

# Guidelines

## for Reviewing Proposals to Establish or Renew Research Training Groups or International Research Training Groups



Disclaimer: The English translation of this document is provided for informational purposes. In the event of a discrepancy between the English and the German versions, the German text takes precedence.

**Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft**

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## I General Information

Proposals to establish or renew Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups are evaluated by a review panel during a generally one- to two-day review session. The review meeting is supported by written preliminary statements submitted by the reviewers. The decision taken by the Grants Committee on Research Training Groups is based on the arguments and assessments put on record during the review meeting.

After the Grants Committee has decided on the proposal, the meeting minutes along with the funding decision will be submitted to the spokesperson of the proposed Research Training Group and the applicant university.

Information on proposal preparation and the review process can be found in the “Proposal Preparation Instructions – Proposals to Establish Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups” (DFG form 54.05)

[www.dfg.de/formulare/54\\_05](http://www.dfg.de/formulare/54_05)

or in the “Proposal Preparation Instructions for Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups (Renewal Proposals)” (DFG form 54.07)

[www.dfg.de/formulare/54\\_07](http://www.dfg.de/formulare/54_07)

## II Preliminary Statements

In order to facilitate a proper, focused and effective review meeting, the DFG asks reviewers to submit a short and informative preliminary statement.

Please comment briefly on the proposal and, in the case of reviews of renewal proposals, the achievements of the RTG to date. Please structure your arguments and assessments according to the review criteria listed under IV. In addition, you may also comment on the funds requested.

One element that is essential to the preparation and organisation of the review meeting is the questions you would like the applicants to address at the review meeting to help you in your final assessment. Please list these **questions to the applicants in** a separate section of your written statement.

A maximum of three pages is considered sufficient for your preliminary statement.

The preliminary statements are made available to the other members of the review panel in advance of the review meeting. Your preliminary statement will not be shared with the applicants or with the Senate and Grants Committee on Research Training Groups.

### **III Review Meeting**

During the review meeting, you will have the opportunity enter into a dialogue with the applicants and discuss any questions you still have. The questions formulated in your preliminary statement can be supplemented with additional questions.

In the final consultation, we will ask you to assess the proposal and, in the case of reviews of renewal proposals, the achievements of the RTG to date based on the criteria for research and training set out in IV.

Your comments and assessments will be recorded in writing and form the basis of the decision of the Grants Committee on Research Training Groups. In addition, we will ask that you rate the criteria for research using “excellent”, “very good”, “good”, “satisfactory”, or “unsatisfactory or not assessable”, and the criteria for training using “exemplary”, “very convincing”, “convincing”, “satisfactory”, or “inadequate or not assessable”. These ratings are intended to support the Grants Committee in its task of assessing and comparing proposals and review outcomes from a wide range of subject areas.

In addition, we will ask that you comment on the requested funding amounts. The main criteria are whether the requested amounts have been conclusively justified and whether they will permit optimum research that is geared towards the objectives of the Research Training Group. For International Research Training Groups, in which the partner institution is expected to contribute equally to the group, you should also assess whether the foreign partner institution participates to an adequate extent.

## IV Review Criteria

The review follows the criteria below, which arise from the objectives of the programme as specified in the Guidelines on Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups (DFG form 50.07).

[www.dfg.de/formulare/50\\_07](http://www.dfg.de/formulare/50_07)

Please note that the overall objectives of a Research Training Group

- **promoting high-quality research and early independence of doctoral researchers,**
- **international orientation and integration of the Research Training Group and its doctoral researchers, and**
- **promoting equity and diversity in research and compatibility of research and family**

each concern several aspects of a Research Training Group; therefore we ask that you always take them into consideration when evaluating the different criteria.

In the case of renewal proposals, the criteria apply to the review of the renewal proposal as well as to the review of the results of the first funding period. In International Research Training Groups, the respective partner institution must also be reviewed. If any comments were given in the review of the draft proposal or the establishment proposal, please take into consideration whether these have been implemented and if so, how.

Please note that the option of applying for positions for postdoctoral researchers has been suspended by the Grants Committee on Research Training Groups until further notice by resolution dated 15 November 2024.

## 1 Research Criteria

### 1.1 Participating researchers and institutions

- (i) Academic qualification and supervisory experience of the participating researchers
- (ii) Group composition and internal collaboration
- (iii) Quality and suitability of the host institutions and existing equipment

*For example: (i) Individual expertise and international visibility of the participating researchers in an international context regarding the leading theme/research idea; if applicable: incorporation in international networks; (ii) Composition of the group regarding subject-specific/methodological expertise, career levels, and participation of female researchers<sup>1</sup>; previous cooperation of the participating researchers; in the case of renewal proposals: changes regarding the composition of the group; (iii) Project staffing and methodological and technical equipment/infrastructure of the university/universities and other participating institutions; if applicable: added value through the involvement of several institutions.*

### 1.2 Research programme

- (i) Quality and originality of the research programme
- (ii) Disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary value added
- (iii) Appropriateness and coherence with respect to the objectives of a Research Training Group
- (iv) Integration into the research profile of the location

*For example: (i) Quality, originality and scientific relevance in international comparison; structure, planned implementation, suitability for enabling ambitious doctoral projects; handling of research data; in the case of renewal proposals: implementation of the research programme and results achieved so far, ongoing development, suitability for second funding period; (ii/iii) Focus/coherence, added value, synergy effects; suitability as a research programme specifically for doctoral researchers; (iv) Fitting of the research topic within the strategic focus of the university and its research environment; possibilities of cooperation with and distinction from other research activities at the location.*

## 2 Training Criteria

### 2.1 Supervision and training strategy

- (i) Recruiting and supervision strategy
- (ii) Training and interaction within the Research Training Group
- (iii) For renewal proposals: Doctoral record of the Research Training Group and achievements of its doctoral researchers
- (iv) Organisation

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<sup>1</sup> If male researchers are underrepresented at the management level in the relevant research area(s) compared to female researchers, please state the percentage of male researchers involved.

*For example: (i) Suitability of the call for proposals and selection process, target figures regarding gender ratio, recruitment at the local/national/international level (in the case of renewal proposals: recruitment success); individual funding duration and cohort model; planned structure of multiple supervisions, balance between supervision and promotion of autonomy; measures to promote gender equality for researchers, diversity in research and the compatibility of research and family; career development measures for graduates (if applicable: strategy for start-up funding); (ii) Imparting of subject-specific as well as interdisciplinary expertise, teaching of good research practice and handling of research data, promotion of interaction within the RTG, networking/internationalisation, added value of the qualification programme; complexity and workload. In the case of renewal proposals: changes/development of the supervision and qualification strategy. (iii) Doctoral record (completion rate, time-to-degree) and achievements of doctoral researchers, e.g. scientific quality of projects, publications, conference submissions; (iv) Organisation and leadership, involvement of doctoral researchers; quality management; in the case of locally distributed and International RTGs: cooperation across locations.*

## 2.2 University integration and cooperation

- Integration into general doctoral training programmes, if available
- Integration into the university's academic structure and support structures for researchers in early-career phases
- Value added by collaboration with other institutions (in terms of doctoral training)

*For example: (i) Synergies with and distinction from graduate schools and other doctoral programmes at the respective location; (ii) Interconnection with undergraduate study programmes, the respective university's support of the RTG's qualification programme (e. g. offices, completion funding, other financial support), support of the RTG through university equity and diversity measures; (iii) Benefits for doctoral researchers through cooperation with other academic/non-academic institutions.*

## **V Additional Aspects of the Review**

### **1 Confidentiality**

Please treat the proposal documents confidentially. To ensure the confidentiality of the review process but also for reasons of data protection, only you as the reviewer may have access to the proposal documents. The contents may not be forwarded to third parties – including third parties within your department/work area.

The DFG is looking closely at the potential uses of artificial intelligence (AI) in the form of generative models for text and image creation – both in research work itself and when submitting proposals to the DFG.

As the documents that are provided to you for review are confidential, they may not be used as input for generative models. The use of generative models in the preparation of reviews is inadmissible in any case due to the confidentiality of the review process. What is more, the processing of proposal content using a generative model may constitute a copyright infringement.

When submitting proposals to the DFG, the use of generative models is permissible because of the considerable opportunities and development potential they offer, but such usage must be disclosed in a scientifically appropriate manner. The use of generative models is to be assessed neutrally per se when it comes to evaluating the subject-specific quality of a funding proposal. As far as the content of a proposal is concerned, full responsibility for research integrity remains with the applicants.

### **2 Obligation to Observe the Principles of Good Research Practice**

The principles of good research practice must also be observed during the review process. Detailed information can be found in the DFG [Code of Conduct “Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice”](#).

A violation of these principles can result in a charge of scientific misconduct in accordance with the [DFG's Rules of Procedure for Dealing with Scientific Misconduct \(Verfahrensordnung der DFG zum Umgang mit wissenschaftlichem Fehlverhalten – VerfOWF\)](#).

### 3 Conflicts of Interest

Please examine whether any circumstances exist that might give rise to an appearance of bias, favouritism or conflict of interest on your part. For more information, please refer to the Guidelines for Avoiding Conflicts of Interest (DFG form 10.201).

[www.dfg.de/formulare/10\\_201](http://www.dfg.de/formulare/10_201)

### 4 Assessment of Researchers' Achievements

The assessment of a researcher's achievements must be carried out in its entirety and based on substantive qualitative criteria. In addition to the publication of articles, books, data and software, other dimensions can be taken into account, such as involvement in teaching, academic self-administration, public relations or knowledge and technology transfer. Details of quantitative metrics such as impact factors and h-indices are not required and are not to be considered as part of the review.

We ask you to consider a researcher's individual career stage when evaluating the qualification of the applicant and to assess his/her achievements on this basis. In some cases, this may mean that preliminary work specific to the project cannot necessarily be expected.

Please also take into account that some researchers may have pursued individual career paths in a business or non-university context.

The review must not be based on non-scientific criteria such as age, gender, family obligations, origin or health restrictions, to the detriment of the applicant. Researchers are encouraged to declare periods of absence and periods of restricted academic activity (minimum duration: three months in a year) due to unavoidable delays in their career. Such periods should be given appropriate consideration in the researcher's favour in order to compensate for any disadvantages experienced.

For further information on equity and diversity in research, see:

[www.dfg.de/diversity/en](http://www.dfg.de/diversity/en)



In order to be able to make non-discriminatory, science-led funding decisions, it is important for the evaluation process to be based solely on the above criteria and free of non-scientific factors. Regularly engaging with the topic of bias can sensitise people to their own, often unconscious prejudices, thereby counteracting any potential bias in assessment. For further information, please refer to the recommendations and background material that are available at:

[www.dfg.de/bias/en](http://www.dfg.de/bias/en)

## 5 Important Information on Data Protection

The DFG takes the protection of your personal data very seriously. The proposal documents on which your review is based regularly contain personal data that is protected by data protection laws, particularly by the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In order to protect this data, we therefore request that you observe the following guidelines on the confidential handling of personal data when preparing your review.

Data protection law stipulates that personal data must be protected by sufficient security measures to prevent any access by unauthorised parties as well as accidental loss. Please take the necessary measures to comply with data protection law, for example by choosing secure passwords, securing PCs, etc. We also ask that you take measures to protect the proposal documents in your home workplace against access by other persons in your household or by other third parties.

If you are working outside the DFG systems (elan), for example saving the proposal documents onto a local end device, please make sure to delete personal data immediately or to securely destroy it when it is no longer required. This should be done in a secure manner (in the case of printed documents, by not disposing of them in a wastepaper basket but by using a paper shredder).

Please help us to recognise and remedy any data privacy incidents, and report all technical difficulties or irregularities to us when using DFG systems (elan), as well as any (potentially) unauthorised access to personal data contained in the proposal documents. Examples of such incidents include:

- Unauthorised use of your elan login data
- Cyberattacks leading to access to personal data contained in the proposal documents by unauthorised parties

- If documents containing personal data relating to the proposal are stolen or read in the event of a break-in
- If USB sticks, mobile phones or laptops containing unencrypted personal data in connection with a proposal document are lost or stolen

In such cases, please contact: E-mail: [datenschutz@dfg.de](mailto:datenschutz@dfg.de)

With regard to your own personal data, please take note of the DFG's data protection notice for reviewers, which can be viewed and downloaded at [www.dfg.de/privacy\\_policy](http://www.dfg.de/privacy_policy). By taking up your duties as reviewer, you hereby confirm acknowledgement of this data protection notice.

[www.dfg.de/privacy\\_policy](http://www.dfg.de/privacy_policy)