent searches. Patent maintenance costs are not eligible for funding.

2.11 What criteria are used to assess applications for funding?

Funding applications will be evaluated according to the following four criteria:

1. Quality of the project
2. Suitability of project participants
3. Benefit and exploitation
4. Relevance to the call

The table below shows the relevant sub-criteria. In the course of the assessment, points will be assigned to each criterion.

Evaluation criteria

Table 4 Evaluation criteria "Quality of the Project"

1. Quality of the Project	max. points 40
<p>1.1 Scientific quality of the Research Programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Does the research programme correspond to or go beyond the international state of the art in science and technology? Has existing national and international research been sufficiently taken into account? – Are the objectives of the research programme clearly formulated? How do you assess the approaches and methods for achieving objectives? – How does the added value of the research programme compare to the sum of individual projects? Do the various individual projects complement each other in a reasonable way? Does this result in recognizable synergy effects? 	30
<p>1.2 Quality of planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do the work and time schedules correspond to the planned research programme? – Are the cost and financing plans feasible? Is the size of the individual projects appropriate in relation to the research programme? – Are the areas and individual projects coherent in terms of structure and content? Are the collaborative relationships (multi-firm) and the allocation of tasks between the partners at project level plausible? – Are the risks adequately addressed in the research programme and are appropriate measures planned? 	4

<p>1.3 Gender and diversity relevance in research programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – If the content of the project and the research results affect people: How well were gender and diversity-specific aspects taken into account in the planning? (more information can be found here) – If there are no gender or diversity specific aspects, has this been adequately explained? <p>Projects, where this analysis rightly shows no gender or diversity relevance in their content, will score full points.</p> <p>Gender balance in the project team is evaluated in the criterion 2.3. Further information can be found here.</p>	2
<p>1.4 Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To what extent are sustainability goals (ecological, social, economic) taken into account in the planning, implementation and exploitation of the project? (more information can be found here) – How does the project contribute to solving societal challenges in line with the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)? (more information can be found here) 	4

Table 5 Evaluation criteria “Suitability of the Project Participants”

2. Suitability of the Project Participants	max. points
<p>2.1 Quality of the consortium from a scientific perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How do you assess the consortium's scientific competencies and available resources be for the successful implementation of the research programme? – How do you assess the potential of key people to gain new knowledge? Do they have appropriate track records? – Is the consortium complete or is there a need for additional competences or partners? 	12
<p>2.2 Quality of the consortium in terms of the company partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How are the technical and economic competencies and resources of the companies involved assessed for the successful implementation of the research programme? – Do the key companies have the potential to implement new findings on the market? – Is the consortium complete or is there a need for additional competences and relevant partners? 	12
<p>2.3 Organisation and Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are the organisational structure and management of the COMET-Project adequate? – Are the planned target values adequate and reasonable? 	6

2. Suitability of the Project Participants	max. points 30
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How do you assess the measures for equal opportunities or diversity? Is gender balance given within the project team? Will this improve standard industry conditions? – How do you assess the performance of a possible predecessor COMET Project? 	

Table 6 Evaluation criteria "Benefit and Exploitation"

3. Benefit and Exploitation	max. points 25
<p>3.1 Economic relevance of the research results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How do you assess the benefit of the project results for companies and users? – To what extent can, through the expected research results, new products, processes and services be initiated? – How do you assess the market opportunities and economic exploitation potential? – How do you evaluate the measures for technology and knowledge transfer to the economy? To what extent will the research results be exploited by the partners (in the form of IPR, patents, licenses, etc.)? – How does the project support a sustainable transformation of the Austrian economy? 	25

Table 7 Evaluation criteria "Relevance to the Call"

4. Relevance to the Call	max. points 5
<p>4.1 Incentive effect of funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How do you assess the incentive effect of the funding? – To what extent will the funding help to implement the project at all and/or within a shorter timeframe, and/or with higher ambition, and/or in a larger scope? 	5
Overall rating	max. points 100

2.12 Target values

In COMET, the applicants set target values, which are intended to indicate the expected impact and outcome of the research. The evaluation process reviews the extent to which these values are appropriate and realistic for the respective research area. If necessary, the values can be adjusted by the evaluation committee. Throughout the duration of the project, the progress towards achieving the target values is reported and checked.

2.13 Which content and what documents are required for submission?

The project applications may only be submitted via [eCall](#).

The document templates are available on the [FFG website](#) and must be used.

Further attachments concerning the application:

- The annual financial statements of the last 2 fiscal years (balance sheet, P&L).
- [Declaration of SME status](#) for associations, sole traders and foreign companies.

For more information on project submission and whether further documents or attachments are required, please refer to the call guidelines.

If the project involves participants outside Austria, collaborative agreements with European or non-European countries may require the submission of documents that cannot be uploaded via eCall. The relevant information will be given in the call announcement. In individual cases, additional supporting documents may be requested.

The call guidelines specify the language in which the application for funding must be written - for COMET Projects this is English.

2.14 Is it necessary to mention other projects?

To support the assessment of the projects content, the application for funding must list further projects related to the current application. The results of those projects and the generated know-how have to be described. Relevant are:

- Pre-projects which delivered results for the applied project
- Ongoing or finished projects (in the last 3 years) related to the applied project

The multiple acceptance of already funded costs or part of costs is not possible. The proposed project must be clearly distinguished from related projects that have already received funding.

2.15 Is scientific integrity ensured?

Funding may only be granted to applicants who demonstrate high scientific integrity during application and project execution.

The FFG is a member of the [Austrian Agency for Research Integrity – OeAWI](#) and is thus committed to safeguarding good scientific practice.

If we suspect a lack of scientific integrity or misconduct in the course of the formal checks or of the proposal check, the relevant documents may be forwarded to the OeAWI's Commission for Scientific Integrity. The OeAWI will then decide whether to initiate an independent investigation procedure and, if necessary, will undertake the necessary investigations.

If the investigation reveals a lack of scientific integrity or misconduct (e.g. plagiarism), the application has to be rejected due to formal reasons. If funding has already been granted, the funding must be reduced, retained or reclaimed.

3 SUBMISSION

3.1 What is the procedure for submission?

A mandatory consultation meeting is required for the submission of the application. The meeting must take place at least one month before the submission deadline.

Applications must be electronically submitted via [eCall](#) before the deadline.

The funding application cannot be submitted until all participants have submitted their partner applications via eCall.

How does it work?

- Download and complete the template for the project description and fill out the annexes from the [FFG website](#)
- Create an application in the eCall, invite partners, enter costs and financing in the eCall
- When entering the cost calculation, the system checks whether the information corresponds to the funding conditions (e.g. funding amount, maximum project size)
- Upload the documents in the eCall
- Complete the application and press "Submit application"
- After successfully submitting the application, a submission confirmation will be sent automatically by e-mail

Not necessary:

- Signature and additional postal submission

Not possible:

- Editing after submission of the application

The application documents are to be submitted by the consortium leader. FFG may request evidence of power of representation. If such evidence is not provided, FFG reserves the right to reject the application for formal reasons.

Details can be found in the [eCall tutorial](#).

3.2 What is the procedure for applying for provincial co-funding?

The provinces support COMET with additional funds of their own to strengthen their respective regional technology policy objectives. This is based on a written agreement between the federal government and the provinces.

Details on provincial funding can be found in the call guidelines.

3.3 How will confidential project data be used?

FFG processes the personal data of funding applicants and funding recipients provided by the data subjects as part of the application for funding, data collected by the FFG for the purpose of concluding the funding contract, and data generated by searches in the transparency portal according to Sec. 32 (5) of the Transparency Database Act (TDBG 2012) for the following purposes:

- Processing of the funding application and assessment of whether the general and specific funding requirements have been met,
- Conclusion of the funding contract and (if a funding contract has been concluded) compliance with the relevant contractual obligations, including but not limited to administration of the funding payments and monitoring of compliance with funding requirements,
- Compliance with statutory obligations, including but not limited to reporting obligations and control purposes in order to avoid double funding (i.e. Sec. 38 in conjunction with 18, 27 ARR, as well as Sec. 12 FTFG and Sec. 9 FFG-G).

The legal basis of processing is therefore Art. 6 (1) (b) GDPR, i.e. performance of a contract, and Art 6 (1) (c) GDPR, i.e. compliance with legal obligations.

The personal data will be disclosed to the following institutions in compliance with legal obligations:

- the federal ministries as owners of the FFG, other contracting authorities for the management of funding measures (e.g. other federal ministries, regional governments, KLIEN)
- third parties, which may include the Court of Audit, EU bodies, and other federal or regional funding agencies

National and international experts will get access to the submitted documents for the evaluation of the proposals. Such experts act as processors on behalf of the FFG and are required to take technical and organisational measures to ensure data security and data confidentiality.

Project content and results may only be published (e.g. on the website or in social media forums) with the consent of the funding recipient (Art 6 (1) (a) GDPR) unless the FFG has a legal obligation to do so.

FFG must also obtain the consent of the data subject for any other data use exceeding these provisions.

FFG is under a legal obligation to maintain secrecy concerning company and project information pursuant to Sec. 9 (4) of the Austrian Research Promotion Agency Act (FFG-G, Federal Law Gazette BGBl. I No. 73/2004).

FFG will ensure a level of security appropriate to the risk in terms of confidentiality, integrity, availability and resilience of the systems by implementing technical and organisational measures within the meaning of Art. 32 GDPR that are sufficient and appropriate for protecting the data against accidental or unlawful destruction, loss and unauthorised access.

Further information about ensuring the confidentiality and security of personal data during the course of the project is available in the [eCall-Tutorial](#).

4 ASSESSMENT AND DECISION

4.1 What is the formal check?

In the formal check the application is examined for formal correctness and completeness.

The FFG communicates the result of the formal check within 4 weeks via eCall:

- If the formal criteria are not met and the deficiencies cannot be corrected, the application for funding will not enter the subsequent steps of the procedure.
- If the deficiencies can be corrected, they may be rectified within a reasonable period of time.

Incorrect information that transpires after the formal check will equally lead to the removal of the funding application from the procedure at a subsequent point.

The **checklist for the formal check** can be found in the project description template and in the call guidelines.

4.2 How is the evaluation procedure organised?

National and international experts will review the submitted documents based on the criteria in chapter 2.11.

Taking into account the written reviews, an evaluation panel will make a funding recommendation.

Reviewers (individuals or members of particular organisations) can, in justified cases, be excluded. The eCall provides a corresponding entry field.

FFG experts will check the financial potential, like credit rating and liquidity of the participating enterprises. They may request additional documents that are required for completing the financial check. Undertakings in difficulty cannot participate. The assessment if an enterprise is to be classified as an “undertaking in difficulty” takes place in accordance with the [General block exemption regulation](#) OJ L 187/19 in its current version, Art. 2 subpar. 18), being the European legal basis of this funding.

In the course of the assessment, additional recommendations and requirements may be formulated. Recommendations are non-binding remarks of the evaluation panel, aimed to support the consortium in the implementation of the project.

Requirements are binding, see chapter 5.2.

4.3 Who takes the funding decision?

Information as to who takes the funding decision can be found in the respective call guideline.

5 FUNDING PROCEDURE

5.1 How is the Funding Contract concluded?

In case of a positive funding decision, the FFG will provide the consortium leader with a view in the eCall system containing the most important basic parameters of the funding contract (e.g. amount of funding, amount of eligible costs, start and end date of the funding period, reporting obligations and possible binding requirements).

After acceptance of the view within the given deadline, the FFG prepares the funding contract and delivers it to the consortium leader. The consortium leader returns the duly signed funding contract. Thereby the funding contract is valid in law. Until then, there is no title for being funded.

Separate funding contracts in accordance with the respective terms must be concluded with the co-financing provinces.

5.2 How are requirements and recommendations taken into account?

In the course of the assessment of the funding application, binding requirements may be formulated.

Two types of requirements are possible:

- Requirements that must be met prior to the conclusion of a funding contract.
- Requirements that must be met by the consortium during the course of the project.

Requirements are part of the funding contract.

5.3 How are the funding instalments paid?

The first instalment will be paid once the requirements have been met and the funding contract has been signed, however, not earlier than one week before the start of the funding period. Payments are made to the bank account specified by the consortium leader. For more information, see the [sample Consortium Agreement](#).

Subsequent instalments will be paid in accordance with the progress of the project:

- once the interim reports and interim accounts have been approved
- where necessary: once additional requirements have been met
- according to the FFG instalment scheme

If the interim reports indicate a delay in project progress or if the costs are below budget, the instalment can be reduced.

If funding is received during the term of the project, this does not mean that the costs have been recognized. At the end of the project term, the required funding quotas of the participating companies must be met in accordance with the funding agreement / approved cost plan. If these quotas are not met, the federal funding may be reduced proportionately.

Instalment scheme

Table 8 COMET Projects instalment scheme

Report number and instalment	3 to 3.5 years project duration	4 years project duration
Number of reports (interim and final report)	3	4
1st instalment in % of funding amount at contract conclusion	30%	30%

Report number and instalment	3 to 3.5 years project duration	4 years project duration
2nd instalment up to % of funding amount	30%	20%
3rd instalment up to % of funding amount	30%	20%
4th instalment up to % of funding amount	none	20%
Final instalment up to % of funding amount	10%	10%

5.4 What reports and accounts are required?

- One month after the reporting deadlines specified in the funding contract, an interim report including monitoring data and interim accounts must be submitted via the eCall reporting function.
- Within three months of the conclusion of the project, a final report, a (publishable) summary and the final accounts must be submitted via the eCall reporting function. The publication of a summary may be omitted in case of incompatibility with commercial exploitation, confidentiality obligations because of security reasons or because of data protection regulations.
- If the project is aborted during the project term, the consortium must submit a final report and final accounts. FFG is entitled to reclaim money if the funding already paid exceeds the funding with regard to the eligible costs.

Requirements for reports and accounts:

- They contain the description of activities and in addition the cost statements of all consortium members mentioned in the funding contract.
- Reports must be prepared using the provided templates.
- FFG will be responsible for reporting, controlling and auditing the COMET Projects with regard to both federal and provincial funding. The consortium leader has to send the reports to the relevant bodies of the provinces, as needed. The provinces may accept the results of this audit, but may also perform audits of their own.

Support of public relations: The funding recipients agree to work together with the FFG and the responsible ministries to support PR work, if required. This includes in particular making available non-confidential project information and images for electronic dissemination portals and other media purposes.

5.5 How should changes to the project be communicated?

Any changes to contractual points such as project content, consortium partners, costs, deadlines or funding period must be substantiated and submitted for approval:

- via eCall message
- in the interim or final report

All relevant documents should be uploaded as an attachment to the eCall message. Any changes to the contract parameters require the approval of the FFG.

Immediate notification is required for:

- substantial changes to the project
- changes to consortium partners such as new ownership structure or insolvency proceedings

The following changes should be communicated in the interim or final report:

- cost reallocations between cost categories, e. g. material costs to personnel costs
- costs reallocations between the project participants

5.6 Can the funding period be extended?

The funding period may be extended for up to one year on a cost-neutral basis, if the project goals have not been achieved and the approved level of costs has not been exceeded.

The following requirements must be met:

- the funding recipients are not responsible for the delay
- the project is still eligible for funding
- an eCall application for extension has been submitted within the approved funding period

5.7 When will the review take place?

For COMET Projects a review (see glossary) is foreseen for the mid of their duration. This allows for a first feedback and is primarily of advisory character. It assesses the degree to which goals have been achieved and reviews development and management as well as implementation of planned measures.

The results of the review is a set of recommendations for the remaining duration of the COMET Project.

5.8 What happens after the conclusion of the project?

The consortium submits a final report and final accounts after the end of the project. The FFG Project Controlling & Audit Division will examine whether the funding has been used appropriately. The audit will establish the final level of eligible costs.

You will receive the result of the audit in writing:

- In the event of a positive result, the appropriate use of the funding will be confirmed.
- In the event of a negative result, procedures may be initiated to secure repayment of funding

Funding details: If the specified costs have been reached, the fixed final instalment will be transferred. If the project has underspent, funding will be reduced accordingly. The amount of funding may also be reduced due to content-related, formal and legal reasons.

For more information about eligible costs, see the [Cost Guidelines](#)

6 ANNEX

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6.1 Glossary

Incentive effect

Funding can only be found compatible if it has an incentive effect. An incentive effect occurs where the aid changes the behaviour of an undertaking in such a way that it engages in additional activities, which it would not carry out or it would carry out in a restricted or different manner or at another location without the aid.

The following criteria may be used in addition to other factors as evidence of the incentive effect:

- Implementation: the funding enables the project to be implemented in the first place
- Acceleration: the funding accelerates implementation
- Scope: the funding increases the scope of the project
- Range: the funding makes the project more ambitious through:
 - a more radical innovation approach
 - higher risk
 - new or extended collaborations
 - long-term strategic orientation

Cash contributions

Cash contributions are payments in cash.

Excellence

The concept of excellence refers both to the excellent quality of science and the orientation towards implementation and application. The assessment of excellence is carried out by experts as part of the evaluation and is based on the unique selling points of the research programme presented compared to the current international state of the art, as presented in the application.

Industrial research

Industrial research includes planned research or critical investigation to acquire new knowledge and abilities with the aim to develop new products, procedures or services including digital products, processes and services or significantly improve existing ones.

This may also include:

- developing parts of complex systems
- if required for the validation of technological fundamentals:
 - building prototypes in a laboratory environment or in an environment with simulated interfaces to existing systems
 - building pilot lines

Industrial research does not extend beyond the proof of concept.

The following questions may help you allocate your project to the appropriate category. If the answers to most of these questions are yes, the project is to be allocated to industrial research:

- Does the project exclude the direct commercial exploitation of the results?
- Does the project involve planned research or critical investigation with the aim to acquire new knowledge and abilities?
- Do the research activities mainly take place in the laboratory or at laboratory scale?
- Does the project involve a high research risk?
- Is the project characterised by a low level of technological maturity or integration?
- Does the project have a long time horizon in terms of market readiness with respect to the relevant sector?
- Are the prototypes used exclusively for the validation of technical fundamentals and does the project exclude the building of prototypes beyond the laboratory environment?
- Does the project exclude the development of a prototype whose form, shape, scale, function, operation and manufacture are largely similar to the final product?

Experimental development

Experimental development involves acquiring, combining, shaping and using existing scientific, technical, economic or other relevant knowledge and abilities with the aim to develop new or improved products, procedures or services, including digital products, processes or services.

This may also include:

- Activities for the design, planning and documentation of new products, procedures and services.
- If the main aim is to improve future products, procedures or services: development of prototypes, demonstration measures and pilot projects as well as testing and validation of new or improved products, procedures and services in a relevant environment under real-world operating conditions.
- Development of commercially usable prototypes and pilot projects if the developed product would be too expensive for demonstration and validation purposes alone.

Experimental development does not extend beyond the demonstration of the prototype (system) in a relevant environment. Exception: commercially usable prototypes and pilot projects if the developed product would be too expensive for demonstration and validation purposes alone.

Experimental development does not include routine or regular adaptations, even if the modifications would represent improvements.

The following questions may help you allocate your project to the appropriate category. If the answers to most of these questions are yes the project is to be allocated to experimental development:

- Does the project build on existing scientific, technical, economic or other relevant knowledge and abilities so that it generates new expanded knowledge and abilities or recombines existing knowledge?
- Does the project exclude routine or regular modifications to products, production lines, production processes, existing services or other ongoing operational processes?
- Does the project exclude the direct commercial exploitation of the results or the final product? Exception: commercially usable prototypes and pilot projects if they inevitably represent the commercial end product and its production would be too expensive for demonstration and validation purposes alone.
- Does the project explicitly exclude activities aimed at series production?
- Does the project explicitly exclude activities aimed at market introduction?

Research programme

A research programme is defined jointly by science and industry and outlines the area of activity for the COMET Projects. A research programme must relate to a clearly defined subject matter.

In-kind contributions

In-kind contributions are provided in the form of non-cash contributions and/or manpower.

Key Researcher

Key Researchers are renowned scientists who owing to their expertise and standing will exercise a significant influence on the further development of the relevant research topic or programme. As a rule, such Key Researchers will be recruited from among the scientific partners (e.g. university professors).

Non-COMET-area (relevant for COMET Centres only)

COMET Centres should develop a “Non-COMET area” complementing the research programme funded under the COMET Programme in line with the present Programme Document (“COMET area”). It serves to carry out contract research for companies (company partners or other clients) in market-oriented fields at full cost

and to fulfil complementary objectives of public interest, e.g. of the provinces. Other funded national and international projects (e.g. EU projects, etc.) are also carried out within the Non-COMET area.

Public funding

Public funding comprises federal and provincial funding.

Projects

Projects are defined as research units to be carried out within the framework of a COMET Project and must be described in Project Sheets (see template) in the application; projects are divided into work packages. The size of the project must be appropriate to the planned activities.

There are two types of projects:

Strategic research projects

Strategic research projects have high standards in terms of novelty and excellence and are oriented towards the long-term strategic goals of the COMET project and its consortium beyond the short-term needs of the companies involved. They should provide new research impulses and be open to particularly high-risk research. Generally, this research is still relatively far from development and implementation.

A part of the strategic projects can be planned as so-called "N.N. projects" ("not named") and does not need to be defined in detail. This makes the research programme more flexible and provides room to respond quickly to new developments and trends.

Company projects

In contrast to strategic projects, company projects are more strongly oriented towards the needs of the companies involved.

Multi-firm projects are those company projects within the scope of a COMET project's research programme involving more than one company partner.

Single-firm projects are those company projects within the scope of a COMET project's research programme involving only one company partner. The share of such projects must be limited to a maximum of 20% of eligible costs.

Review

For COMET Projects, a so-called Review is planned halfway through the duration. The aim is to determine whether the content and results planned in the application appear to be reachable by the end of the term. The written content is assessed by external experts. In an online meeting any questions will be answered and discussed.

Province of domicile

The province of domicile is the province in which the consortium leader of the COMET project is based.

Universities

The smallest possible organisational unit of a university that is able to participate as a scientific partner is a university institute or a comparable unit according to §20 Universities Act 2002 – UG). To participate, these organisational units have to possess the necessary power of attorney according to § 27 UG. Organisational units underneath the level of university institutes or comparable units (e.g. work groups) may not participate as project partners.

Companies

Enterprises that are independent of each other hold less than 25% of the capital or voting rights in one another. This rule also applies to shareholdings via parent companies. For more information see [SME definition](#).

6.2 Call Milestones

Figure 1 Call Milestones

