



# Application guidelines for HFSP Research Grants Award year 2025

## Recent changes:

The HFSP has recently adopted a new [Shared Values Statement](#). While scientific excellence and the potential for research breakthrough remain the foremost criteria, the HFSP aims to reach higher levels of equity and inclusion in frontier life science research funding, making frontier research more accessible and diverse.

## Deadlines:

- Compulsory initiation of a Letter of Intent by obtaining a 7-digit LOI ID (1XXXXXX):  
**19 March 2024**
- Submission of a Letter of Intent: **28 March 2024**
- Submission of Full Proposals: mid-September 2024, **on invitation only**

These guidelines provide the essential information necessary to submit a research grant application for the award year 2025. Please read the guidelines carefully to establish whether your project falls within the funding scope of the HFSP. See also '[Frequently asked questions](#)' and '[Writing a letter of intent](#)' for detailed tips. If you have further questions, please contact the HFSP Grant Office: [grant@hfsp.org](mailto:grant@hfsp.org)  
HFSP will open the application site by late January 2024. Updated and detailed instructions for how to log in and use the application site will be available [here](#) before the opening of the site.

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## 1. Overview

### 1.1. Objectives of HFSP Research Grants

The International Human Frontier Science Program (HFSP) strives to strengthen open scientific inquiry by initiating international collaborative, interdisciplinary and cutting-edge basic research in the life sciences.

The International Human Frontier Science Program Organization (HFSP/O) develops and implements the Program. The aim of the Program is to promote, through international cooperation, basic research focused on the elucidation of the sophisticated and complex mechanisms of living systems, for the benefit of all humankind. It aims to complement, not duplicate, the frontier life science programs of the countries that financially support HFSP/O.

HFSP/O attaches highest importance to novelty, scientific merit, internationality, and interdisciplinarity.

Research topics may include biological functions at all levels of analysis: for example, studies on genes and individual molecules, intracellular networks, intercellular associations in tissues and organs, and networks underlying the complex functions of entire organisms including cognitive functions, as well as populations or ecosystems.

### 1.2. Distinguishing Features of the HFSP Research Grant Program

- **Novelty:** The Human Frontier Science Program (HFSP) supports projects that challenge existing paradigms and extend the frontiers of life sciences by using novel approaches and techniques. To stimulate daring ideas and development of new methods which entail risks, preliminary results are not required in research grant applications.
- **Teams of scientists:** HFSP supports teams of normally 2-4 scientists. Team members should not have collaborated before, they will normally not have published original research together, and the project must be significantly different from their ongoing research.
- **Scientific merit:** HFSP projects are potentially transformative in addressing important fundamental problems at the frontiers of the life sciences or in crossing barriers to progress in the life sciences.
- **Internationality:** HFSP supports novel international, preferably intercontinental collaborations that involve scientific exchanges across national boundaries.
- **Interdisciplinarity:** HFSP supports interdisciplinary projects. The participation of scientists from disciplines outside the traditional life sciences such as physics, chemistry, computational biology, engineering, mathematics, nanoscience, or psychology is highly encouraged.
- **Early career scientists:** HFSP places special emphasis on encouraging scientists early in their careers – this is expressed both in a special scheme for Early Career scientists and in encouraging scientists early in their careers to participate in the Program Grants.
- **Two kinds of research grants** are available, the **Research Grants – Early Career and Research Grants – Program**. The following text applies to both unless stated otherwise.
- **Award sum:** Budgets are not required. Awarded teams receive a **fixed sum**, over three years, depending on team size (awarded 2-member teams will receive 300,000 USD, 3-member teams 400,000 USD and 4-member teams 500,000 USD annually, if all members have their labs in different countries).

### 1.3. Summary of the Application Process

The first step in the application process for Research Grants is to connect to the application site (see [item 8](#)) and initiate a Letter of Intent by **19 March 2024**. The deadline for submission of this letter is **28 March 2024** for awards to be announced in March 2025.

Projects will be pre-screened upon reception by a small scientific committee (three HFSP Scientific Directors and two members of the Review Committee) for the eligibility of the applicants and for concordance with the scientific scope (see section 2). Any project that does not meet the requirements (see sections 3 and 4) will not be sent for review, and the Principal Applicant will be informed as soon as possible.

The remaining letters of intent will be evaluated by the Review Committee (see a list of present members [here](#)). Review committee members evaluate and score the applications following the criteria of novelty/originality/frontierness, interdisciplinarity as well as the qualification and integration of the team (see the reviewers guidelines [here](#)). In a second step, a Selection Committee will decide which applicants are invited to submit a full proposal. Applicants will be notified in early July 2024 whether they are invited to submit a full proposal, with a deadline mid-September 2024. More details are provided in “[How to Apply](#)”. Decisions on awarded grants will be announced end of March 2025.

## 2. Scientific scope

HFSPO funds projects in basic research studying fundamental problems on all organizational and trophic levels of life sciences. Research projects may range from biological functions at the molecular and cellular level up to the level of biological systems, including cognitive functions. All levels of analysis are supported: for example, studies on genes and individual molecules, intracellular networks, intercellular associations in tissues and organs, and networks underlying the complex functions of entire organisms, populations, or ecosystems.

The HFSP funds novel collaborations that bring together scientists with distinctly different expertise to focus on problems at the **frontiers** of the life sciences. The potential of a project to move the frontiers of life sciences and lead to a breakthrough, is a major criterion in the review of HFSP research grants, and it is understood that projects with this potential may entail high risk.

#### HFSPO does not fund:

1. Research of a purely applied nature. For example:

- projects of a primarily clinical and pharmaceutical nature are only considered if they allow new insights into fundamental biological mechanisms of disease;
- projects aimed at developing methods of diagnosis or treatment, including the search for potential drug targets or advanced trials of drugs under development;
- applied research in engineering, biotechnology, or nanotechnology, that does not address a fundamental biological problem;
- projects directly concerned with agricultural or forestry problems such as crop yield or breeding and environmental problems such as pollution.

2. Research aimed at developing novel methods or the study of analogs or models of biological activity **unless** these methods allow new biological questions to be answered in the context of the aim of HFSP to fund fundamental research.

3. Observational projects or systematic screening approaches.

4. Large-scale data collection studies without a convincing rationale for the collection and detailed methodology for the data analysis; this includes systematic multi-species-omics analyses of populations or ecosystems, which do not address a fundamental biological question of general interest. However, studies of the mechanisms of species-species interactions or their co-evolution are eligible.

5. Research in for-profit environments (but collaborations are allowed).

6. Proposals representing standard or incremental approaches, obvious next steps in the field or the laboratory of one or more applicants (routine projects) and proposals that do not represent significant changes in research direction from previous work of the applicants are unlikely to receive funding.

### 3. Eligibility criteria and application rules

#### 3.1. Structure of the research team

Scientists applying for a HFSP research grant must be organized as an **international research team** (with emphasis on intercontinental collaborations). Applications from individual researchers are not eligible. The HFSP research team may include 2 to 4 (rarely 5) members, whereby one member of the team is designated as the Principal Applicant and the others as Co-Applicants.

All team members must have obtained a research doctoral degree (PhD, MD or equivalent) before the LOI submission deadline and lead a research group (however small). All team members must be able to independently determine the course of the HFSP-funded project and have freedom to administer the awarded grant. “Post-docs” are not eligible.

**HFSPO promotes new interdisciplinary collaborations across the world.** Therefore, team members are expected to work in different disciplines and have their labs in different countries; for the rules on the country of team member affiliation, please see [3.5](#).

**HFSPO promotes new research collaborations.** Therefore, the team members should not have collaborated before, they will normally not have published together and must propose a project significantly different from their ongoing research.

Co-authorship in scientific publications is generally considered the result of a past or present collaboration, which is contrary to the spirit of the Program. However, some joint publications may be considered acceptable, for instance a multi-author review summarizing the field or a joint publication in a different field resulting from a much earlier collaboration. Applicants will need to enter the number and titles of co-publications between team members in the application form to guide the review committee in their assessment. More than three co-publications are very likely seen as proof for an ongoing collaboration and strongly reduce the chance of funding.

HFSP encourages inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility ([shared values](#)), and welcomes applicants independent of gender, origin, cultural background, and age.

#### 3.2. Principal Applicant

The international team must designate one of its members as the Principal Applicant. The Principal Applicant must be located in an HFSPO member country (see [3.5](#)). As the only exception, former CDA awardees can act as the Principal Applicant in an HFSP Research Grant irrespective of the location of their laboratories, as long as the team includes at least one Co-Applicant from an HFSP member country.

The Principal Applicant will be responsible, on behalf of the team, for planning and coordinating the research. She/he will also act as the liaison with HFSPO and be required to submit annual distribution of

funds as well as progress reports. If, on the basis of those progress reports, the Principal Applicant considers that a team member is not contributing to the project as planned, then she/he may propose to HFSPo a reduction in that member's budget, or, exceptionally, ask them to leave the project. If a team member changes institution, HFSPo will require the Principal Applicant to confirm that this move will not be deleterious to the project.

### 3.3. Number of team members

The number of team members should normally be 2 – 4 unless a fifth member is clearly essential for the interdisciplinary nature of the project. Teams of 5 members are rarely successful. Teams with more than one member working at the same institution are not eligible, and teams should avoid relying on local collaborations for their part of the project (they may, however rely on technical support from research facilities at their institution).

### 3.4. Affiliation

The Principal Applicant must be working at a non-profit academic institution (meaning an institution that can train students – undergraduate and/or PhD and postdocs – even if it cannot issue degrees). The team may include members from for-profit organizations if their expertise is necessary for the project. However, such team members may not receive any funds and will not be considered in calculating the amount of award (see item [5.2.](#)). All active appointments have to be declared in the application form, specifically if an applicant has affiliations in two different countries.

Secondary affiliations will be considered to determine eligibility of a team. For instance, a team of two members is not eligible if one of them has a secondary affiliation in the country where the other member works. Likewise, different branches or campuses of the same university (e.g. NYU in New York and Shanghai) or organization (e.g. EMBL or MPI) are counted as the same affiliation.

The inclusion of scientists from low- or middle income countries as team members is strongly encouraged, specifically if there are plans to collect data in these countries.

### 3.5. Country of affiliation

The Principal Applicant of the international team must be located in one of the HFSPo member countries (but see [3.2.](#)). Co-Applicants can be located in any country.

The member countries are:

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus (EU part), the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, the Republic of Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

### 3.6. Internationality

- a. Research project with all team members in one country (including cases in which a member moves after the LOI submission) are not eligible.
- b. Clear priority will be given to **intercontinental** collaborations.
- c. **Teams with 2 members from the same institution are not eligible to apply.**
- d. A proposal from a team with three or four members where two team members have their laboratories in the same country is eligible only if the team can demonstrate that this collaboration is essential to maintain the frontier and interdisciplinary character of the proposed research. In such rare cases, two

scientists from one country will be considered as 1.5 team members, for calculating the award sum, see also the [FAQ](#)).

- e. When applicants have two affiliations in different countries, both will be considered active and will be taken into account for eligibility and for calculating the budget if the team is successful.

### 3.7. Concurrent applications

- a. **No individual may be an applicant on more than one letter of intent in the same review round.** ALL applicants (both RG-Early Career and RG-Program, as Principal Applicant or Co-Applicant) have to be aware of this rule. If anyone applies on two or more Letters of intent, these will all be removed from the competition.
- b. Scientists cannot hold or apply for an HFSP Research Grant and an HFSP Fellowship, at the same time.

### 3.8. New applications from previous awardees

- a. Scientists cannot hold more than one HFSP award at any one time (as Principal Applicants or Co-Applicants, even during any no-cost extension). Awardees from 2020 and 2021 may apply for a new grant if it starts after termination of the current award (which means after approval of the final financial report), and if the project and team members are distinct from the current grant. Awardees from 2022 and 2023 are not eligible.
- b. Any team member who has been awarded an HFSP research grant (as Principal Applicant or Co-Applicant) 2020 or 2021, must provide information about the objectives and outcome of the former project, together with a statement of its relationship to the current application. This can be added in a few sentences at the end of the CV. Applications bearing a strong similarity to previous awards, either in team composition or topic of research, will not be considered eligible.

### 3.9. Project

Applicants should take into account HFSP's mission "to fund basic research focused on the elucidation of the sophisticated and complex mechanisms of living organisms". Accordingly, HFSP funds only applications that address a fundamental problem or mechanism at the frontier of the life sciences. Grant applications may take the character of exploratory or discovery grants that are based on ideas and concepts. For that reason, preliminary data are not required.

HFSP recognises that such research inherently contains risks and therefore may not be supported by other funding schemes. Applicants are expected to address the risks and outline mitigation strategies allowing them to reach their goals.

Novel combinations of expertise are a major feature of HFSP-sponsored projects and those involving truly novel interdisciplinary collaborations will have a higher chance to be awarded. Slightly modified conditions apply for Early Careers (see [4.2.](#)). Projects are expected to propose new lines of research through the collaboration and must be distinctly different from all team members' other research funded by other sources.

The collaboration between **all team members** must be absolutely necessary to achieve the aims of the project. "Concerted action" programs, in which each team member performs a self-contained project under a general theme without extensive interaction with the other team members are not considered to be collaborative and will not be supported.

Modeling contributions are strongly encouraged, but need to be clear. Reviewers are expecting details of the mathematical methods and an appreciation of the limits of the proposed approach.

See also the [FAQ](#) for tips and common reasons for rejection.



### 3.10. Publications

HFSP is a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment ([DORA](#)) which we consider to be an incentive to evaluate research proposals on the basis of their content and not solely by the criterion of Journal Impact Factors (JIF). Reviewers at all stages of the HFSP grant application process are advised that they should consider the quality of the research published and/or proposed in an application. While productivity may be an important factor, the assessment will be based on the content of articles and not the JIF. HFSP reviewers are asked to consider the influence of candidates' publications (including [preprints](#) deposited on public servers) in advancing knowledge in a given field (or throughout biology).

## 4. Two types of award

In addition to the above general requirements for all Research Grants, the following conditions apply specifically to the two schemes:

### 4.1. Research Grants – Program (RG-Program)

Research Grants - Program are meant to allow teams of independent researchers to develop **new** lines of research through a new collaboration. Priority will be given to novel research projects with the potential to extend the present frontier of the life sciences and teams including members from outside the life sciences. Applicants for RG-Program are encouraged to include independent investigators early in their careers as members of their team, high diversity of backgrounds (gender, origin and others) and approaches is often adding to the quality of the work.

### 4.2. Research Grants – Early Career (RG-Early Career)

These awards are meant to encourage outstanding scientists in the initial period of their independent careers, to formulate novel and promising research projects. Typically, “Early Career” team members will have completed one or two periods of postdoctoral training and recently been appointed to independent staff positions that allow them to initiate and direct their own independent lines of research.

#### Formal eligibility requirements for RG – Early Career (in addition to those valid for all RG)

- Early Career applicants should be project leaders directing a research group. They must have full responsibility for the day to day running of their laboratories and full control of the HFSP funds. In unclear cases, written confirmation may be requested from the Head of Department (or equivalent) that the applicant is in the position to carry out the research independently.
- “Postdocs” are not eligible to apply.
- All members of an RG-Early Career team must be within 5 years of obtaining an independent position and must have obtained their first doctoral degree (PhD, MD or equivalent) no longer than 10 years before the deadline for submission of the Letter of Intent. Exceptions may be made for periods of parental leave, compulsory military service or absence for medical conditions, but not for periods of unemployment. If an applicant had a longer period of purely clinical service, please contact the HFSP grant office. Applicants should clearly list periods of parental leave (or similar) in the CV giving start and end as well as the number of months to benefit from an extension of the eligibility criteria.

Recognising the challenge of establishing an independent research group at an early stage of a career, special consideration will be given to the overall level of interdisciplinarity in RG-Early Career applications. Early career investigators will be expected to propose projects with team members having distinct expertise and coming from different disciplines of the life sciences if not from outside the life sciences.

## 5. Budget

### 5.1. Use of funds

The research institutions must provide the facilities and equipment necessary for members to carry out their proposed research. The funds provided by the HFSP are not intended to replace or supplement current domestic programs nor to provide basic institutional infrastructure. They are to be used specifically to support new international collaborative programs.

### 5.2. Tenure of Grant

Each grant is awarded for a period of three years.

### 5.3. Amount of award

The HFSP budget is determined in US dollars. While payments may be requested in another currency, the amount in that currency will be determined by the exchange rate against the US dollar at the time of each transfer and thus may vary from year to year. HFSP reserves the right to transfer funds in local currency.

- a. Awarded teams receive funds on an annual basis, the annual sum for the entire team is: 300,000 USD for a team of 2; 400,000 USD for a team of 3; 500,000 USD for a team of 4 or more members.
- b. Two members from the same country have to clearly bring different disciplines to the project. They will be awarded an amount equivalent to 1.5 team members (currently 350,000 USD for a team of '2.5' and 450,000 USD for '3.5' team members).
- c. In the case of a two-member team with one member in a for-profit institution, the total annual award will be reduced to 150,000 USD. In other cases, the for-profit member will not be included when calculating the amount of the award.

### 5.4. Method of payment

In the event of an award being made, the distribution of funds will be proposed by the team. HFSPO expects a fair distribution of funds and a valid explanation for deviations from an even distribution. After approval of the distribution, the funds will be transferred by the HFSPO directly to each team member's institution.

### 5.5. Financial reporting

Institutions will be required to maintain complete lists of all expenditures from the HFSPO award. A financial report based on these lists will be required for the full three years of the award, organised by the Principal Investigator at the end of the grant. In addition, all invoices, pay-slips, etc. must be retained for at least two years after the end of the grant period in case of audit. Reporting practices may be subject to modification during tenure of the grant if required by the HFSPO Board of Trustees or auditors.

### 5.6. Permissible and impermissible expenses

A budget is **not** required at any stage of the application process. The following information is provided to allow applicants to understand the scope of expenditures permitted in case an award is made.

#### 5.6.1. Equipment

Purchase of equipment must be essential for the new collaboration which is proposed. Purchase of equipment to supplement current domestic programs is not allowable. Participating laboratories should already be equipped to pursue their current research.

#### 5.6.2. Materials and supplies

Costs of reagents, animals, disposables, computer software necessary for the scientific collaboration.

### **5.6.3. Services**

Consulting services and computer services *specific to the project*, including rental fees (fees for computer or telephone networks may be included in the indirect costs (see [5.6.7.](#)).

### **5.6.4. Salaries**

No salary support (including summer salaries) for the Principal Applicant, Co-Applicant or other faculty, institutional staff such as secretaries or laboratory managers, and no student tuition fees may be paid.

Salaries may be provided for research assistants (post-doctoral scientists, graduate students, technicians) essential for the new collaborative project. HFSPO expects teams to work for diversity, inclusion and equal opportunity in employments on HFSP funding.

### **5.6.5. Communication expenses**

Publication costs (including [open access](#) fees), article translations, mail, express courier services.

### **5.6.6. Travel and per diem**

- Travel costs and per diem allowances (up to three months each year), for team members and their personnel visiting other team members.
- Travel costs and per diem allowances for field work or visits to research facilities.
- Scientific meetings or training courses related to the HFSP project.
- Costs for attending the annual awardee meeting organised by the HFSP.

### **5.6.7. Indirect costs (overheads)**

No more than 10% of the direct costs covered by the award, at each research institution, may be used for indirect costs.

## **6. Ethical considerations**

Awardees must observe the highest ethical standards in conducting all research supported by the Program. If awarded, all team members have to agree to conform strictly to the national and institutional codes of practice, regulations and laws, which govern the ethical conduct of scientific research in his/her own institution. Institutions must inform HFSPO if national or institutional codes of practice, regulations, or laws have been infringed in the performance of the award. All awardees must also agree not to undertake any research jointly with scientists in another country where experimental procedures, which are forbidden in his/her own laboratories/institutions are permissible. Examples of national guidelines can be found via links on <https://www.hfsp.org/Good-Scientific-Practice> or [HFSPO's policy on scientific misconduct](#) available on the HFSP website.

## **7. Intellectual property rights and publications**

HFSPO will not claim any intellectual or commercial property rights that may be generated through the research it sponsors. HFSPO will not become involved in any dispute which may arise about the ownership of such rights. The assignment of any such rights (and any income arising from them) is to be determined by the procedures and regulations which apply in the laboratory/institution in which the research is conducted. In considering the possible commercial importance of discoveries which arise from research sponsored by the Program, all awardees must agree that submission of manuscripts for publication of these discoveries in scientific journals will not be delayed for more than 45 working days after the manuscript is completed.

An acknowledgement (with grant number) of support by the Human Frontier Science Program must be included in all publications resulting from work carried out under the grant.

## 8. How to apply

ProposalCentral Application guide: [ProposalCentral Guide](#) (will be updated before the opening of the site).

### Deadlines:

- I. **Compulsory initiation of a letter of Intent** (by obtaining a 7-digit LOI ID 1XXXXXX): **19 March 2024**
- II. **Submission of Letters of Intent: 28 March 2024**

Please read the guidelines and the document [‘Writing a letter of intent’](#) carefully to establish whether your project is clearly in tune with the aims and requirements of the HFSP Research Grant program.

The main steps in applying are as follows:

1. The research team must designate one member as **Principal Applicant**, who will be responsible for final submission of the letter of intent. Note the requirement that the Principal Applicant must have her/his primary laboratory in a member country. See Item [3.4](#) of the guidelines for more detail.
2. In setting up the team, the Principal Applicant **must ensure that no team member is a Principal Applicant or Co-Applicant on another proposal** (see Item [3.7](#) in the guidelines). Failure to ensure this will result in all those applications being withdrawn from the competition.
3. The Principal Applicant will first have to set up a personal account in the application site [Proposal Central](#) (PC), if not already in the PC database, and initiate the Letter of Intent by obtaining a seven-digit LOI ID (1XXXXXX) (see [ProposalCentral Guide](#)). This will give access to the online application form and further instructions concerning the online submission (including the addition of the other team members). It is essential to initiate the Letter of Intent as soon as the team has seriously decided to submit a letter of intent, but by **19 March 2024** the latest.
4. The composition of the team can be modified up to the final submission date. However, all team members must be designated as co-applicants on the online form, and each team member has to enter their own CV information and publications before the submission deadline. Each team member should also provide information on their contribution to the project in one of the fields assigned for sub-projects.
5. The letter of intent must be **submitted by 28 March 2024**. No changes can be made to the letter of intent after final submission.
6. The Principal Applicant will be notified in early July if the team is invited to submit a full proposal. The deadline for invited full proposal will be mid-September 2024.

## 9. Technical tips

On the letter of intent application portal, instructions for each section will be given and a user guide is available (see above). If new problems are reported to us, tips will be added to the relevant pages to help in the submission procedure. Please notify us at [grant@hfsp.org](mailto:grant@hfsp.org) if you encounter problems.