



**FFG**

**Guidelines for  
COMET- Centres (K2)  
under the Programme  
COMET (Competence Centres for  
Excellent Technologies)**

**4<sup>th</sup> Call**

**Submission deadline  
24<sup>th</sup> October 2018**

## Contents

<b>1. CALL OBJECTIVES .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. CALL DOCUMENTS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. LEGAL BASIS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>5. THE BASIS OF FUNDING .....</b>	<b>9</b>
5.1 What are K2 Centres? .....	9
5.1.1. General Information .....	9
5.1.2 COMET Research Programme.....	10
5.2 What governance structures are required? .....	11
5.3 What criteria must be met by the consortium? .....	12
5.4 What are the responsibilities of the consortium leader?.....	13
5.5 Who is eligible to receive funding and/or to participate? .....	13
5.5.1 Who is eligible for funding? .....	13
5.5.2 Who is eligible to participate? .....	13
5.5.3 Can existing competence centres participate?.....	14
5.6 Can partners from outside Austria participate? .....	14
5.7 How much support is granted?.....	15
5.7.1 Amount of Federal Funding.....	15
5.7.2 Amount of Provincial Funding.....	15
5.7.3 Amount of Funding Rate .....	15
5.8 How are COMET Centres financed? .....	15
5.8.1 Contribution of scientific partners .....	16
5.8.2 Contribution of company partners .....	16
5.9 What projects are eligible for funding?.....	16
5.10 What costs are eligible ? .....	17
5.11 What points should be considered relating to IPR? .....	18
5.12 What are the evaluation criteria for funding applications? .....	19
5.12.1 Evaluation criteria for K2 Centres.....	19
5.12.2 Key Figures and indicators .....	22
5.13 What documents are required for submission? .....	23
5.14 Is it necessary to mention other projects? .....	23
5.15 Is scientific integrity ensured?.....	24
<b>6. SUBMISSION PROCEDURE.....</b>	<b>24</b>
6.1 What is the procedure for submission? .....	24
6.2 What is the procedure for applying for provincial co-funding?.....	25
6.3 What about the security of confidential project data? .....	25
<b>7. ASSESSMENT AND DECISION .....</b>	<b>26</b>
7.1 What is the formal check? .....	26
7.2 How is the evaluation procedure organised?.....	26

7.3	Who takes the funding decision? .....	27
<b>8.</b>	<b>FUNDING PROCEDURE .....</b>	<b>27</b>
8.1	How is the funding contract concluded?.....	27
8.2	How should recommendations and conditions be taken into account?.....	28
8.3	How are the instalments of funding paid? .....	28
8.4	What reports and accounts are required? .....	29
8.5	How should changes to the project be communicated? .....	29
8.6	Can the funding period be extended?.....	30
8.7	What happens after the end of the end of the first funding period?.....	30
8.8	When will the mid-term evaluation take place? .....	30
8.9	What does ‘phasing-out’ mean?.....	30
<b>9.</b>	<b>ANNEX .....</b>	<b>31</b>
9.1	Glossary.....	31
9.2	Abbreviations.....	35
9.3	Call milestones (up to first instalment) .....	36

## PREAMBLE

These Call Guidelines<sup>1</sup> provide you with information about basic requirements, funding conditions and procedures for the submission of **COMET Centres (K2)** and the specifics of the call, the call objectives, budget and submission deadlines.

The Competence Centre Programme COMET (Competence Centres for Excellent Technologies) comprises three programme lines (COMET-Project, COMET-Centre, COMET-Modul), which are characterised by high research expertise and links to science as well as by high relevance of implementation in industry.

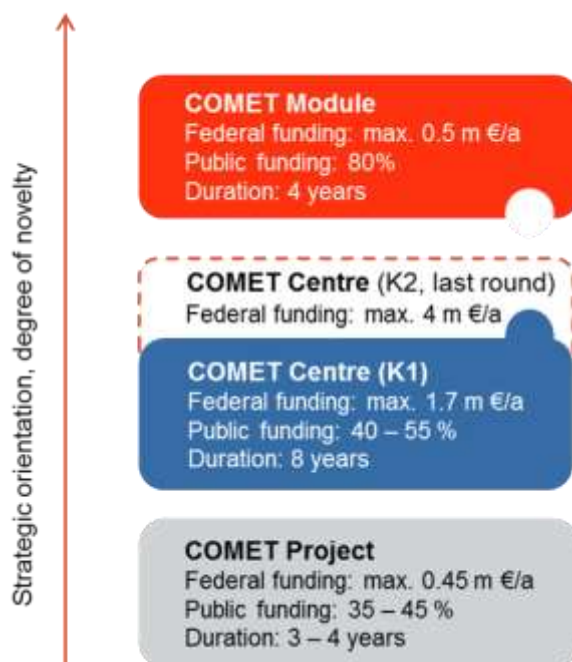
The degree of novelty of the research and thus also the strategic orientation, is increasing from COMET Project to COMET Centre to COMET Module.

The 3-line model enables potential partners to

- get access to the COMET Programme via a COMET Project as part of a consortium (min. 1 scientific partner, min. 3 company partners)
- build up competences and human resources in a physical centre (min. 1 scientific partner, min. 5 company partners)
- open up new research areas for a COMET (K1) Centre via a COMET Module (min. 1 scientific partner, min. 3 company partners)

All lines are open with regard to research fields and topics, but each individual project must focus on a clearly defined theme.

The current call refers exclusively to K2-Centres, while K2 Centres are already required to implement the contents of the COMET Modules as part of their research programmes.



<sup>1</sup> This document is a translated version of the original German version. In cases of unclear formulation the German version is the decisive document.

This will be the last calls<sup>2</sup> for K2 Centres under the previous conditions. The call is carried out on a competitive basis between existing competence centres as well as new initiatives.

The maximum total duration is 8 years, divided into two funding periods (4 + 4 years). The granting of a second funding period is conditional on a successful mid-term evaluation.

## 1. CALL OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the COMET programme 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.

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<sup>2</sup> Two last calls are planned based on the terms of the existing K2 Centres. The last K2 Centres approved will thus run from 2018 to 2025 respectively from 2020 to 2027.

## 2. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

Key facts	COMET Centres (K2) 4 <sup>th</sup> Call
<b>Instrument</b>	Competence Centre (C8 Z)
<b>Short description</b>	Funding is provided for competence centres performing research at the highest level in research programmes jointly defined by science and industry.
<b>Funding per K2 Centre (EUR)</b>	Federal government: max. EUR 4 million/year Provincial government: max. EUR 0.85 million/year These limits must not be exceeded!
<b>Funding rate</b>	40 - 55% (depending on type of research)
<b>Contribution of company/scientific partners</b>	Contribution of company partners: min. 40% Contribution of scientific partners: min. 5%
<b>Duration (years)</b>	Maximum duration: 8 years, Divided into 2 funding periods (4+4 years). Applications to be submitted for the 1st funding period. The granting of a second funding period is conditional on a successful mid-term evaluation.
<b>Minimum consortium requirements</b>	at least 1 scientific partner and at least 5 company partners
<b>Budget for 4<sup>th</sup> K2 Call</b>	EUR 32 million (federal funds) plus additional provincial funds
<b>Start of call</b>	24 April 2018
<b>Submission deadline</b>	24 October 2018, 12:00 (CET) (for eCall and paper submission)
<b>Hearings</b>	27- 29 May 2019
<b>Jury decision</b>	30 /31 May 2019
<b>Project start</b>	1 January 2018 or 1 April 2018 or 1 July 2018
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Funding agency</b>	<b>Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG)</b> Structural Programmes office (3rd floor), 1090 Vienna, Sensengasse 1 Opening hours: Mon - Thu 09:00 – 16:00, Fri 9:00 – 13:00

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<p><b>Information on the Web</b></p>	<p><a href="http://www.ffg.at/comet">http://www.ffg.at/comet</a>  <a href="https://www.ffg.at/comet-4-ausschreibung-k2-zentren">https://www.ffg.at/comet-4-ausschreibung-k2-zentren</a></p>

### 3. CALL DOCUMENTS

DOCUMENTS	Web
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call Guidelines for COMET K2 Centres, 4<sup>th</sup> Call (present document)</li> <li>• Cost Guidelines Version 2.1</li> </ul>	<a href="https://www.ffg.at/comet-4-ausschreibung-k2-zentren">https://www.ffg.at/comet-4-ausschreibung-k2-zentren</a>  <a href="https://www.ffg.at/recht-finanzen/kostenleitfaden">https://www.ffg.at/recht-finanzen/kostenleitfaden</a>
FORMS FOR FUNDING APPLICATION	Web
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Description K2 Centre</li> <li>• Cost Plan 1<sup>st</sup> FP</li> <li>• Monitoring Tables</li> </ul> <p>Annex</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annex 0: Review of existing centers (only for existing COMET-centres)</li> <li>• Annex 1: References (no forms available)</li> <li>• Annex 2: Project Sheets</li> <li>• Annex 3: Partner Descriptions</li> <li>• Annex 4: CVs and List of Publications</li> <li>• Annex 5: Letters of Commitment (LOC) Scientific Partners</li> <li>• Annex 6: Letters of Commitment (LOC) Company Partners</li> <li>• Annex 7: Declaration of Federal Province(s) (no forms available)</li> </ul>	<a href="https://www.ffg.at/comet-4-ausschreibung-k2-zentren">https://www.ffg.at/comet-4-ausschreibung-k2-zentren</a>

### 4. LEGAL BASIS

The following documents are used as a legal basis for this Call:

DOCUMENTS	Web
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Richtlinien zur Förderung der wirtschaftlich-technischen Forschung, Technologieentwicklung und Innovation” (guidelines for the promotion of the commercial and technological development of research, technology and innovation (FTI – guidelines 2015) Struktur- FTI-guidelines<sup>3</sup>)</li> <li>• COMET Programme Document dated 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016</li> <li>• COMET Evaluation Concept<sup>4</sup> dated 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016</li> </ul>	<a href="https://www.ffg.at/recht-finanzen/rechtsgrundlagen">https://www.ffg.at/recht-finanzen/rechtsgrundlagen</a>  <a href="http://www.ffg.at/content/comet-downloadcenter">http://www.ffg.at/content/comet-downloadcenter</a> see General: points 1.2

Superior provisions may be restricted, but not invalidated, by programme-specific provisions in the Programme Document or these Call Guidelines.

<sup>3</sup> GZ BMVIT-609.986/0011-III/12/2014 and GZ BMVFW-97.005/0003-C1/9/2014.

<sup>4</sup> part of the COMET- Programme Document (annex)



## 5. THE BASIS OF FUNDING

### 5.1 What are K2 Centres?

#### 5.1.1. General Information

K2 Centres aim to focus existing competences and develop new competences by collaborating with international researchers of renown, scientific partners and companies in a joint strategically oriented research programme at the highest level.

K2 Centres are characterised by extremely ambitious research programmes. They define new promising/emerging fields of research and differ from K1 Centres by carrying out research of particularly high risk. They drive internationalisation as a characteristic of excellent research. Benchmarking with the best must be ensured on a continuous basis.

They carry out strategic research to establish promising/emerging fields of research way beyond the current state of the art and to develop new fields of expertise in order to strengthen Austria's position as a research location and prepare it for the challenges of the future.

K2 Centres encourage collaboration with top international scientists and companies. Structured career models offer high-potential researchers from Austria and abroad optimal development and career prospects.

If funding is granted competence centres must be organised as **independent legal entities**, preferably as a limited liability company (GmbH) or a corporation.

COMET Centres are to be classified as research organisations if they meet the definition of "research and knowledge dissemination organisations" specified in Article 83 of the GBER (General Block Exemption Regulation) (for definition see Glossary)<sup>5</sup>.

Research activities of COMET- Centres must be pooled in order to achieve the required visibility and attractiveness. More than one location is permissible provided that the hub character of the centre is preserved.

Expertise is built up directly at the Centre, especially through recruitment, qualification measures and the creation of a shared knowledge base in order to ensure the long-term existence of the Centre.

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<sup>5</sup> The main activity of the Centre is considered to be non-economic if an economic activity represents a secondary activity which is directly related to and required for the operation of the research organisation or which is inseparably linked to the non-economic main activity and is limited to 20%. If such a research organisation also carries out economic activities it must keep separate records concerning their financing, costs and revenue. Companies which can have a controlling influence on such organisations, for example as a shareholder or member, must not be granted preferential access to the results obtained.

If the non-economic area generates profits (e.g. via licences deriving from a funded project), they have to be reinvested into the non-economic Area of the centre.

COMET Centres comprise a funded area (COMET area), in which the relevant COMET research programme is carried out, and a Non-COMET area, which does not receive public funding from the COMET programme and is used for additional projects as company projects, international and EU funded projects as well as other national funded projects (see Glossary for a definition of “Non-K area”).

### 5.1.2 COMET Research Programme

Central to each application is a **research programme defined jointly by science and industry** which does not simply constitute a conglomeration of individual projects but creates substantial added value as a result of cooperation and joint strategic orientation.

The planned research programme may be divided into several research Areas. An **Area** is defined as a methodically and thematically distinct unit in a K2 Centre’s research programme. It must define a coherent research and development programme for the medium term within the larger context of a COMET-Centre (see Glossary for definition of “Area”).

The individual Areas consist of several **individual projects** of an appropriate and reasonable size. Projects may also involve several Areas (cross-cutting projects).

An Area comprises categorically two different types of individual projects: company projects which may be classified into „multifirm“ and „single firm“ projects as well as strategic projects (see Glossary for a definition of “Projects”).

The share of single firm projects is limited to a maximum of 20% of eligible costs. The share of pure strategic projects must amount to at least 20% of eligible costs (target value).

**Strategic Areas** in the sense of COMET Modules are designed to pool strategic research in order to open up new, promising/emerging fields of research that are way beyond the current state of the art in order to enable high-risk research (see Glossary for a definition of “Strategic Area”). The research programme must include at least one Strategic Area.

A Strategic Area consists exclusively of strategic projects due to the high degree of novelty required.

Individual projects must be described using so-called “Project Sheets” to be annexed to the funding application. At least 60% of the overall costs of the research programme must be incurred on projects and supported by LOCs.

## 5.2 What governance structures are required?

Competence centres are unique in the portfolio of funding programmes because of their special governance structures, their long-term orientation and their size.

COMET- Centres must have a **balanced ownership structure** without dominance of a single owner. Preference should be given to a balanced mix involving partners from science and industry.

A key factor for the success of the competence centre is an **independent Centre Management** which pursues the Centre's objectives and interests and is responsible for efficient business operation as well as organisational and scientific management (managing director, scientific director) of the Centre.

The Centre Management is responsible for:

- Establishing and optimising organisational and decision-making structures
- Supporting the build-up of expertise at the Centre by recruiting qualified staff, ensuring staff development and gender mainstreaming, establishing a shared knowledge base etc.
- Creating structured career models for researchers, actively supporting the mobility of research staff
- Recruiting experts for key functions such as Key Researchers, Area Managers, Project Managers etc.
- External presentation/PR measures including website in English/German
- Benchmarking (continuous comparison with the best of the world) /self-evaluation of the Centre
- IP policies (regulations between the Centre, company partners and scientific partners)
- Ensuring the exchange of knowledge and communication between the Areas in order to use synergies and create a clear added value.

In addition to the bodies prescribed by law, K2 Centres must establish centre- **specific boards** (especially a Strategy Board<sup>6</sup>, an International Advisory Board<sup>7</sup>) which carry out important strategic, advisory and supervisory tasks:

- Monitoring and supervision of the Centre's strategic goals, especially with regard to excellence, the development of international visibility, IP policies and international networking and positioning of the centre as an attractive international cooperation partner
- Long-term strategic planning to secure the success and existence of the Centre beyond the funding period (by developing the Non-COMET area, drawing up a business plan etc.)
- Quality assurance for the research programme
- Safeguarding the Centre's unique selling proposition

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<sup>6</sup> The Strategy Board should provide a balanced mix of scientific and business expertise.

<sup>7</sup> The Advisory Boards should comprise high-calibre, independent international experts.

- Monitoring compliance with requirements and recommendations specified by the jury as well as goal achievement and results
  - Changes in the research programme and partner structure
- The application must show what boards will be established to fulfil these functions. The FFG/funding providers are entitled to participate in relevant boards as observers.

When dealing with conflicts of interest concerning members of the management as well as the COMET-Centres surveillance authority, guidelines in accord with the public corporate governance codex have to be applied or ensured.(for details see glossary)

### 5.3 What criteria must be met by the consortium?

Partners may participate in a COMET Centre **either** as a scientific partner **or** as a company partner. Participation as both scientific partner and company partner is expressly excluded.

Applicants can be **consortia** with

- at least **1 scientific partner (SP)** and
- at least **5 company partners (CP)** that are independent<sup>8</sup> of each other

If one company partner controls another or a group of companies, this group of companies will be regarded as one enterprise. COMET addresses enterprises of all sectors and sizes.

Scientific partners are taken to include research and knowledge dissemination organisations or research organisations (for definition see Glossary) if they provide their contributions as part of their non-economic activities.

Participation in the consortium is evidenced by a “**Letter of Commitment**” (LOC) including the relevant contribution (see LOC template).

The funding must have an incentive effect (for definition see Glossary) for the Centre as the funding recipient and should also have an incentive effect for the partners. eCall therefore requires both the Centre and each partner to explain whether and to what extent the project could be carried out without funding.

The cooperative character of the programme is emphasised by the mandatory conclusion of an **Agreement** specifying the rights and obligations of the partners involved (see Glossary for a definition of “Agreement”).

The centre must be located in Austria.

The requirements to the consortium have to be fulfilled at all times after the project start until the end of the project. Otherwise funding can be reclaimed

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<sup>8</sup> 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](#)

## 5.4 What are the responsibilities of the consortium leader?

The consortium leader (the Centre) is responsible for the project management and communications with the funding agency and the partners of the Centre for the entire duration of the programme. This includes checking the reports and financial accounts of all partners based on the data and information provided. The consortium leader confirms to the FFG that

- the costs included in the accounts are relevant to the project, i.e. they can be clearly attributed to the project;
- the project is fully in line with the funding contract in terms of costs and content and that any alterations have been notified in good time;
- the reports and financial accounts are complete and have been prepared in accordance with the funding and programme guidelines.

## 5.5 Who is eligible to receive funding and/or to participate?

### 5.5.1 Who is eligible for funding?

The Centre is the sole funding recipient (and contracting party).

Competence centres must be implemented as independent legal entities, preferably as a limited liability company (GmbH) or a corporation.

Company partners and scientific partners are not considered funding recipients, but may claim eligible costs relevant for the calculation of the total funding amount.

### 5.5.2 Who is eligible to participate?

**Legal entities, partnerships and sole traders** that are not part of the federal administration are in principle eligible to participate as consortium partners

Especially:

- Companies of any legal form
- Institutions of research and knowledge dissemination
  - Universities<sup>9</sup>
  - Non-university research institutions
  - Technology transfer institutions, innovation agents and other research-oriented organisations such as associations with a relevant purpose

Legal entities that are part of the federal administration are eligible to participate as consortium partners provided that they do not claim eligible costs and do not provide cash or in-kind contributions to the project as company or scientific partners. Their

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<sup>9</sup> 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 UOG 2002/§20. To participate, these organisational units have to possess the necessary power of attorney according to UOG 2002/§ 27. Organisational units underneath the level of university institutes or comparable units (eg work groups) may not participate as project partners

participation needs to be justified in the application. The scope of the participation as well as the resulting rights and duties are to be stipulated by contract.

**Sub-contractors** are not considered as partners in a COMET- Centre. They are not entitled to use the project results and provide defined services for the Centre, which are to be included in the cost category “Third-party costs”.

**Associated partners** may be organisations or persons that do not provide regular services for the Centre and are not Agreement partners. The services are to be included in the cost category “Third-party costs”.

### 5.5.3 Can existing competence centres participate?

A co-operation between existing competence centres is possible. The centres may join as scientific partners in their non-economic area. Complementary (sub)projects may also be carried out within the research programme of the respective centre without joining as a partner. If existing COMET competence centres participate as scientific partners the projects must be carried out in the Centre’s Non-COMET area (for definition of ‘Non-COMET area’ see glossary).

## 5.6 Can partners from outside Austria participate?

A consortium may have partners from outside Austria.

A major aim of the Programme is to promote internationalisation by involving internationally renowned researchers, organisations and companies in order to strengthen the competitiveness of science and industry.

The participation of international (research) partners is therefore desired and should be set out accordingly in the application.

The costs of foreign partners – both from within and outside the EU – can be accepted under the following conditions:

- The foreign partner accepts the FFG’s obligation and entitlement to monitor the project progress as specified in the funding contract and submits documentation in German or English in accordance with the requirements to be met by Austrian partners.

Organisations from outside Austria may also be involved as subcontractors or as associated partners if they do not provide regular services for the Centre and are not Agreement Partners.

## 5.7 How much support is granted?

The **maximum** level of **public funding** is **EUR 6 million per year** for each K2 Centre (**federal and provincial funding**) or max. EUR 24 Mio over the 4-year duration of the Centre (1st funding period).

Support is paid in the form of non-repayable grants.

### 5.7.1 Amount of Federal Funding

The maximum amount of **federal funding** is **EUR 4 million per year**.

### 5.7.2 Amount of Provincial Funding

The provinces have committed themselves to provide additional funds at a fixed **ratio of 2:1** for the COMET Competence Centre Programme. The maximum level of additional **provincial funding** is therefore **EUR 2 Mio. per year**.

If several provinces participate in a COMET Centre the total amount of provincial funding will be divided between the participating provinces.

The level of provincial funding must not be exceeded in the funded part of the COMET Centre. The provinces may, however, at any time provide funding for other projects in the Non-COMET area of the Centre.

For details concerning the application of provincial co-funding see chapter 6.2

### 5.7.3 Amount of Funding Rate

The applied **overall funding rate** must be within the range specified for K2 Centres (**40% - 55%** of eligible total costs) and results from the research mix or the predominant type of research in the individual projects. Centres with a stronger focus on basic research will receive a higher funding rate and centres with a stronger focus on applied research will receive a lower funding rate within the specified range.

The funding applicants must propose an overall funding rate based on the planned research programme. The final funding rate for the entire Centre will be determined in the course of the evaluation process.

This Call invites applications for the first funding period. The approval of a second funding period will depend on a successful mid-term evaluation (see Evaluation Concept). Funding amounts that have not been used cannot be carried over from one funding period to the next.

## 5.8 How are COMET Centres financed?

The total financing of a COMET centre comprises public funding (federal and provincial funding at a ratio 2:1) as well as contributions of the scientific and company partners.

- Public funding: 40 – 55 %
- Contribution by scientific partners: min. 5 %
- Contribution by company partners: min. 40 %

The balance must be covered.

**Example of financing** for a K2 Centre (EUR per year) assuming a 55% funding rate and maximum eligible funding:

Federal funding (max.)	4.000.000	36,67%
Provincial funding (max.)	2.000.000	18,33%
Contribution of scientific partner	545.455	5%
Contribution of company partner	4.363.636	40%
Total costs	10.909.091	100%

### 5.8.1 Contribution of scientific partners

The accumulated contributions of the scientific partners must be **at least 5%** of the eligible overall costs and cannot be replaced by contributions from company partners. **Up to 100%** can be in the form of **in-kind contributions**.

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

### 5.8.2 Contribution of company partners

The contributions of the company partners must be **at least 40%** of the eligible overall costs for COMET- Centres.

Company partners may provide both **cash contributions** and **in-kind contributions**; a **total of at least 50%** of the contributions must be provided **in cash**. As a matter of principle, company partners are not allowed to provide general co-financing in the form of a basic subsidy.

Costs of the company partners are to be accounted for as in-kind contributions<sup>10</sup>. Additionally the centre may purchase services from the company partners in the Non-COMET area of the centre.

## 5.9 What projects are eligible for funding?

The COMET Programme provides funding exclusively for the following project types

- a) Activities in the field of industrial research
- b) Activities in the field of experimental development
- c) Activities in the field of basic research related to activities listed in a) and b) above
- d) Training measures related to activities listed in a) and b) above

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<sup>10</sup> Services from company partners may only be purchased in justified individual cases and require prior approval.



e) Technological feasibility studies

For details on both research categories experimental development and industrial research see Struktur- FTI Guidelines and Glossary of this document.

A single project may also be predominantly assigned to industrial research if more than half of the eligible project costs are incurred for activities of this category

## 5.10 What costs are eligible ?

Costs eligible for funding are exclusively limited to costs incurred directly in the context of development and running operations of competence centres

All costs attributable to the project or centre incurred directly, actually and additionally (to the normal operational costs) during the duration of the funded research activity are eligible for funding. Evidence must be provided for actual project costs (e.g. original receipts allocated to the project, annual payroll accounts, time records).

The period for which **costs may be recognised** corresponds to the **contractual duration of the Centre**, which commences with the start date and ends with the conclusion of the project. Funding amounts that have not been used cannot be carried over from one funding period to the next.

**Detailed information on eligible and non-eligible costs** is given in the Cost Guidelines Version 2.1, which may be found at <https://www.ffg.at/recht-finanzen/kostenleitfaden/version-21>.

The following regulations apply in addition to the provisions of the Cost Guidelines as amended:

- One of the following two methods may be used for reporting **costs of R&D infrastructure use**:
  - applying annual depreciation
  - reporting full acquisition costs in the year of acquisition and correcting the eligible costs by the remaining book value in the last year.
- Centre overhead costs must be determined at company level. The overhead costs determined must be distributed between the COMET area and the non-COMET area using a transparent allocation and accounting system. The overhead costs allocated to the COMET area must be adjusted for the costs not eligible for funding.
- Travel costs of third parties are eligible for funding if they can be shown to be directly related to the project (e.g. members of the International Advisory Board).
- Public relations costs are eligible for funding if they are directly related to the COMET Centre and can be allocated to the funded research project (e.g. dissemination of research results, brochures, press releases, homepage etc.).
- Hospitality costs related to relevant networking activities (e.g. Boards, Project Committees) are eligible for funding.
- In contrast to the Cost Guidelines, project costs and services charged to the Centre by the scientific partners are eligible for funding. These costs are to be included in the costs of scientific partners.

- All COMET -Centres are obliged to be annually audited by a certified accountant.
- **Bilateral research cooperation** ('single-firm' projects) is limited to a maximum of 20% of eligible costs.
- The phasing-in period of the Centre must be taken into account in the cost development (staff recruitment etc.).

Costs that are not eligible for funding include, inter alia:

- Costs for the establishment and maintenance of the legal entity (e.g. company limited by shares, GmbH), e.g. notarial deed, company registration etc.
- Costs for the acquisition of real estate and immovable property;
- Investments in construction, manufacturing equipment and production facilities
- Costs that are not directly related to the funded project;
- Costs that are not deemed to be eligible for funding under EU law.

## 5.11 What points should be considered relating to IPR?

Before the first instalment of funding is paid, a duly executed Agreement (Cooperation Agreement) must be submitted, which regulates the collaboration and especially the **intellectual property rights (IPR)** relating to the funded project results. Where appropriate existing Centres can draft an amendment for an existing agreement.

The major areas of regulation have been summarised in the Agreement Guidelines for COMET Centres and the IPR Sideletter (Best Practice – COMET), which are available at <http://www.ffg.at/content/comet-downloadcenter> (Section 5.1) for the respective call.

IPR regulations should be tailored to the individual project types – strategic projects or company projects (single-firm and multi-firm projects) – and their characteristics.

Intellectual property rights relating to the project results belong to the consortium. It must be ensured, however, that the COMET Centre is strengthened in its position as a central knowledge hub and in building up competence at the centre with strategic projects playing a key role in this respect.

Intellectual property rights relating to the project results belong to the consortium. The provisions of the [Community framework for state aid for research and development and innovation](#), 2014/C 198/11, apply to collaborations between commercial companies and research institutions. This document stipulates that 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; the contributions (cash/in-kind) provided to the Centre may be offset.

## 5.12 What are the evaluation criteria for funding applications?

### 5.12.1 Evaluation criteria for K2 Centres

The funding applications will be evaluated in accordance with the following four main criteria:

1. Quality of the project
2. Suitability of the applicant / project partners
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.

Projects must achieve a total of at least 50 points to be invited to the hearing.

1. Quality of the Project	Points 25
<p><b>1.1. Scientific quality of the Research Programme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the research programme meet / exceed the international state-of-the-art in science and technology. Have existing national and international research activities been sufficiently taken into account?</li> <li>• Have the objectives of the research programme been described clearly? Are the approaches and methods adequate to achieve these objectives?</li> <li>• Is the research programme designed to trigger new research impulses and develop new expertise? Is it adequately focused?</li> <li>• What is the added value of the research programme as compared to a sum of individual projects? Do the individual projects complement each other? Do they provide significant synergy effects?</li> <li>• If the project relates to people<sup>11</sup>: Have gender aspects been adequately taken into account in the research topic or within the methodical approach?</li> </ul>	12,5
<p><b>1.2. Quality of strategic research in promising/emerging fields</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent does the research programme open up to <b>promising/emerging</b> fields<sup>12</sup> and develop new expertise?</li> <li>• Are the approaches characterised by high risk (no incremental research) and are they designed to meet grand challenges?</li> <li>• Does the research go way beyond the state of the art?</li> <li>• Does the research programme have potential to generate ground-breaking new findings?</li> </ul>	6,25

<sup>11</sup> For projects whose content and focus have no gender relevance, no points will be deducted.

<sup>12</sup> In German: .. „in zukunftsweisenden Themenfeldern“



<p><b>1.3. Quality of planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the work and time schedules in line with the planned research programme?</li> <li>• Are the costs and financing plans realistic at programme and project level? Is the size of the individual projects adequate for the research programme?</li> <li>• 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?</li> </ul>	6,25
<p><b>2. Suitability of the applicant / project partners</b></p>	
<p><b>2.1. Quality of the consortium from a scientific perspective</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the scientific qualifications and resources of the consortium sufficient to ensure successful implementation of the research programme?</li> <li>• Can the key persons demonstrate relevant reference projects? Do the key persons have the potential to make new ground-breaking findings?</li> <li>• Is the consortium complete or does it require additional expertise and relevant partners?</li> </ul>	10
<p><b>2.2. Quality of the consortium in terms of the company partners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the technical and economic qualifications and resources of the company partners sufficient to ensure successful implementation of the research programme?</li> <li>• Can the key companies demonstrate relevant reference projects? Do the key companies have the potential to implement new findings on the market?</li> <li>• Is the consortium complete or does it require additional expertise and relevant partners?</li> </ul>	10
<p><b>2.3. Organisation and management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the (planned) organisational structure and management of the Centre meet the requirements of the COMET Programme?</li> <li>• Are the planned target values adequate and reasonable?</li> <li>• What is the Centre's performance to date? (only for existing COMET- Centres)</li> </ul>	5
<p><b>3. Benefit and exploitation</b></p>	
<p><b>3.1. Economic relevance of the research results</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What benefits will the project results bring to the companies or users? What are the market opportunities and the potential for commercial exploitation?</li> <li>• Are relevant measures of technology and knowledge transfer to industry in place? Are the expected research results suitable for initiating new products, processes and services?</li> </ul>	12,5
<p><b>3.2. Benefit and exploitation at the Centre</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will the research results be exploited at the Centre or by the partners (in the form of IPR, patents, licences, non-COMET projects, etc.)?</li> <li>• Is the work designed to establish a knowledge base for the future of the Centre?</li> </ul>	7,5



<p><b>3.3. Market relevance of strategic research in promising/emerging fields</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the new research fields address potential future markets with a long-term development potential?</li> <li>• How large is the potential market and what is the competitive advantage and the impact on the sector?</li> <li>• Can the expected research results provide a basis for new ground-breaking technologies?</li> </ul>	5
<b>4. Relevance to the call</b>	<b>Points 25</b>
<p><b>4.1. Development of human resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the chosen HR strategy in line with the Centre's overall strategy? Are the planned HR measures in terms of personnel recruitment, development and management aligned to the Centre's current requirements?</li> <li>• Does the Centre offer structured career models for researchers from Austria and abroad? What measures are put in place to attract internationally renowned researchers to the Centre?</li> <li>• Does the Centre promote the intersectoral mobility of researchers (exchange between science and industry)?</li> <li>• Are the measures of personnel recruitment and development coherent with the research programme? Do they ensure the development of relevant expertise at the Centre?</li> <li>• Are the planned gender mainstreaming measures sufficient? Does the Centre provide for a balanced participation of women researchers at all levels? (in terms of improving the gender balance in the sector)</li> </ul>	10
<p><b>4.2. Internationalisation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the (planned) involvement of international scientific organisations and researchers in the COMET research programme?</li> <li>• Does the Centre plan to cooperate with internationally renowned researchers and research institutions in strategic research?</li> <li>• What is the position of the K2 Centre in comparison with the best in terms of international benchmarking? What is the USP of the Centre as compared to other research facilities?</li> <li>• What is the (planned) involvement of international companies in the COMET research programme?</li> <li>• Is the Centre's (planned) involvement in international and EU projects ambitious? Does it participate in major international events, bodies, etc. to a sufficient extent?</li> </ul>	10
<p><b>4.3. Incentive effect of funding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent does the funding influence the project positively in one or more of the following dimensions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Implementation: the funding enables the project to be implemented in the first place</li> <li>○ Acceleration: the funding accelerates implementation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	5

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Scope: the funding increases the scope of the project</li> <li>○ Range: the funding makes the project more ambitious through: a more radical innovation approach, higher risk, new or extended collaborations, long-term strategic orientation</li> </ul> |  |
|--|--|

### 5.12.2 Key Figures and indicators

The evaluation will also involve an assessment of key figures and indicators based on individual target values defined by the Centre upon submission of the application.

The review will determine to what extent these target values are reasonable and realistic in the context of the given research field and environment. The target values (or subsequently adjusted, if required) will be included in the reporting process and verified in the mid-term and ex-post evaluations (comparison between target and actual values).

The quantitative target values must be entered in the monitoring table of the application, see Table.V. Target Values). Referring explanations of the individual indicators are shown in the table under “Explanations”. The reference values of the individual indicators are shown in the table (under “Explanations“). In addition to the general target values that apply to all Centres, each Centre must additionally define at least 3 self defined specific target values. The target values must be described in the application.

The COMET Monitoring and Evaluation Concept (Chapter 3) describes the key figures and indicators allocated to the individual COMET Programme goals.

Further information about the results of previous COMET Centres can be found in the monitoring reports, which are published on an annual basis.

[https://www.ffg.at/content/comet-downloadcenter#Anker\\_4\\_Berichtswesen](https://www.ffg.at/content/comet-downloadcenter#Anker_4_Berichtswesen) (unter Pkt. 4.1 K1/K2 Zentren)


### 5.13 What documents are required for submission?


The templates are available from the FFG website and must be used: <https://www.ffg.at/comet-4-ausschreibung-k2-zentren>


More explanations can be found in the relevant forms and templates.

 **Project Description K2 Centre**

Project description – thematic funding application (upload as pdf file)

 **Cost Plan FP1:** Cost and financial tables for the 1<sup>st</sup> funding period of the Centre (upload as Excel file)

 **Monitoring Tables:** Monitoring tables including quantitative target values (upload as Excel file)

 **Annex (0)-7** (Uploads as pdf files)

**Annex 0: 4YE Review of existing centres** (for existing COMET Centres only)

Describes compliance/implementation of requirements/recommendations from the last evaluation of the centre

**Annex 1: References** (no template); Gives the literature used in drawing up the application

**Annex 2: Project Sheets**

**Annex 3: Partner Descriptions**

**Annex 4\*: CVs and List of Publications**

Please upload all CVs and publications in a single file via eCall (no scan)

**Annex 5\*: Letters of Commitment (LOC) Scientific Partners** and

**Annex 6\*: Letters of Commitment (LOC) Company Partners**

Duly executed letters of commitment of all scientific and company partners including their relevant contributions (cash and in-kind).

**Annex 7\*: Declaration of Federal Province(s)**

Written declaration(s) of the participating provinces (province of domicile must provide a declaration upon submission of the application).

\*) Annexes 4 - 7 need only be uploaded electronically and need NOT be enclosed with the paper application. The LOCs are to be scanned for the electronic application, the originals remain at the Centre.

It is not permitted to enclose additional Annexes.

### 5.14 Is it necessary to mention other projects?

To support the assessment of the content of the project, the application for funding must list those projects that have been or are being publicly funded by Austrian authorities and/or EU grants, provided these are:

- Pre-projects which deliver results for this project
- Ongoing or finished projects (of 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 projects that have already received funding.

When submitting a COMET follow-up application, the differences to the previous project funded under the COMET scheme must be clearly set out.

Additional projects should be listed in the Project Description or in the Monitoring Tables

Other funding applied for or approved for the relevant project proposal must be indicated directly in the eCall application (under Costs and Funding/Other Funding), with the exception of applications for provincial co-funding under the COMET Programme.

### 5.15 Is scientific integrity ensured?

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

The FFG is a member of the Austrian Agency for Scientific Integrity – OeAWI (<http://www.oeawi.at/de/statuten.html>) and is thus committed to safeguarding good scientific practice.

If we suspect a lack of scientific quality or misconduct in the course of the formal checks, we may forward the relevant documents 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 quality or misconduct (e.g. plagiarism), we must request a revision of the application or reject it for formal reasons. If funding has already been granted, the funding must be reduced, retained or reclaimed.

## 6. SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

### 6.1 What is the procedure for submission?

The funding application must be submitted in both **electronic** (eCall) and **paper form**.

The application forms (see Chapter 3) are available for download from the FFG website at <https://www.ffg.at/comet-4-ausschreibung-k2-zentren> and must not be modified.

The paper application must be submitted to FFG in **6 copies** prior to the expiry of the application deadline (**1 original loose leaf version** together with the duly signed documents 'Project Description K2-Centre' and 'Cost Plan FP1' and **5 copies**).

For **electronic submission** the documents must be uploaded **via eCall** according to the specified folder structure. Annexes 4 to 7 (LOC) need only be submitted electronically.

The **complete** electronic application must be submitted via **eCall in good time** prior to the submission deadline at <https://ecall.ffg.at>.

The funding application may only be submitted once **all invited partners have completed and submitted** their partner applications via eCall.



An **application** is considered to have been submitted if it has been **completed in eCall** by clicking the **'Submit'** button. On successful submission an automatic **confirmation of receipt** will be sent **by e-mail**. It is **not possible to resubmit** the application or parts of it or to revise the application once it has been submitted.

A **detailed tutorial** on eCall is available at <https://ecall.ffg.at/Cockpit/Help.aspx>.

The application is to be submitted by the Centre. If the Centre has not yet been established at the time of submission, the application is to be submitted by the partner appointed as consortium leader by the consortium.

## 6.2 What is the procedure for applying for provincial co-funding?

Every funding application must be accompanied by a **written declaration of the province of domicile** (i.e. the province in which the COMET- Centre will be based) and **all co-financing provinces**. In justified exceptional cases the declaration of co-financing provinces may be submitted subsequently, at the latest 4 weeks after submission of the application.

The written declaration is usually a letter of reference on behalf of the funding application in which the provincial government confirms its funding commitment in the event that the COMMET Centre is approved. The entire amount of provincial funding must in any case be covered by (a) written declaration(s).<sup>13</sup>

The funding applicants are responsible for consulting the relevant contacts in the provinces in good time prior to the submission of the funding application.

A so-called **Core Form** containing the key figures of the project must be submitted to the relevant provincial governments prior to the application deadline by **10<sup>th</sup> October 2018**. The form is available from the contact offices of the provincial governments or from the FFG website.

The funding applicants must send the complete application to the relevant authority of the province(s) involved till **October 24<sup>th</sup> 2018** (call dead line)

A list of the relevant contacts in the individual provinces can be found at <https://www.ffg.at/comet-4-ausschreibung-k2-zentren>. (including also informations about specific conditions).

## 6.3 What about the security of confidential project data?

The FFG is under a legal obligation to maintain secrecy concerning company and project information pursuant to Sec. 9 para 4 of the Austrian Research Promotion Agency Act

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<sup>13</sup> The province may also confirm in its written declaration that it will not participate in the COMET Centre if it deems the Centre to be incompatible with the interests of the province. In this case the Federal Government reserves the right to provide funding for the K Centre without a contribution being made by the province.

(FFG-G, Federal Law Gazette BGBl. I No. 73/2004 ). External experts who are involved in the assessment of projects are also subject to confidentiality obligations.

Project contents and results may only be published with the consent of the funding recipient.

We may use personal data in accordance with Secs. 7 to 11 of the Data Protection Act (DSG 2000 Federal Law Gazette, BGBl. I No. 165/1999):

- for the conclusion and performance of the funding contract
- for fulfilling our statutory mandate
- for control purposes

This use may mean that the data must be transferred or disclosed in particular to bodies and authorised representatives of the Federal Audit Office, the Federal Minister of Finance and the EU.

## 7. ASSESSMENT AND DECISION

### 7.1 What is the formal check?

During the formal check, the application is checked for formal correctness and completeness, but not for thematic content.

You will be notified of the result of the formal check within 4 weeks via an eCall message.

- 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, you may rectify these problems within a reasonable period of time.

Should it transpire after the formal check that incorrect information has been given, the funding application may also be removed from consideration at a subsequent point in the procedure.

The relevant **checklist** can be found in the Project Description template.

### 7.2 How is the evaluation procedure organised?

The procedure is defined in the COMET Programme Document (Chapter 8) and the Evaluation Concept. K2 Centres are evaluated in **a one-stage process involving a hearing.**

The review is carried out in accordance with the criteria listed in Chapter 5.12 by **national FFG experts** and **external international experts** (peers) based on the documents submitted. The external review is carried out by the Christian Doppler Research Association (CDG) together with the Austrian Science Fund (FWF).

It is possible to **exclude up to 5 international reviewers** for justified reasons, especially in the event of disputes on theoretical principles or scientific competition. eCall contains an entry field for this purpose.

After the initial review based on the defined evaluation criteria each Centre will be invited to a **hearing**, which will take place in Vienna. The primary aim of the hearing is to request additional information from the applicants. The hearings will be held in English and are scheduled to last 4 hours per consortium: 0.5 h presentation, 1.5 h discussion and 2 h closed session (without applicants). Any questions arising from the review will be communicated to the consortium leader for clarification during the presentation or discussion at least 1 week prior to the hearing. A maximum of 5 representatives per Centre/consortium may participate in the hearing.

An **evaluation panel (jury)** will subsequently make a funding recommendation based on the reviews and the results of the hearing.

### 7.3 Who takes the funding decision?

The funding decision is the responsibility of the Federal Minister(s) concerned and will be made on the basis of the funding recommendation from the evaluation panel, including any obligations and/or conditions.

- Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology (BMVIT)
- Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs (BMDW)

## 8. FUNDING PROCEDURE

### 8.1 How is the funding contract concluded?

If funding is granted, FFG sends the consortium leader (Centre) an **offer of funding** in form of a **draft contract** which must be accepted within a **specified period of time**. If the consortium leader accepts the draft contract including any requirements contained therein within the specified period of time, a **Funding Contract** will be drawn up. The Centre will be the exclusive funding recipient.

The Funding Contract specifies, among other points the funding recipient, the project title, the level of eligible costs, the amount of funding granted, the period of funding, the payment modalities, the reporting obligations and any additional conditions and requirements.

The Funding Contract must be duly executed and the original returned to the FFG.

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

The **Centre Plan** forms an integral part of the Funding Contract and must be drawn up prior to the conclusion of the Funding Contract. Compliance with the obligations as well as the recommendations formulated by the jury and any resulting changes to the application need to be addressed. The Centre Plan consists of a thematic part and tables including a cost plan as well as additional annexes.

## 8.2 How should recommendations and conditions be taken into account?

Recommendations and/or mandatory requirements may be formulated during the evaluation of the application.

Requirements may take the form of conditions for the conclusion of the Funding Contract) or conditions to be met within the funding period.

The implementation of the recommendations and requirements must be documented in the Centre Plan and interim reports.

## 8.3 How are the instalments of funding paid?

The amount payable for the relevant annual period will be paid in advance.

- The instalment for the first year will be paid as soon as the Funding Contract has been signed and the recipient has met all relevant requirements. The maximum amount for the first instalment for K2 Centres is EUR 4 Mio (federal funding).

Before the 1st instalment can be paid, the consortium must prepare an **Agreement** (see Glossary for definition), which defines the basic principles of cooperation between the partners involved in the Centre (see FFG Agreement Guidelines for information about the structure of the Agreement). The Agreement must be signed by at least 50% of the partners covering at least 50% of the partner contributions.

- Subsequent instalments will be paid in accordance with the progress of the project respectively for the following funding year will be paid once the reports been reviewed and approved. The payment amount will in principle be calculated from the costs already incurred and the costs budgeted for the following year applying the funding rate specified in the Funding Contract or for the budget adjustments for the current year (at the annual report)
- The funding agency reserves the right to reduce the funding amount in justified cases (e.g. actual costs lower than planned costs).
- Final instalment: 10% of the maximum funding approved will be retained and will only be transferred upon approval of the final report and the final accounts. The payment amount will be based on the approved eligible costs and the funding rate agreed in the Funding Contract/Centre Plan. At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> funding period, the scientific partners and the company partners must have provided their financing rates stipulated in the Funding Contract. If the financing rates have not been made in full federal funding might be reduced accordingly.

The **payment of funding** during the term of the Centre does **not imply approval** of the costs.

The **costs will only be approved** once the Centre is granted **discharge** by the FFG Project Controlling & Audit Division following the final audit performed after expiry of the 1<sup>st</sup> funding period.

The FFG will carry out (annual) **on-site audits** during the term of the funded K Centre and may also check the accounts submitted by the funding recipient and the partners for

accuracy and the correct and legal use of the funds. The audits will be duly announced by the FFG.

## 8.4 What reports and accounts are required?

A **technical interim report** including monitoring data, as well as **interim accounts** must be submitted within one month of the reporting deadlines specified in the Funding Contract **using the reporting function of the eCall system**. The reporting must correspond to the actual requirements of FFG.

The **annual reports** document the preceding funding year and include the budget for the following year. The cost tables additionally include the accounts provided by all consortium partners.

A scientific **final report**, a (publishable) short summary<sup>14</sup> and **final accounts** must be submitted within 2 months of the end of the project **using the reporting function of the eCall system**

**Detailed information** on eligible and non-eligible costs are set out in the “Cost Guidelines Version 2.1” available at <https://www.ffg.at/recht-finanzen/kostenleitfaden/version-21>. Further rules concerning COMET can be found in chapter 5.10.

In addition, the funding recipient undertakes to work together with the FFG and the responsible ministry departments to support PR work as and when required. This shall include in particular making available non-confidential project information (e.g. Fact Sheet, Success Stories) and images for electronic dissemination portals and other media purposes.

The FFG will be responsible for reporting, controlling and auditing the COMET Centres with regard to both federal and provincial funding. The provinces may accept the results of this audit, but may also perform audits of their own.

## 8.5 How should changes to the project be communicated?

Any deviations from the planned or approved activities must be explained in the reports (e.g. changes to the work schedule, new Projects, entry and exit of partners etc.).

Substantial changes to the research programme and expected major deviations, especially from the values stipulated in the Centre Plan, must be reported to the FFG immediately they become known via eCall.

The FFG should generally be notified as soon as possible of any changes that occur in the Centre, and in any case of any major changes in the costs and/or contributions, so that further procedure can be discussed and agreed.

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<sup>14</sup> Publication of the short summary may be omitted if it contradicts the commercial exploitation, due to obligations to confidentiality for security reasons or because of privacy policy

## 8.6 Can the funding period be extended?

The funding period cannot be extended, and funding amounts that have not been used cannot be carried over to the next funding period.

## 8.7 What happens after the end of the first funding period?

The consortium submits a final report and final accounts after the end of the first funding period. 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: The final instalment will be transferred once the specified cost has been reached. If the project is underspent the level of funding will be reduced accordingly. The funding amount may also be reduced for scientific reasons, as well as on formal and legal grounds.

## 8.8 When will the mid-term evaluation take place?

A mid-term evaluation is carried out in the fourth year after the start of the project as specified in the COMET Evaluation Concept for K2 Centres. This evaluation includes an assessment of the achievements so far (ex-post evaluation) and an ex-ante evaluation of the Centre's plans for the second funding period.

The mid-term evaluation will result in a stop/go decision on whether to continue the COMET Centre in the second funding period.

Each Centre will be assessed based on its own achievements and will not compete with the other Centres.

## 8.9 What does 'phasing-out' mean?

Existing COMET Centres (K2) that have reached the end of their term and have not been successful in reapplying in COMET or which do not pursue continued COMET funding, may apply for a phasing out period of up to 1,5 years. The phasing-out period is designed to conclude research activities already started as well as to provide the researchers working at the Centre with optimal conditions for their future professional careers.

The maximum annual funding for the phasing-out period is capped at 50% of average annual funding in the preceding funding period (mean value). Planned activities and a budget for the phasing-out period must be submitted to the FFG (Phasing-Out Plan). The jury will decide whether a centre qualifies for a phasing-out period based on minimum quality criteria.

COMET Centres are, of course, also free to continue without further public funding from the COMET Programme.

## 9. Annex

### 9.1 Glossary

#### **Incentive Effect<sup>15</sup> (Anreizeffekt)**

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

#### **Agreement**

The Agreement is concluded by the consortium partners involved (Centre, company partners, scientific partners) and defines the basic principles of cooperation within the Centre. The issues to be regulated include, but are not limited to, the rights and obligations of the contracting parties, IPRs, liability issues, organisational and decision-making procedures, admission and withdrawal of partners, aims and reporting obligations (see FFG Agreement Guidelines and IPR Sideletter for information about the structure of the Agreement).

#### **Area**

- An **Area** is defined as a methodically and thematically distinct unit in the research programme of a COMET Centre. Thus, an Area must define a coherent research programme for the medium term within the larger context of a COMET Centre.
- A **Strategic Area** in the sense of COMET Modules is a clearly defined research area which requires a high degree of novelty and thus focuses exclusively on strategic research. It is designed to open up new promising/emerging fields of research (in German: “zukunftsweisende Forschungsthemen”) that are way beyond the current state of the art in order to enable particularly high-risk research (no incremental research).

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<sup>15</sup> For detailed definition see Struktur-FTI Guidelines, 12.1 Definition of Terms

### **Cash contributions**

Cash contributions are payments in cash.

### **Research and knowledge dissemination organisation or research organisation<sup>16</sup>**

means an entity (such as universities or research institutes, technology transfer agencies, innovation intermediaries, research-oriented physical or virtual collaborative entities), irrespective of its legal status (organised under public or private law) or way of financing, whose primary goal is to independently conduct fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development or to widely disseminate the results of such activities by way of teaching, publication or knowledge transfer. Where such entity also pursues economic activities, the financing, the costs and the revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately. Undertakings that can exert a decisive influence upon such an entity, for example in the quality of shareholders or members, may not enjoy a preferential access to the results generated by it.

### **Research Categories<sup>17</sup>:**

#### **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.

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.

**Industrial research** has the following characteristics:

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

This may also include:

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<sup>16</sup> In accordance with AGVO, Struktur-FTI-Guidelines and Union framework for State aid measures for the promotion of RTI

<sup>17</sup> for detailed definitions see Struktur-FTI-Guidelines 12.1



- 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.

Industrial research takes place mainly in the laboratory or at laboratory scale. The development risk is higher than for experimental development. The technology readiness level is lower. The time horizon for market introduction is longer.

### **Research programme**

A research programme is defined jointly by science and industry and outlines the area of activity for the COMET Centre within the COMET-funded K area. A research programme must relate to a clearly defined subject matter and is divided into working areas (see definition 'Areas') and projects (see definition 'Projects').

### **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).

### **Multi-firm criterion**

The multi-firm criterion stipulates that at least 5 independent company partners must be involved in a K Centre.

### **Non-COMET area**

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 research area (Area), or as cross-cutting projects 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 are characterised by a high degree of novelty and excellence and are based on a Centre's long-term objectives beyond the short-term requirements of company partners. They are established in line with the core expertise of the Centre and are suitable for expanding this expertise by creating unique selling propositions in an international context. Such research is generally far from development and implementation. The share of pure strategic projects must amount to at least 20% of eligible costs (target value).

- **Company Projects (“Multi-firm” projects, “Single-firm” projects)**

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

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

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

## Dealing with conflicts of interest

When dealing with conflicts of interest concerning members of the management as well as the COMET-Centres surveillance authority, the following points in accordance with the public corporate governance codex of the federal state have to be implemented and ensured:

- Every member of the management of a COMET-Centre has to openly and immediately disclose any conflict of interest towards the surveillance authority and has to inform all other members of the management about it.
- All dealings between the COMET-Centre and members of the management, including family members as well as affiliated persons and organisations, have to follow sector specific conditions. Before their conclusion they require the approval of the surveillance authority, or in case such an authority does not exist, the shareholder's.
- Each member of the surveillance authority of a COMET Centre is committed to the aim of the COMET-Centre. They must neither follow personal interests nor may they use business opportunities that rightly belong to the Centre for themselves.
- Every member of the surveillance authority has to disclose any conflict of interest, especially such conflicts that may arise from consulting or executive functions for customers, suppliers, creditors or other business partner (eg company partners or scientific Partners of the COMET-Centre) towards the surveillance authority.
- The surveillance authority has to inform the shareholders committee about occurring conflicts of interest and handling of such.

- Considerable and non-temporary conflicts of interest of a member of the surveillance authority have to lead to the termination of their mandate. Passing conflicts are for example the build-up phase of a COMET-Centre (max for 2 years after the start of the Centre)
- Members of the surveillance authority are not allowed to be members of the shareholder committee

### **Province of domicile**

The province of domicile is the province in which the COMET Centre is based.

## **9.2 Abbreviations**

AGVO	Allgemeine Gruppen Freistellungsverordnung (General Block Exemption Regulation)
LOC	Letter of Commitment
FFG	Austrian Research Promotion Agency
FP	Funding period
Struktur-FTI Guidelines	Richtlinien zur Förderung der wirtschaftlich-technischen Forschung, Technologieentwicklung und Innovation (guidelines for the promotion of the commercial and technological development of research, technology and innovation (FTI – guidelines 2015) Struktur- FTI-guidelines
Union Framework	Union framework for State aid measures for the promotion of research, technology and innovation
Programme Document	Programme document of the COMET Programme for Competence Centres
CP	Company partners
SP	Scientific partners

### 9.3 Call milestones (up to first instalment)

