



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.

1 PREAMBLE

The Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) is your partner for research and development. This guideline is 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 relevant to your project are described in the corresponding call-guidelines.

It is FFGs intention to make the application process simple, straightforward and up to date. The following call-guideline will therefore support you to submit your application.

2 THE BASIS FOR GETTING FUNDED

2.1 COMET

COMET comprises three lines (see figure 1). This 3-line model tries to do justice to the central challenge between focus and renewal and between incremental development and high-risk research.

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.

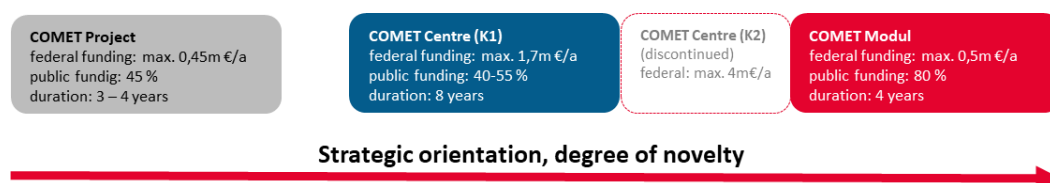
Overview of COMET lines

All 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%).

Figure 1 Overview of the COMET lines



Bilateral research collaborations (single-firm projects) must be limited to a maximum of 20% of eligible costs.

The public funding quota of COMET Projects is fixed at 45%. COMET centres can have projects focusing rather on basic oriented research with higher funding and more application-oriented projects with lower funding. Thus there is no specified funding rate, but rather a funding range, depending on the type of research (basic research, industrial research, experimental development). In contrast, a fixed funding rate of 80% was specified for COMET modules due to their high degree of novelty.

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:

The call makes reference to the global Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (SDGs) and the European elements of the EU Green Deal. More detailed information can be found in chapter 6.2 and on the [FFG Website](#).

2.2 What are COMET Projects?

The aim of COMET projects is to carry out high-quality research in cooperation between science and industry with a medium-term perspective and clearly defined topics with future development potential. “COMET projects” contribute to the initiation of new product, process and service innovations.

COMET projects are projects in cooperation between science and industry with a “multi-firm” character and have at least 3 company partners. They are strategic in the sense that a sustainable profile development is aimed for in a medium-term perspective. A resubmission is possible.

COMET projects enable new consortia and topics to gain access to COMET. There is also the possibility to develop into a COMET centre in the long term.

COMET projects are characterized by a high level of research competence and scientific connection combined with high implementation relevance in the corporate sector. The COMET project line is thematically open.

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, as a result of cooperation and joint strategic orientation, creates substantial added value as defined by the COMET objectives.

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.

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.

The duration of a COMET project is a minimum of 3 years, 3.5 years or a maximum of 4 years.

COMET projects are to be submitted as consortia.

These requirements must be met:

- Maximum of 3, 3.5 or 4 years duration.
- Public funding: 45%
- Funding amount: 2.7 mio. EUR (federal and provincial funding) for 4 years:
Max. Federal funding max. 1.8 mio. EUR
Max. provincial funding max. 0.9 mio. EUR
- 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 [GBER 2014](#)) 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 ([see template](#)).

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 all the regulations required by the 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
- 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 such as associations with a relevant purpose
- Other non-commercial institutions
 - Local authorities and autonomous bodies (Note: Activities of local authorities falling within their statutory mandate are not eligible for funding)
 - Non-profit making organisations such as NPOs (see glossary)

Eligible for participation but not for 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: Their participation has to be justified in the application. Possible “other participants” also include institutions of the Austrian federal administration, provided they neither claim costs nor contribute financially to the project. Their rights and obligations are contractually agreed.

Not eligible:

Due to incompatibility, organisations which have, in the name of the FFG or the funding authority, contributed essentially to the evaluation or the design of a funding measure in connection with this specific call within the last three years, are not allowed to participate in this call in any way.

If this refers to different units of an organisation, a participation in this specific call has to be coordinated with the call management of the FFG. In any case, it has to be explained that no conflict of interest can occur.

The FFG reserves the right to exclude applicants due to incompatibilities.

Can established COMET Centres participate?

Competence centres in the sense of the funded centres from COMET are eligible to participate. Consortium management by a COMET centre in 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. Foreign participants can be funded even if they do not belong to the EU. Provided that the call for proposals does not explicitly exclude it.

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, foreign organizations can cover their costs through self-financing and/or grants from their state. Cooperation agreements for joint funding exist with both 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 2.7 million EUR federal funding and provincial funding** per project for the maximum term of four years.

The amount of **federal funding** is a maximum of **450,000 EUR per year** for the maximum term of four years. The **provincial funding** totals to an additional maximum of **225,000 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 (see chapter 3.2).

The overall funding rate for the COMET project is 45% 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 and other organizations, the funding rate is based only on the research category. Provided: it is a non-economic contribution
- 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

Type of organisation	Research category industrial research	Research category experimental research
Small businesses	80 %	60 %
Medium-sized companies	70 %	50 %
Large companies	55 %	35 %
Research institutions within the scope of their non-economic activities	85 %	60 %
Non-economic entities within the scope of their non-economic activities	80 %	60 %

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-commercial activities of non-commercial 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 each individual 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:

- The acquisition of existing knowledge and skills
- Combining existing knowledge and skills
- Shaping existing knowledge and skills
- The use of 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 appendix.

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.

2.8 How are COMET Projects financed?

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

- Share of public funding: 45 %
- 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 the [Community framework for state aid for research and development and innovation, 2014/C 198/01](#), 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.

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 the 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 30
<p>1.1 Scientific quality of the Research Programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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? – Have the objectives of the research programme been described clearly? How do you rate the approaches and methods to achieve these objectives? – 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? 	20
<p>1.2 Quality of planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are the work and time schedules in line with the planned research programme? – Are the costs and financing plans realistic at programme and project level? Is the size of the individual projects adequate for 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? 	4
<p>1.3 If the project and the research results relate to people: Have gender aspects been adequately taken into account?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Quality of analysis of genderspecific topics – Consideration of the methodological approach (more information can be found here). Projects not relating to this point (without gender relevance in their research programme) will not lose points. 	2
<p>1.4 Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How does the project contribute to achieving ecological, social, economic sustainability goals? – How is sustainability taken into account in the planning, implementation and exploitation of the project? (more information can be found here) 	4

Table 5 Evaluation criteria “Suitability of the Project Participants”

2. Suitability of the Project Participants	max. points 30
<p>2.1 Quality of the consortium from a scientific perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How do you rate the scientific qualifications and resources of the consortium to ensure implementation of the research programme? – Can the key persons demonstrate relevant reference projects? Do the key persons have the potential to make new findings? – Is the consortium complete or does it require additional expertise and relevant partners? 	12
<p>2.2 Quality of the consortium in terms of the company partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How do you rate the technical and economic qualifications and resources of the company partners to ensure successful implementation of the research programme? – Can the key companies demonstrate relevant reference projects? Do the key companies have the potential to implement new findings on the market? – Is the consortium complete or does it require additional expertise and relevant partners? 	12
<p>2.3 Organisation und 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? – How do you rate the performance of a possible predecessor COMET Project? – How do you rate the planned measures for gender mainstreaming? Is gender balance given within the project team in order to better the situation typical for the sector? 	6

Table 6 Evaluation criteria "Benefit and Exploitation"

3. Benefit and Exploitation	max. points
	30
3.1 Economic relevance of the research results	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What benefits will the project results bring to the companies or users? – To what extent are the expected research results suitable for initiating new products, processes and services? – What are the market opportunities and the potential for commercial exploitation? – Are relevant measures of technology and knowledge transfer to industry in place? To what extent will the research results be exploited by the partners (in the form of IPR, patents, licences, etc.)? 	30

Table 7 Evaluation criteria "Relevance to the Call"

4. Relevance to the Call	max. points
	10
4.1 Incentive effect of funding	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How do you assess the incentive effect of the funding? – How much does the funding contribute to the project being implemented at all or more quickly and/or with greater ambition and/or on a larger project scale? 	10
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?

Project submission is only possible electronically via eCall: <https://ecall.ffg.at>

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.

The required documents or attachments can be found in 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 a lack of scientific quality or misconduct is suspected during the evaluation or in the course of the formal 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?

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

The funding application can not 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
- Upload the documents in the eCall (the documents are to be uploaded according to the specified folder structure)
- 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:

- Late submission or revision of parts of the application.
- 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 accuracy 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.

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. If an enterprise is to be classified as an “undertaking in difficulty”, the assessment takes place in accordance with the [General block exemption regulation](#) (OJ L 187/19, as amended by OJ L 270/39 from 29 July 2021) 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 the consortium must meet by 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. 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.

The payment of funding during the course of the project does not imply approval of the costs.

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%
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 (e.g. fact sheet, success stories) 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 or sent by post. 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?

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

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 program presented compared to the current international state of the art, as presented in the application.

Industrial research

Industrial research involves planned research or critical investigation to acquire new knowledge and skills with the aim of developing new products, processes or services or significantly improving existing ones.

It may also include:

- developing parts of complex systems
- necessary for validation of technological principles:

- Building prototypes in a laboratory environment or in an environment with simulated interfaces to existing systems
- Construction of pilot lines

Industrial research extends at most to functional verification.

Here are questions to help classify a project category. If the majority of answers are positive, a classification as Industrial Research is obvious:

- Can it be ruled out that the results will be directly commercialized?
- Is it planned research or critical exploration to gain new knowledge and skills?
- Does the research activity take place predominantly in a laboratory environment or on a laboratory scale?
- Is there a high level of research risk?
- Is there a low level of technical maturity or integration?
- Is there a long time lag - in terms of the industry - to market maturity?
- Do prototypes only serve to validate technical fundamentals and can it be ruled out that the construction of prototypes goes beyond the laboratory environment?
- Can it be ruled out that a prototype is developed whose shape, form, scale, functionality, operation and manufacture already largely resemble the final product?

Experimental development

Experimental development involves the acquisition, combination, design, and use of existing scientific, technical, economic, and other relevant knowledge and skills with the goal of developing new or improved products, processes, or services.

This may include:

- activities to design, plan, and document new products, processes, and services.
- Where the primary objective is to improve products, processes, or services that have not yet been established: the development of prototypes, demonstration activities, and pilot projects, and the testing and validation of new or improved products, processes, and services in an environment representative of real-world conditions of use
- Development of commercially viable prototypes and pilot projects if the developed product would be too expensive for demonstration and validation purposes alone

Experimental development extends at most to demonstration of prototype (system) in deployment environment. Exception: commercially viable prototypes and pilot projects when the developed product would be too expensive for demonstration and validation purposes alone.

Experimental development does not include routine or periodic changes, even if those changes represent improvements.

Here are questions to help classify the project category. A majority of positive responses suggest classification as Experimental Development:

- Does the project build on existing scientific, technical, business, and other relevant knowledge and skills, resulting in new expanded knowledge and skills or a recombination of existing knowledge?
- Can routine or periodic changes to products, production lines, production processes, existing services, or other ongoing operational processes be eliminated?
- Can direct commercial exploitation of the results or final product be excluded in the context of the project? Exception: commercially viable prototypes and pilot projects if the final commercial product is necessarily involved and would be too expensive to produce for demonstration and validation purposes alone.
- Can activities for series transition be excluded?
- Can activities for market introduction be excluded?

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.

NPOs

A "non-profit organization" does, according to its legal status or according to its statutes, not distribute any profits to owners, members or other natural or legal bodies.

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.

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 answer and discussed.

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 should drive new research impetus in their fields and be open to high-risk research. Such research is generally far from development and implementation.

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 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 (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 Sustainability

Responsible and future-oriented research and development seeks to achieve the current European and global goals that are designed to put us on a path to a sustainable future. Research funding must therefore be in line with the objectives of the two underlying initiatives, i.e. the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (SDGs) and the eight elements of the EU Green Deal.

Based on the [2030 Agenda](#), the United Nations adopted in 2015 a set of **17 Sustainable Development Goals** (UN SDGs) which Austria, as a UN member state, pledged to achieve.

The specific sub-goals of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) which are of relevance for Austria and can be practically implemented at the national level can be found on the website of the [Federal Chancellery](#)

In 2019 the European Commission published the [EU Green Deal](#), a strategy comprising eight elements with the aim to make Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050.

The topic of sustainability was therefore integrated into the assessment criteria of the present funding instrument. Both funding applicants and funding recipients are required to describe and report on how their project contributes to achieving the ecological, social and economic sustainability goals and how sustainability aspects are taken into account in project planning, implementation and exploitation.

Further information is also available on the [FFG website](#).

6.3 Call Milestones

Figure 2 Call Milestones

