



Vienna Science
and Technology Fund

Vienna Research Groups for Young Investigators

Call Specifications

Information and Communication Technology 2023

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1. About this document

This document specifies the process, criteria, and instrument of a specific WWTF call. It is aimed at applicants wishing to submit a proposal in the Vienna Research Groups for Young Investigators Call 2023. For further information regarding the thematic scope of the call, funding and submission guidelines, as well as references to WWTF policies, please also consider the following documents:

Call Fiche	Summarizes the most important aspects of the call	https://wwtf.at/modules/download.php?key=4523_DE_O&cs=F539
Submission Guideline	Guide to entering and uploading information into the Funding Portal	https://wwtf.at/funding/programmes/vrg/#VRG23
WWTF Funding Guideline	General Guideline for WWTF funding activities	https://www.wwtf.at/upload/WWTF_Richtlinie_081121.pdf.pdf
Guideline for Good Scientific Practice	Guidelines by the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity	https://www.wwtf.at/upload/broschure_gwp-richtlinien_web_2017.pdf
Open Science Policy	Open Science Policy of WWTF	https://www.wwtf.at/upload/wwtf_open-science-policy_09032022.pdf
Gender Equality Strategy & Plan	Detailed information about gender mainstreaming at WWTF	https://wwtf.at/upload/wwtf-gender-equality-strategy-and-plan_final.pdf
Reporting and Accounting Guideline	Specifies reporting and accounting for funded projects	https://www.wwtf.at/upload/anhang_berichtswesen_und_abrechnungsmodalitaeten_04112020.pdf

2. Thematic scope of the call

This call is issued within the WWTF Programme Vienna Research Groups for Young Investigators in the area of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The proposed field of research should contribute to the scientific advancement of the ICT field and demonstrate relevance to industry with a strong potential for mid-term technological and societal impact.

The term “industry” is understood in a broad sense, meaning that industries of all kinds including service sectors are covered. “Mid-term” stands for an impact that does not have to show immediate results and can still encompass some more years of scientific research. The call is open to all topics and fields of ICT. Some typical topics that are relevant for Vienna in this call include among others systems engineering, automatization, new forms of production, data sciences approaches, autonomous driving, new digital business models or quantum software engineering.

3. Steps of the application process

For applicants, the application includes the following steps:

- **Submission of a proposal:** concise proposals demonstrating the candidate’s qualifications and proposed research
- **Participation in the hearings**

4. Submission

Applications must be submitted via the **WWTF Funding Portal** at <https://fundingportal.wwtf.at/> within the deadlines defined on the [Call Fiche](#). *Please note that we are rolling out our new funding portal.* Existing users can login with their credentials.

- One of the contributing researchers must register at WWTF’s Funding Portal and provide the necessary data and files (preferably the potential VRG leader).
- The structure and content of the application are described in more detail in the [Submission Guideline](#).
- Important: Signatures of the proponent and proposed group leader (“affirmations”) and the authorized signatory at each institution (“authorization”) are required in the application process. Please contact your institution’s research service and inform yourself about your institute’s internal processes and timelines.
- All application information will be processed through the online system. No hard copies of documents are required.
- We recommend registering and creating a proposal even in the case that you are not sure if you want to submit a proposal in order to learn what the requirements are. All proposals not submitted will be deleted shortly after the call deadline.
- The application must be written in English because all projects will be reviewed internationally.
- Please inform yourself about internal deadlines at the host institutions.

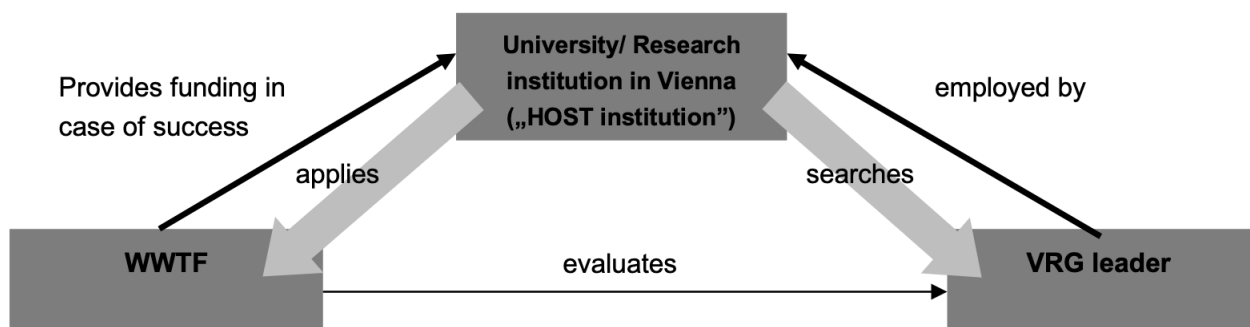
5. Eligibility of applicants and roles in the project

The general eligibility of applicants is specified in the [WWTF Funding Guideline](#).

An application is prepared in tandem: the proposed **VRG leader** applies together with the **proponent** representing a research institution in Vienna.

The proponent is an established scientists of a university or non-profit public and private non-university research institution based in Vienna (“host institution”) that intend to hire an excellent young researcher from abroad.

- The host institution is responsible for the application, the selection of the candidates presented to the WWTF and the provision of a career perspective.
- In the case of non-university institutions as host institutions, the existence of suitable links with a university partner to ensure academic integration and teaching as well as for a possible academic career is a selection criterion.
- Active recruitment procedures are mandatory. The search for the potential VRG leader is conducted by the host institution. The international publication of a job announcement – e.g., in a high impact journal that is relevant for the topic and/or via professional societies/ mailing lists – is obligatory. For advertising reasons, the host institution can forward the link / a digital copy of the job announcement to WWTF (publication on WWTF homepage).
- The proponent is responsible for the coordination of the application, should support the applicant at every stage of the application and is responsible for the integration of the applicant in the host institution in case of funding.



VRG leaders are young researchers with the aim to advance their career in an early post-doc phase. Typically, it is the first “genuine” group led by the young researcher who assumes leadership responsibility for several group members. This means that:

- Vienna Research Group leaders are independent in designing their research work and recruiting staff. They are expected to attract additional and increasing third-party funding over the years.
- Researchers who apply for this call are up to eight years after PhD (counting from the submission deadline); care duties may extend this period by up to four years.
- The candidates come from abroad to strengthen Vienna as a research location by attracting additional talents and to provide impulses for the Viennese research landscape. This means (i) no current employment contract with an Austrian institution three months before the submission deadline until the submission deadline, (ii) being employed at a foreign research institution for at least two years in

the last three years counting from the submission deadline. Given these terms, the WWTF also welcomes applicants with Austrian citizenship who wish to return to Austria. Note that the rationale of the VRG programme is to bring new competences to Vienna.

- WWTF encourages Vienna-based research institutions to actively search for women to act as potential group leaders. The successful appointment of a woman is supposed to be rewarded with a financial contribution for the Vienna host institution in order to support their gender mainstreaming activities. WWTF also offers dual career advice for partners of the awarded group leaders. Costs for childcare and/or career coaching for female WWTF-funded personnel can be included to a small amount in the budget.

Additional partners:

- Apart from the VRG group, additional research partners can be involved. Those partners substantially work on the project and might receive funding and/or provide resources and funding for the project.
- No industry involvement is required. Industry partners are not eligible for funding, however they might participate in the project by in kind-contributions
- Partners can be affiliated to institutions in or outside Vienna (including international partners). Partners inside and outside Vienna are optional and not a requirement for application.
- Partners outside of Vienna may receive up to 20% of the total requested funding.

6. Career perspectives and funding phases

The essential aspect of the program is the contractual relationship of the host institution with the group leader, her/his status within the host institution, especially her/his career perspectives. The steps leading to a tenured position (or an equivalent career path) (for example the exact process of getting a so-called “Qualifizierungsvereinbarung”/qualification agreement including time frames) have to be specified already in the application. It is important that the prospective host institution in Vienna provides a clear-cut career plan for the candidate. These details will be the basis for contract in the case of funding.

The funding period of the Vienna Research Group can be six to eight years and has two phases:

- In the first five years the group is mainly financed by the WWTF (in general about 70-80% of the funding). Before the end of the first phase (regularly during the fourth year, at the latest at the beginning of the fifth year; earlier dates are possible), an evaluation step (“interim evaluation”) takes place, preferably co-organized by WWTF and the host institution. This means that the involvement of an international reviewer, nominated by WWTF, is mandatory and the publication record and the research profile of the group leader will be evaluated. Further criteria might be included by the host institution.
- In case of a positive evaluation, the second phase will run for one to three years. This phase is characterized by a tenured position and is mainly financed by the host institution. Funding by WWTF is supplemented, particularly in the second phase (i.e. years 6, 6-7 or 6-8), by a significant increase of financial contributions from the host institution/other third party funding. In case of a negative result of the assessment, the funding of the group will be discontinued after a fading-out phase (max. 1 year).

7. Funding and evaluation criteria

The following criteria are used in the evaluation.

- **Scope:** is the project within the scope of the call as described in the call specifications? Projects which are not within the thematic scope will be immediately rejected by the jury, regardless the possible scientific quality.

The key criterion in the evaluation of proposals is **scientific quality**, i.e., both the submitted project and the applicant(s) must be scientifically outstanding. In detail this means:

Quality of the proposed VRG leader

- **Scientific excellence and academic potential of the applicant:** accomplishments and potential of the applicants to conduct the proposed research (measured by academic age) and to go beyond the state of the art. Candidates have substantial research experience and research outputs. In addition, candidates must already have high quality publications (in peer reviewed journals) and comparable achievements.
- **Independent thinking and leadership:** demonstration of the VRG leader to conduct independent research and showing leadership potential.

Quality of the proposed research

- **Innovative character of the proposed research:** Does the proposed research work meet the highest relevant international quality standards? Does the project show scientific originality and innovative aspects? Are the methods and research approaches appropriate and innovative?
- **Feasibility:** is the timeframe sufficient for carrying out the project? Are the proposed resources suitable to achieve the goals? Is the budget adequate?
- **Consideration of gender aspects:** The relevance of potential sex-specific and gender-related aspects of the proposed projects should be considered and explained throughout the proposal.
- **Relevance:** What are the mid- to long term academic, societal and economics impacts in particular with regard to Vienna?

Fit to the research environment offered

- **Integration into the research environment:** Plans and commitments for the integration of the VRG into the research environment of the home institution including a concept for the integration of VRG leaders into academic teaching and their formal position in the university structure, e.g., in the supervision of doctoral candidates during and after the funding period.
 - If a non-university research institution applies for funding, the application should be submitted jointly with a university to demonstrate involvement in teaching and PhD training, possibility of transfer to a Viennese university.
- **Career perspective:** A career model within the university, which offers a long-term career perspective for the VRG leader linked to an evaluation of their individual performance.
- **Continuation of funding / evaluation:** clear concept of the interim evaluation involving WWTF

Other aspects:

- **Career breaks** such as for parental leave, care duties and longer illnesses will be taken into account in the evaluation of the proposals. Please indicate the time periods to allow them to be considered.
- For WWTF's **gender** guideline, see section 9 below.

8. Eligible Costs

The funding has to be used to cover the costs for the research group. All costs that are directly attributable to the project and are regarded as commonly required in the respective scientific field are eligible for funding. Please also consider your organization's internal guidelines for eligible expenses/costs.

8.1. Personnel costs

WWTF is dedicated to funding researchers. Hence, the larger share of the project's budget should be allocated to personnel costs for researchers working on the project.

- Eligible forms of employment contracts are full-time and part-time contracts as well as marginal employments ("Arbeitsvertrag"). Contracts for services ("Werkvertrag") are only permitted if the nature of the work means that it cannot be performed through employment contracts.
- All persons employed through a WWTF-funded project should receive a fair employment contract with at least a minimum wage according to the "Kollektivvertrag" (collective agreement) of the Austrian Universities / extra university research institutions or – for staff employed at institutions with no collective agreement – according to the standards of the Austrian Science Fund (FWF, wage scheme available online).
- Salaries higher than those stipulated in the collective agreement are possible, subject to the agreement from the host institution and justification due to experience of the group leader and researchers.
- The budget calculation in the Funding Portal automatically includes an inflation adjustment of 6% p.a. Note: WWTF has the right to set further adjustments in the future (in both directions according to the inflation rates).
- Applications for personnel costs must be in one of the following categories:
 - **PI/Group leader**
 - **Senior Personnel:** highly qualified scientists, usually permanently employed
 - **Post Doc:** or equivalent qualification, including Senior Postdocs
 - **PhD Candidate:** or equivalent qualification level
 - **MA/BA Student:** Bachelor or Master students
 - **Technician or equivalent** (proportional funding only)
 - **Data Manager/Steward** (proportional funding only)
 - **Student Assistant**
 - **Administrative Personnel** (proportional funding only)

8.2. Non-Personnel costs

Running costs for basic infrastructure (telephone costs, rents) as well as costs for the acquisition of infrastructure and basic equipment are not eligible for funding as it should fall under the category overhead costs.

Non-personnel should not exceed 30% % of the overall budget. The costs can be in the following categories:

- **Equipment:** Smaller equipment can be purchased within the scope of the grant. General office software is not eligible for funding. This includes devices up to 1,500 € each as well as software specific to the projects. Funding by WWTF under this scheme is not intended to cover investment in general and larger infrastructure, however *pro rata* depreciation rates over the project duration for equipment necessary to the project may be funded.
- **Consumables:** Costs for project-related expenses like consumables. WWTF does not fund consumables that are general and not project-specific (e.g., paper, printer toner)
- **Travelling:** Costs for travel and accommodation for scientific meetings and conferences, field work, expeditions may be funded. Please also consider the regulations of your organization for travel costs.
- **Publication costs:** costs incurred for publication activities, e.g., printing costs, article processing charges (for open access), data management, etc. This also includes costs for archiving research data in open repositories. Please also consider the [Open Science Policy](#).
- **Data management:** Costs for data access as well as for conducting surveys and panels can be covered. The grant also covers costs incurring for data preparation in order to make the data accessible via a repository.
- **Workshops / Conferences /...:** Costs for organizing events, workshops, and conferences as well as invitations are eligible.
- **Other:** e.g., third-party costs, namely, for external collaboration, consulting, studies, software development as well as costs for childcare and/or for career coaching for female WWTF funded personnel may be funded to a small degree. Furthermore, the relocation of the VRG leader can be funded up to 5.000 €. In general, it is assumed that the funding of individuals will be predominantly through employment contracts at the participating institutions and not through other types of employment.

8.3. Indirect costs (overheads)

Please note, WWTF offers a maximum of 20% overhead lump sum to compensate for all indirect/administration costs. Overhead is calculated as 20% of the direct costs of the project. That means that flat fees for payroll or project accounting charged to the project accounts are non-eligible direct costs. The total funding volume is calculated as direct plus indirect costs. Please also consider the [Reporting and Accounting Guidelines](#).

Applicants are required to comply with the overhead regulations of the involved institutions.

8.4. In-kind contributions

The applicant's in-kind contributions have to be at least 20% of the total project sum. These in-kind contributions have to be described in detail (in general it should at least include the salary of the VRG leader after a

positive interim evaluation). Please be aware that the monetary and in-kind contributions are the contributions from the **host institution** (and from institutions that the VRG leader has an affiliation with) **only**.

Basic infrastructure as office premises equipped with telephone, internet, laboratory etc. do not count as in-kind contributions and are covered by overheads. They must be available anyhow, so that work in the given research area can be taken up upon signing of the contract. Other categories are in-kind working capacity, consumables/software or monetary contributions.

9. Gender aspects in the application phase

WWTF has a [Gender Equality Strategy & Plan](#) which must be considered in the application. Examples of questions that should be considered during drafting the proposal are:

- Equal opportunities in research
 - Please take gender balance/equality in the project consortium and team into consideration, at all levels and in decision-making positions, e.g. what steps have been taken to approach / achieve it?
 - Do working conditions allow all members of staff to combine work and family life in a satisfactory manner?
 - Are there mechanisms in place to manage and monitor gender equality aspects, e.g., workforce statistics?
- Gender in research content and in the research ideas phase
 - If the research involves humans as research objects, has the relevance of gender to the research topic been analysed?
 - Have literature and other sources relating to gender differences in the research field been consulted?
- Proposal phase
 - Does the methodology ensure that (possible) gender differences will be investigated: that sex/ gender differentiated data will be collected and analysed throughout the research cycle and will be part of the final publication?
 - Does the proposal explicitly and comprehensively explain how gender issues will be handled?
 - In case there is no potential sex and/or gender dimension to be considered, is this briefly addressed in the proposal?
- Research phase
 - If there are further groups involved in the project (e.g., samples, testing groups), are they gender balanced?
 - Are questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, etc. designed to unravel potentially relevant sex and/or gender differences in your data?
 - Is data analysed according to the sex variable? Are other relevant variables analysed with respect to sex?

10. Guidelines for good scientific practice and ethics

Compliance with the **rules for good scientific practice**, including the observance of ethical aspects in research, is mandatory. This pertains to the application process and, in case of funding, the actual research work.

- WWTF is member of the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity (OeAWI) and thus committed to their standards for good scientific practice. Hence, applicants must comply to OeAWI standards. See <https://oeawi.at/en/guidelines/>
- In case of suspected scientific misconduct WWTF will employ the ombudsperson at the applicant's institution or request OeAWI to investigate the case.
- Based on the outcome of investigations by the ombudsperson or OeAWI, WWTF reserves the right to exclude the applicants and the application from the current and future calls.

Research may include **ethical aspects** that require the approval from an ethics committee/institutional review board.

- If the approval from the ethics committee/institutional review board is required for the planned project this must be clearly stated at the short proposal stage. The approval ("Votum") must be submitted online with the proposal.
- Should it not be possible to obtain a final ethical approval before the submission deadline due to reasons which are beyond the control of the applicant, the applicant must explain the reasons in the application and send the preliminary approval to the responsible call manager before the jury meeting.
- The approval by the ethics committee should be specific for the planned WWTF project; therefore, the title of the project should be the same as on the approval (minor deviations are possible). If the title of the approved research differs significantly from the proposed project, a statement must be provided (in the online Funding Portal), confirming that the approval will cover the planned research.
- If the main applicant for the ethical approval is not the PI or a co-PI/Core-Team Member of the WWTF proposal, a clear statement must be included in the proposal, in which the PI or co-PI/Core-Team Member confirms that he/she is authorized to conduct the planned research within this ethical approval.
- If the planned research is covered by an existing approval, the applicants must submit the extension of the ethics approval. The above also applies for extensions.
- Non-compliance will result in the rejection of the proposal on formal grounds.

11. Selection and decision process

Applications must be submitted via the online Funding Portal in the specified timeframes. Submissions after the deadline will not be considered. The following paragraphs explain the processes in more detail.

The core element of WWTF's decision making processes is an **international jury** mandated to provide a funding recommendation to the WWTF boards.

- Depending on the scope of the call, the jury is comprised in general of 5-7 outstanding international experts that have no current affiliation to an Austrian institution.
- Jury members are selected by WWTF according to their expertise with regard to the call topic and having no known conflict of interest prior to the submission deadline. For details see section on reviewers below.
- Members of the jury will be published after the WWTF Board of Directors' formal funding decision.
- Please note that WWTF does not allow the opportunity for rebuttals to recommendations by the jury panel or decisions by the WWTF Board of Directors

11.1. Formal eligibility check by WWTF

WWTF office conducts a formal eligibility check of the proposal based on the criteria outlined in the [WWTF Funding Guideline](#), the [Call Fiche](#) and this document. This mainly includes a check if all required signatures from the appropriate persons are uploaded.

Substantial deficiencies and missing items in the application will lead to the exclusion of funding applications from further evaluation and rejection on formal grounds. The strict timelines of the call does not allow for proposals to be sent back to the applicants for improvements and supplements.

11.2. Preparatory meeting 1

- Each proposal is independently assessed by at least two jury members based on the evaluation criteria.
- The jury decides if a proposal should be reviewed or rejected. This usually takes place 1-2 months after the submission deadline.
- Proposals not in the thematic focus of the call and that do not meet international scientific quality standards will be rejected at this stage and will not be considered for the review process
- All applicants will be promptly informed about the decision. Rejected applicants will be provided with a short jury statement explaining the decision. Successful applicants will be informed that they were admitted to the next stage.
- After the preparatory meeting, the jury may be extended by additional members in case supplementary expertise is needed to cover the topics of the proposals.

11.3. Evaluation of proposals

In the next stage, proposals will undergo a **review process**.

- WWTF will obtain a minimum of two (usually 3-4) written reviews for each proposal.
- Reviewers are recognized international experts in the topic(s) of the proposals. WWTF does not assign reviewers based with an Austrian affiliation. WWTF aims for diversity in the cohort of reviewers (gender, age, countries).
- All reviewers will be checked for potential conflicts of interests with the applicants by WWTF office. As a rule, reviewers shall not have close professional relations with the applicants (including all team

members of the project). Practically, this excludes reviewers that have published with the applicants within the last five years or have had a collaboration in a research project in this timeframe. In case of very close cooperation with the applicant(s) over a longer period of time, the reviewer will not be contacted. Joint publications in an edited volumes/proceedings, “community papers” with more than 30 authors or common attendances in workshops and conferences do not qualify as conflict of interest. Additionally, reviewers are asked to disclose any potential conflict of interest.

- Reviewers will receive a review questionnaire by WWTF and be asked to provide their assessment via this document.
- The expert reviewers remain anonymous to the applicants.
- In the proposal submissions, applicants are asked to suggest 5 experts, whom they deem qualified to review the proposal. WWTF office will check the reviewers for potential conflict of interests. WWTF office is free to choose / not to choose any of the suggested experts. Jury members also nominate reviewers.
- Applicants may also exclude up to 3 persons without stating any reasons. Reviewers on the negative list will not be contacted.

11.4. Preparatory meeting 2

- Each proposal is, again, independently assessed by at least two jury members considering the reviews based on the evaluation criteria.
- The jury decides if the potential group leader will be invited to the hearings. This usually takes place 1-2 months before the hearings.
- All applicants will be promptly informed about the decision. Rejected applicants will be provided with a short jury statement explaining the decision and the anonymized reviews. Successful applicants will be informed that they are invited to the hearings. Invited applicants will receive the anonymized review after the formal decision by WWTF boards.

11.5. Hearings and jury meeting

At least two jury members are assigned to each proposal and act as rapporteurs for the proposals.

- The basis for the evaluation by the jury are the proposals, the hearings as well as the reviews.
- All invited candidates are comprehensively evaluated. The applicant’s attendance of the hearing in Vienna is mandatory in order to be considered for funding. WWTF does not reimburse travel costs to and from the hearing. For more information regarding travel grants please consult for example <https://www.ffg.at/en/career-grants> (Career grants of the Austrian Research Promotion Agency FFG).
- The result is a recommendation for each application: “to be funded” or “not to be funded” or “reserve candidate”.

11.6. Formal funding decision

The jury recommendation will be **formally confirmed** first by the WWTF Advisory Board and then approved by the WWTF Board of Directors.

- Applicants will be promptly informed about the decision.
- The decision may include budget cuts as well as additional conditions and recommendations.
- Applicants will receive anonymized full text reviews. Unsuccessful applicants will also receive a short statement by the jury explaining the main reasons why the application was not selected for funding.

12. Employment and funding contract

In case of funding, WWTF office will contact the potential group leader for the steps leading to a funding contract.

- The VRG leader will be provided with the necessary documents for the contracts.
- A signed employment contract between the VRG leader and the host institution (“Dienstvertrag”) must exist and sent to WWTF not later than two months after the formal funding decision has been made (by the WWTF Board of Directors). Otherwise, the reserve candidates will be invited.
- Only then the funding contract with WWTF will be finalised and the names of the successful candidates will be published.
- Projects may start immediately but should start not later than 18 months after the formal funding decision by the WWTF Board of Directors has been made.
- The formal funding contract will be signed between WWTF and the host institution of the VRG leader (for universities according to §27 of the Universities Act 2002). The contract provides the VRG leader with the scientific responsibility and financial authority for conducting the project.

13. Monitoring and reporting

Funded projects are committed to delivering reports and participating in evaluation and monitoring. WWTF offers the possibility to adapt the work plan according to project needs. For details see the [Reporting and Accounting Guideline](#).