

Call for Proposals

“Young Researchers' Career Development Project – Training New Doctoral Students”

Call Identifier: DOK-2025-02

This Call has been prepared in line with the regulations of the Croatian Science Foundation. By applying to this Call, you are accepting the terms and conditions thereof. The terms relating to the masculine gender are considered neutral and shall refer to persons of both genders.



About the programme

Future development of basic, applied and developmental research, transfer of new technologies as well as creating conditions for innovation and their application all depend on the quality of postgraduate training, planning and developing careers of young researchers and capabilities of the Republic of Croatia to retain the best young scientists and encourage their employment, not only in the scientific and academic sectors, but also in the economic sector. The strategic goal of the Croatian Science Foundation (hereinafter: the Foundation) is to develop a comprehensive programme of funding career development of young researchers, from doctoral studies to post-doctoral specialisations in Croatia and abroad, as well as to actively encourage the mobility from academic to economic sector and vice versa.

Aim of the “Young researchers' career development project – training of doctoral students” Call for Proposals

The Foundation launches this Call in order to enable active and prospective researchers dealing with internationally and/or nationally significant issues to include within their research projects young researchers willing to participate in scientific research with the aim of directing their career towards cutting-edge science. The overall goal is to train new Ph.D. degree holders who will continue developing their career in competitive research and/or contribute to the development of new technologies in the economy.

In addition, this Call will build mentoring capacities within Croatian scientific organizations, encourage transfer, adoption and application of acquired knowledge as well as enhance the level of postgraduate education and scientific development of young researchers.

The aim of the project is to support employment of young researchers at the early stage of career development (postgraduate level) within the system of science and higher education, which shall contribute to the improvement of young researchers' career development system.

The Applicant to the Call is considered an Organization that nominates mentor candidates. Mentor is a person responsible for scientific development of the research assistant and should be an active researcher. The Organization and Mentor must clearly explain the training and work methods, research tasks as well how the acquired knowledge can be applied by the doctoral student.

The Call shall finance the overall salary cost of the research assistant, with the primary objective of writing a doctoral thesis and acquiring the knowledge on basic premises of scientific work and research.

Call objectives:

- Training new Ph.D. degree holders
- Increasing the number of young researchers participating in research projects
- Increasing doctoral students' competences
- Strengthening mentoring capacities within Croatian research organisations
- Creating new and improving existing knowledge
- Strengthening human resources essential for social development based on knowledge and scientific achievements.

Call in brief

Call opening date: 20 January 2025

Call closing date: 24 February 2025 until 13:00 (CET)

The Call is open to all scientific fields.

Mentor candidate: scientist with internationally recognized achievements in science and/or technology.

Estimated number of funded doctoral students: 220

Project funding duration: 5 years in case of research institutes, 6 years in case of higher education institutions, pursuant to Act on Higher Education and Scientific Activity

Estimated start of financing: second half of 2025

Single amount of funding: doctoral student's total salary cost, calculated pursuant to the Regulation on Job Titles, Employment Conditions and Salary Coefficients for Public Service (OG 22/2024) and all material rights pursuant to collective agreements applicable to public sector employees.

Call conditions

Applicant eligibility

Eligible Applicants are organizations established pursuant to the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Activity (OG 119/22), i.e.

- Higher education institution
- Research institute.

The organization shall provide actual and specific support to both the mentor and doctoral student and secure pre-conditions for scientific development, which is confirmed by signing Form A.

One Applicant Organization can nominate an unlimited number of mentor candidates (provided that they meet the conditions below).

The candidate for mentor shall meet the following conditions:

- A scientist¹ who obtained their PhD at least two years prior to the Call deadline,
- Must be permanently employed at an eligible organization (defined below) at the moment of application,
- A principal investigator or a team member of a research project financed by the Foundation, various EU (e.g. Horizon 2020) and other competitive international research

¹ Pursuant to Article 85 of the Act on Higher Education and scientific Activity (OG 119/2022), a scientist is a person with a doctoral or Master's degree and a person enrolled in doctoral studies.

projects², within which the doctoral student will conduct their research. The project must be implemented for at least another 18 months after the application deadline,

- Must be an active researchers (as evidenced in their list of publications, projects, patents, international cooperation, etc.),
- The Call is open to researchers from all scientific fields,
- Candidates for mentors may be nominated only once per Call by the Applicant Organization,
- Only one candidate from a single project³ may apply for one doctoral student per Call,
- Candidates who are currently not mentoring or are mentoring fewer doctoral students will have priority.

Call procedure

Step 1 – Application and selection of mentor

Applications of mentor candidates are submitted **only** through the [Electronic Application and Assessment System](#) (EPP system), which is available on the Foundation's website. Candidates for mentor must meet the conditions defined above.

The Foundation evaluates the mentors' applications and adopts a decision on funding.

The list of approved mentors is published on the Foundation's website.

Step 2 – Public call for recruitment of research assistants

Organizations are obliged to launch a public call for the recruitment of research assistants in accordance with the legal regulations and conditions established by the Foundation's Board. The public call must be released **no later than 2 months** after the mentor has been notified of the Call results. **The Organization is obliged to deliver a written notice to the Foundation that the call is open.**

Organizations that have released the public calls verify the eligibility of candidates and submit a proposal for the selection of PhDs to the Foundation along with the proof of eligibility, after which the Foundation shall issue its consent for employing the doctoral student.

Research assistants shall meet the following mandatory criteria:

- Finished relevant graduate or integrated studies;
- Meets the criteria for the enrolment in doctoral studies;⁴
- A candidate already holding a Ph.D. degree may not be employed through this Call.

² Institutional projects, HAZU, bilateral, COST, IPA and similar projects as well as professional projects and studies are not eligible for this Call,

³ An exception to this rule are projects implemented in large consortia (Centres of Excellence, Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe etc.), where one mentor per work package may be nominated.

⁴ Does not apply to candidates who have already enrolled in doctoral studies.

Additional criteria (not mandatory)

- Previous honors, awards, etc. for excellence in studying and/or research work.
- Participation in scientific research, published papers, personal presentations at scientific conferences.

Organizations, in consultation with the mentors, may set additional criteria for doctoral students, but only as an addition to the mandatory criteria established by the Foundation's Board.

Step 3 - Contracting

Upon receiving approval from the Foundation for the proposed candidate, the Foundation and the Organization sign a Contract on mutual rights and commitments. Only after this contract has been signed the Organization may sign an employment contract with the research assistant.

The young researcher is employed to the position of research assistant with the appropriate coefficient defined in the Regulation on Job Titles, Employment Conditions and Salary Coefficients for Public Service to the period of 5 years (at research institutes) or 6 years (at higher education institutions).

The employment contract shall define the working conditions in which the research assistant may commit significant time to their research and writing of their doctoral thesis.

Funding

The amount of single funding covers the total cost of the doctoral student's annual remuneration, which includes: gross salary, taxes, contributions and cost of public transportation to and from work as well as other payments and bonuses.

The place of work of the doctoral student has to be in the head office or subsidiary offices of the Organization.

The Organization calculates and pays the salary to the research assistant after which the Foundation reimburses these funds to the Organization's account. Organizations are obliged to keep records of doctoral students in line with regular internal procedures valid for other employees paid from the Organization's own funds.

Application and submission procedure

Prior to registering, please read the **Guide for Applicants** as well as other forms and evaluation criteria. The documents referred to above can be found on the [Foundation's website](#).

Application must be submitted in **electronic form only**, through the [Electronic Application and Assessment System \(EPP\)](#) available on the Foundation's website.

Application must be written **in the Croatian language**.

Applications have to be completed and submitted via the EPP system within the Call deadline.

Incomplete applications and applications submitted after the deadline will not be taken into consideration.

Application documentation (mandatory)

1. Form A – Nomination of Mentor candidate

- Section a – Organization's needs and capacities
- Section b - Mentor's CV
- Section c - Mentor's five-year track-record
- Section d – Development plan for doctoral student's scientific and research career
- Section e – a detailed plan for financing education and scientific research of the doctoral student.

2. **Form B** – Detailed plan for doctoral student's career development.

3. **Form C** – Declaration of Mentor candidate

Additional documentation

- If the candidate for mentor is a team member on a project – the candidate must submit the evidence of his participation in the project, stating his status in the project, duration and budget of the project, which must be signed by the Principal Investigator and the Head of the organization where the project is being implemented. If the costs of the doctoral study are to be covered from the project budget, the amount of the tuition fee should be specified.
- If the doctoral study and/or research work of doctoral student is to be funded from a source other than the mentor's Organization – confirmation of payment of tuition and research work costs (with signature and stamp).

Evaluation

Following the Call closure date, the Foundation's experts will conduct an eligibility check of all submitted proposals.

The Foundation shall conduct a one-step review process for the Call DOK-2025-02. The Foundation's Board shall appoint a One-step Review Committee (hereinafter: Committee), making sure that all scientific areas are covered. The Committee shall nominate peer reviewers. Each application will be evaluated by at least three peer reviewers. The final ranking list of the mentor candidates shall be defined by the Committee, while the funding decision is adopted by the Foundation's Board.

The applications shall be evaluated based on the following criteria: 1. Organization's needs and capacities, 2. Quality of Mentor candidate, 3. Research assistant's career development plan. More detail on the evaluation criteria is available in the [Evaluation Form](#) (in Croatian).

Project implementation and reporting

Reports

- After **18 months** of employment, the Organization and mentor shall submit a periodic report to the Foundation on the research assistant's work, i.e. on the implementation of the Plan in accordance with the planned activities. Funding will resume if the report is positively evaluated; if the report is negatively evaluated, funding will be suspended.
- The second periodic report is due after **36 months**. Funding will resume if the report is positively evaluated; if the report is negatively evaluated, funding will be suspended.
- For research assistants employed at **higher education institutions**, a third report is due after **54 months**.
- **The final report** shall be submitted after financing has ended (60 months for research institutes, 72 months for higher education institutions). The final report is due 30 days after the project end date. The candidate shall submit the evidence of a successfully defended doctoral thesis.
- The mentor and the doctoral student are required to submit an additional report on the fulfilment of obligations with justifying documentation upon the Foundation's written request, regardless of the periodic reports' deadlines.

Other obligations

- The research assistant is obliged to enrol in doctoral studies during the first reporting period.
- Compliance with the approved doctoral student's career development plan, financial obligations (e.g. covering costs of doctoral studies) and other contractual obligations.
- Delivering additional reports for the occasional control of the doctoral students' progress by the Foundation.
- Registration of published papers, conference papers, posters, etc., in the EPP system, with the financial contribution of the Foundation clearly stated.

The reports will be used to also monitor:

- Percentage of defended doctoral theses in relation to the number of employed research assistants
- Publication of research results and impact (publications, dataset, software, models, methods, theories, algorithms, protocols, exhibitions, strategies etc.) in open access
- Percentage of research assistants undergoing training abroad
- Research assistant's future career.

In case the foundation decides to evaluate the Programme, in the years following its completion, it may conduct surveys to collect data which would compare the results achieved by the projects

in relation to the state of affairs upon application. By applying to the Foundation's calls, the applicants shall commit to responding to such surveys and consent to their data being used for measuring research impact, regardless of whether they received funding or not.

Failure to complete the Plan

- In case of objective difficulties in achieving the aims defined in the doctoral student's career development plan, the mentor and the doctoral student or the Organization are required to promptly inform the Foundation in written form.
- In case of negative evaluation of periodic reports, i.e. if the doctoral student's career development plan is not being implemented as foreseen in the contract, the mentor, the Organization and the doctoral student are responsible for the breach of contractual obligations.
- The Foundation shall hold the right to immediately terminate the Contract by giving written notice of termination to that effect if the evaluation has shown serious failures in the implementation of the Plan or in case of non-compliance with the contract or other written notices of the Foundation.

Submission deadline

Submission deadline is **24 February 2025 until 13:00 CET**.

All enquiries related to the Call can be submitted **only via the following e-mail address programi@hrzz.hr**. Answers to the submitted questions will be published on the Foundation's website twice a week (Mondays and Thursdays).

The Foundation will also hold several Q&A workshops for applicants across Croatia. The list of workshops is available on the Foundation's website (in Croatian). Two online workshops will also be held, one of which will be held in English (time TBC).