



FFG
Promoting Innovation.

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**COMET COMPETENCE CENTERS FOR EXCELLENT
TECHNOLOGIES**

GUIDELINES FOR COMET CENTRE (K1)

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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 Centre (K1) 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.

2 THE BASIS FOR GETTING FUNDED

2.1 COMET

COMET (Competence Centers for Excellent Technologies) comprises three lines (see figure 1).

The 3-line model enables

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

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

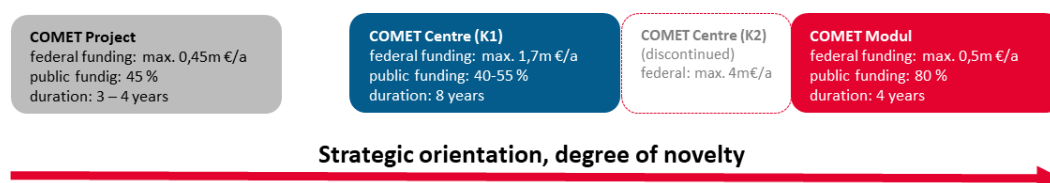
Overview of COMET lines

All COMET lines (COMET Project, COMET Centre, and 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) in COMET Projects and COMET Centres must be limited to a maximum of 20% of eligible costs. No single-firm projects are allowed for COMET Modules.

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 (40% till 55%), depending on the type of research (basic research, industrial research, experimental development). In contrast, a fixed funding rate was specified for COMET Projects (45%) and COMET Modules (80%) due to their high degree of novelty.

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

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

The strategic objectives of COMET are:

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

Sustainability:

COMET 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 Centres (K1)?

2.2.1 General information

COMET Centres (K1) aim to develop and focus competences through excellent cooperative research with a medium to long term perspective. They conduct research at top international level and stimulate new research ideas in their fields. Continuous international benchmarking must be ensured.

COMET Centers have a clearly defined unique selling proposition (USP) and ensure this through continuous international comparison.

They contribute to initiating product, process and service innovations with a view to future relevant markets.

COMET Centres define multi-year research programmes aligned to the strategic interests of science and industry.

COMET Centres consolidate their competences by establishing relevant human resources being further developed via structured career models. The Centres provide a wide range of training and further education opportunities, in particular for young scientists.

If funding is granted Competence Centres must be organised as independent legal entities, preferably as a limited liability company (GmbH) or a corporation. The Centre must be located in Austria.

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](#)¹.

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.

Their position as Centres of expertise (creating a shared knowledge base) must be strengthened by building up and developing the relevant expertise.

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 COMET and is used for additional projects as company projects,

¹ 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.

international and EU funded projects as well as other national funded projects (Definition Non-COMET area see glossary).

The term of COMET Centres is eight years (four + four) and is divided into two funding periods. A mid-term evaluation is carried out in the fourth year.

2.2.2 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 research programme must be clearly aligned with the center's USP.

The planned research programme may be divided into several research Areas. An Area is defined as a methodically and thematically distinct unit in a COMET 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 (Definition Area see glossary).

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 multi-firm and single firm projects as well as strategic projects (definition of Projects see glossary). The share of single firm projects is limited to a maximum of 20% of eligible costs. The share of strategic projects is an important indicator with regard to the degree of novelty of research.

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 Letters of Commitment (LOCs).

2.2.3 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.

The Centre Management pursues the Centre's objectives and interests and is responsible for efficient business operation and organisational and scientific management of the Centre. This is regarded as a key factor for the success of the Competence Centre.

The Centre Management is responsible for:

- Long-term strategic planning to secure the success and existence of the Centre beyond the funding period (Strategy of the Centre and HR-Strategy, development of the Non COMET area, a business plan, internationalisation strategy etc.)
- Safeguarding the Centre's unique selling proposition (USP)
- Benchmarking (continuous international comparison) /
- 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, creation of a gender equality plan or a corresponding concept, 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, and Project Managers etc.
- External presentation/PR measures including website in English/German (inter alia to increase the international visibility)
- IP policies (regulations between the Centre and 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, the following important strategic, advisory and supervisory tasks have to be guaranteed:

- Monitoring and supervision of the Centre's strategic goals, especially with regard to excellence, IP policies and international networking and positioning of the Centre as an attractive international cooperation partner
- Quality assurance for the research programme
- 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

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 prolonged GBER 2020](#)) and
- at least five (5) **companies** that are independent of each other. Companies are independent of each other, if they own less than 25% of capital or voting right of each other (for more information regarding affiliated entities

see [SME definition](#)). It must be ensured that a highly dominant company does not indirectly bypass the multi-firm criterion

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

Additional requirements to the consortium

- Participation in the consortium is evidenced by a **Letter of Commitment** (LOC) including the relevant contribution.
- The accumulated contributions of the scientific participants must be at least 5% of the eligible overall costs.
- The contributions of the participating companies must be at least 40% of the eligible overall costs for COMET Centres.

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 cooperation (consortium) agreement (see glossary) regulates the collaboration within the consortium and the intellectual property rights (IPR) relating to the project results. FFG provides a [sample consortium agreement](#) for support.

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 (the COMET Centre) 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 the funding yourself
- you communicate any changes in due time
- you provide accounts and reports in accordance with the funding contract

The consortium leader (the Centre) must ensure that a legally valid cooperation (consortium) agreement has been concluded prior to the start of the project, in which all the regulations required by the [community framework 2022](#) have been agreed. Moreover, the consortium leader confirms that:

- the costs charged are relevant to the project, can be clearly attributed to the project
- the project costs and content are in accordance with the approval.

2.5 Who is eligible for funding?

The COMET Centre (K1) 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.

Participating companies and scientific organisations are not funding recipients, but may claim eligible costs relevant for the calculation of the total funding amount.

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

Eligible for funding:

- 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 Centre. They provide defined tasks for the COMET Centre 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 further COMET Centres participate?

A co-operation between existing Competence Centres is possible. The COMET 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 Centres participate as scientific partners, the projects must be carried out in the Centre's Non COMET area (see glossary).

2.6 Can partners from outside Austria participate?

A consortium may have participants from outside Austria. A major aim of COMET 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 following conditions apply:

- 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.

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 Centres (K1).

Organisations from outside Austria may also be involved as subcontractors.

2.7 How much support is granted?

The maximum level of public funding is **EUR 10.2 million** (federal and provincial funding) for each COMET Centre (K1) over the four-year duration (first funding period). Support is paid in the form of non-repayable grants.

Applications have to be submitted initially for the first funding period. The granting of a second funding period is conditional on a successful mid-term evaluation. Funding amounts that have not been used cannot be carried over from one funding period to the next.

2.7.1 Amount of federal funding

The maximum amount of federal funding is **EUR 6.8 million** for the first funding period whereas the maximum annual federal funding of **EUR 1.7 million** must not be exceeded.

2.7.2 Amount of provincial funding

The provinces provide additional funds at a fixed ratio of 2:1. The maximum level of additional provincial funding is therefore **EUR 3.4 million** for the first funding period or max. **EUR 0.85 million** per year.

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

2.7.3 Amount of funding rate

The applied overall funding rate must be within the range specified for COMET Centres (**40% to 55%** of eligible total costs).

This 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.

2.8 How are COMET Centre financed?

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

- | | |
|---|----------|
| – Public funding: | 40 – 55% |
| – Contribution scientific participants: | min. 5% |
| – Contribution companies: | min. 40% |

The balance must be covered.

Example of financing for a COMET Centre (K1) in EUR per year with a funding rate of 50 % and maximum eligible funding:

Table 1 Example of financing for a COMET Centre

Type of contribution / cost	Amount in EUR	amount in %
Federal funding (max. per year)	1.700.000	33,33%
Provincial funding (max. per year)	850.000	16,67%
Contribution of scientific participants	255.000	5%
Contribution of companies	2.295.000	45%
Total costs	5.100.000	100%

2.8.1 Contribution of scientific participants

The accumulated contributions of the scientific participants must be at least **5%** of the eligible overall costs and cannot be replaced by contributions from companies. Contributions can be **up to 100% in-kind**.

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

2.8.2 Contribution of companies

The contributions of the participating companies must be at least **40 %** of the eligible overall costs for COMET Centre.

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 participating companies are to be accounted for as in-kind contributions. Services from participating companies may only be purchased in justified individual cases and require prior approval.

2.9 What projects are eligible for funding?

COMET provides funding exclusively for the following project types

1. Activities in the field of industrial research
2. Activities in the field of experimental development
3. Activities in the field of basic research related to activities listed in pt. 1. and 2. above
4. Training measures related to activities listed in pt. 1 and pt.2 above
5. 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.

2.10 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.

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.

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

The period for which costs may be recognised corresponds to the contractual duration of the COMET Centre, which commences with the start date and ends with the conclusion of the project.

Special regulations for COMET Centres:

- **Costs of R&D infrastructure use may be reported by one of the following two methods:**
 - 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 according to the current valid [cost guidelines](#).
- **Partner accounting** as well as approval of costs have to follow the cost guidelines.
- 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.).

- All **revenues** generated from the exploitation of research results, have to be considered as re-investment in the non-profit area of the Centre. Costs are not deducted.

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.

2.11 What about intellectual property rights?

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. The provisions of the [Community framework for state aid for research and development and innovation 2022](#) (pt. 2.2.2), 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. 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.

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.

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

Table 2 Criterion - Quality of the project

1. Quality of the project	max. points
<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? Are the approaches and methods adequate to achieve these objectives? – Is the research programme designed to trigger new research impulses and develop new expertise? Is it adequately focused and oriented along the unique selling proposition (USP) of the Centre? 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 Gender relevance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – If the content of the project and the research results affect people: To what extent have gender-specific topics been taken into account in the planning process? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Quality of the analysis of the gender-specific topics – Consideration in the methodological approach of the project (more information can be found here) Projects, where the analysis justifiably reveals no gender relevance, will receive full points. 	2
<p>1.3. Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How does the project contribute to achieving ecological, social, economic sustainability goals? 	4

1. Quality of the project	max. points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How is sustainability taken into account in the planning, implementation and exploitation of the project (more information can be found here)? 	30

Table 3 Criterion - Suitability of project participants

2. Suitability of the applicant / project partners	max. points
<p>2.1 Quality of the consortium from a scientific perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are the scientific qualifications and resources of the consortium sufficient to ensure successful 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? 	10
<p>2.2 Quality of the consortium in terms of the company partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are the technical and economic qualifications and resources of the company partners sufficient 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? 	10
<p>2.3 Organisation and management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do the (planned) organisational structure and management of the Centre meet the requirements of COMET? (Assumption of important strategic, advisory and supervising tasks by relevant bodies, balance of ownership structure, etc.) – Is the (planned) external presentation including PR-measures of the COMET Centre adequate? – Are the planned target values adequate? – What is the Centre's performance to date? (especially progress of the research programme, implementation of requirements and recommendations, target values of the previous period); for existing COMET Centres only 	5

Table 4 Criterion - Benefit and exploitation

3. Benefit and exploitation	max. points
3.1. Economic relevance of the research results	25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What benefits will the project results bring to the companies or users? – 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? 	17,5
3.2 Benefit and exploitation at the Centre	7,5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Will the research results be exploited at the Centre or by the partners (in the form of IPR, patents, licences, Non COMET projects, etc.)? – Are sustainability effects adequately considered in the exploitation strategy? – Is the work designed to establish a knowledge base for the future of the Centre? 	7,5

Table 5 Criterion - Relevance to the call

4. Relevance to the call	max. points
4.1 Development of human resources	20
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is the personnel planning plausible and based on the Centre's needs. Is appropriate organisational implementation given? – How are the measures to attract (internationally) renowned researchers and high potentials to the Centre to be evaluated? – Are appropriate measures for qualification and further development of the (research) personnel foreseen, to support the development of competences at the Centre especially for young researchers? – Does the Centre offer structured career models for researchers? – To what extent does the Centre promote the inter-sectoral mobility of researchers (exchange between science and industry) in order to strengthen know how transfer? – Are appropriate measures to provide equal opportunities foreseen (e.g. a Gender Equality Plan)? Are gender-sensitive appointments on all levels of the Centre foreseen? Does this improve the sector-specific conditions in the field? 	8

4. Relevance to the call	max. points 20
<p>4.2 Internationalisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the (planned) involvement of international scientific organisations and researchers in the COMET research programme? – What is the position of the COMET Centre in terms of international benchmarking? What is the USP of the Centre as compared to other research facilities? 8 – What is the (planned) involvement of international companies in the COMET research programme? – 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? 	
<p>4.3 Incentive effect of funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To what extent is the incentive effect of funding necessary to implement the project as proposed? 4 – How do you judge the incentive of funding? – How much does the funding contribute to the project in terms of ambition, speed and scope of the project? 	

2.13 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.

2.14 Which content and what documents are required for submission?

The required documents or attachments can be found in the call guidelines. The call guideline specify the language in which the application for funding must be written - for COMET Centres this is English.

The document templates are available on the [FFG website](#) and must be used. Explanations can be found in the corresponding templates.

All documents and attachments may only submitted via [eCall](#).

2.15 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.

2.16 Is scientific integrity ensured?

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

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

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

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

3 SUBMISSION

3.1 What is the procedure for submission?

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

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

How does it work?

- Download and complete the template for the project description and fill out the annexes from the [FFG website](#).
- Create an application in the eCall, invite partners, enter costs (on an overall level) 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 (the project description).
- Editing after submission of the application.

The application documents are to be submitted by the consortium leader (COMET 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. 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 (see Chapter 4.2). 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 call guidelines.

4.2 How is the evaluation procedure organised?

COMET Centres are evaluated in a one-stage process involving a hearing.

National and international experts will review the submitted documents based on the criteria in chapter 2.12.

After the written review each Centre will be invited to a hearing. The primary aim of the hearing is to request additional information from the applicants.

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

International 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 COMET Centre. They may request additional documents that are required for completing the financial check. Undertakings in difficulty cannot participate. The assessment if an enterprise is to be classified as an “undertaking in difficulty“ takes place in accordance with the [General block exemption regulation](#) (OJ L 187/19, 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 (the COMET Centre) 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. The Centre will be the exclusive funding recipient.

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.

Requirements and recommendations as well as their implementation have to be documented before the contract is signed or before the respective instalment in the eCall or the interim report.

Prior to payment of the first instalment, the existence of a duly executed agreement (see glossary for definition) has to be confirmed, which regulates the collaboration and especially the intellectual property rights (IPR) related to the funded project results.

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.

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

- once the interim reports and interim accounts have been 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)
- where necessary: once additional requirements have been met
- according to the FFG instalment scheme (see table 6); 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.
- At the end of the funding period, the scientific partners and the company partners must have provided their financing rates stipulated in the Funding Contract/approved cost plan. If the financing rates have not been made in full federal funding might be reduced accordingly.

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 6 COMET Centre instalment scheme

Report number and instalment	4 years project duration
Number of reports	4 (interim and final)
1st instalment	federal funding 1st funding year according to agreed cost plan
2nd instalment	federal funding 2 nd funding year according to agreed cost plan
3rd instalment	federal funding 3 rd funding year according to agreed cost plan

Report number and instalment	4 years project duration
4 th instalment	federal funding 4 th funding year according to agreed cost plan, minus 10 % of total federal funding amount
Final instalment	10 % of total federal funding amount

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.
- Detailed information on eligible and non-eligible costs are set out in the Cost Guidelines in their current version. Further rules concerning COMET can be found in chapter 2.10.

Requirements for reports and accounts:

- 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.
- Reports must be prepared using the provided templates
- FFG will be responsible for reporting, controlling and auditing the COMET Centres with regard to both federal and provincial funding. The consortium leader (COMET Centre) 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.

The FFG will carry out (annual) on-site audits and/or remote during the term of the funded COMET 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.

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 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.

5.6 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.

5.7 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 COMET 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.

As a result of the evaluation process, the panel makes a funding recommendation including requirements and recommendations regarding the second funding period.

Only Centres that pass the mid-term evaluation may be continued.

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

The guidelines for the mid-term evaluation provide information regarding the application of the second funding period, the procedures of the mid-term evaluation and basic requirements and funding conditions.

5.8 What happens after the conclusion of the 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: 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](#).

5.9 Phasing out

Existing COMET Centres (K1) 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 one year. 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 COMET funding.

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 behavior 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

Area

A (research) 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.

Cash- contributions

Cash contributions are payments in cash.

Research and knowledge dissemination organisation or research organisation

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 (in accordance with AGVO,

Struktur-FTI-Guidelines and Union framework for State aid measures for the promotion of RTI)

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.

Research Categories

(for detailed definitions see Struktur-FTI-Guidelines 10.1)

Experimental Development

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

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

This may also include:

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

Industrial research does not extend beyond the proof of concept. 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 area. A research programme must relate to a clearly defined subject matter and is divided into research 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).

Consortium Agreement

The Consortium Agreement is concluded by the consortium partners involved (Centre, company partners, scientific partners) and defines the basic principles of cooperation within the COMET 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.

Non COMET area

COMET Centres should develop a “Non COMET area” complementing the research programme funded under COMET in line with the present guidelines for COMET Centres (“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 research area (Area), or as cross-cutting projects. 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 should drive new research impetus in their fields and be open to high-risk research. Such research is generally far from development and implementation.

Company 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.

Province of domicile

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

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 (e.g. 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.

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 UG 2002/§20. To participate, these organisational units have to possess the necessary power of attorney according to UG 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 1: Milestones of the call

