Call for Proposals

Research Projects (IP-2025-02)

About the Programme

With the aim of promoting scientific excellence and competition, the Programme "Research Projects" funds basic research that creates new knowledge or improves existing knowledge about a particular field as well as applied research conducted with clear technological, economic, or social objectives. The proposed topic must be internationally recognized and/or of national significance, and the project should be managed by a strong research team led by Principal Investigators with international and national reputation and an excellent track record. Consolidation of research is encouraged to increase the impact of research results and increase success rates at competitive European and other international calls.

The Programme promotes open science and research integrity principles, positive research culture and effective valorisation of knowledge and publication of research results in open access. Researchers are directed toward storing their publications in repositoria and publishing in journals with a quality-oriented editorial policy. In addition, researchers are expected to manage their research data in a responsible manner, in line with open access and FAIR principles as well as principles pertaining to sustainable approach to, re-use and sharing of research data.

The Research Projects programme also has international visibility as it is part of the international Weave network, which enables joint submission of bilateral or trilateral collaborative scientific project proposals. Under this Call, researchers can submit joint bilateral or trilateral project proposals with researchers from Slovenia, Switzerland and Czechia.

Objectives of the Call:

- Enhancing research excellence in basic research and applied and developmental research at lower technological readiness levels,
- Reaching social and economic values from newly acquired knowledge,
- Forming strong research groups dealing with internationally and/or nationally significant topics, whose Principal Investigators are outstanding scientists with internationally recognized achievements,
- Supporting networking and collaboration between research teams,
- Including and supervising early-career researchers in the implementation of research projects.

Call in brief:

Call opening date: 20 January 2025

Application deadline: 24 February 2025 until 13:00 (CEST)

Research area: The call is open to all scientific disciplines.

Duration of project: 3 years

Maximum total project budget: 200.000,00 EUR

Minimum total project budget: 60.000,00 EUR

Total Call budget: 12.000.000,00 EUR

Estimated project start date: second half of 2025

SUBMITTING A PROJECT PROPOSAL

Eligibility of applicants

The Applicant is a legal entity that submits a project proposal to the Call.

Eligible applicants:
- higher education institutions
- scientific institutes
- other research-oriented legal entities that employ at least five PhD holders who have been employed at the institution for at least one year[1].

The Principal Investigator, as the end beneficiary of funding, should meet the following conditions:
- scientist responsible for the scientific research and management of the entire project; should be registered in the Registry of Scientists and Artists,
- an active researcher (with a PhD degree, experience in project management, an active research group as evidenced in their track record, relevant publications, patents or other results in the research field of the proposed project) with internationally recognized achievements and a history of successful mentoring of young researchers,
- Permanently employed at the Applicant throughout the project implementation period,
- Fellows of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts and researchers holding the title of Professor Emeritus and Scientist Emeritus may also be Principal Investigators.

End beneficiaries of funds are the Principal Investigator and team members. One researcher may be a Principal Investigator of only one project funded by HRZZ (with the exception of ERA-NET and Weave projects). One researcher may hold a maximum of two active roles in projects funded by HRZZ – i.e. Principal Investigator on one project and team member on another project or team member on two projects. The cut-off date for determining active roles is **1 July 2025.**

Funding

Total budget of a single project over a three-year period may not exceed **200,000 EUR**, while the minimum project budget should be **60,000 EUR**.

Categories of eligible expenses:
- research costs,
- equipment purchase and maintenance (up to 59,999 EUR),
- dissemination, training and collaboration (up to 15,000 EUR per year),
- costs of open access publications (up to 15,000 EUR),
- indirect costs – up to 15% of funds requested in categories 1-4 per reporting period, excluding salary costs,

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[1] This provision shall be applied only if other conditions of the Call are met, primarily the provision that the Principal Investigator should be employed with the applicant throughout the project period and that PI can be replaced in case they retire in the second half of the Project, provided that that the Co-PI was also evaluated.

- salary costs (for a higher research assistant)[2].

The project budget (Financial Plan) should be prepared to reflect the realistic needs of the project. Expenditures in the Financial Plan should be distributed over three twelve-month periods.

If a portion of the project proposal submitted to this Call is already funded from another source or has been submitted to another call, the Applicant should provide in the Application Form all relevant information regarding the portions of the proposal that are funded from other sources (equipment, specific activities, etc.), as well as the sources, duration of funding and amount. This information will not be evaluated but is relevant for avoiding the risk of double funding. In case of a significant overlap with the other project, HRZZ may decide to deny funding for the project proposal. Proposals submitted under the Weave initiative must also indicate the total amount of funding requested from partner institutions. The final version of the Financial Plan shall be approved by HRZZ prior to contracting, following a verification of proposed expenditures and alignment of the Work and Financial Plan with HRZZ's general acts.

Only those research activities which have no other sources of funding may be funded (double financing must be avoided). **Salaries of higher research assistants are eligible until 30 November 2027.**

Content of the application and submission procedure

Project proposals are to be written on the provided application forms and submitted in electronic format through the Electronic Proposal Submission system (hereinafter: EPP), which can be accessed through HRZZ's website at the link: https://epp.hrzz.hr/.

All application documents are submitted in both Croatian and English. The Applicant shall be responsible for the identity of content of both language versions. The Croatian Science Foundation shall not be held responsible for any differences.

Project proposals must be complete and submitted in the electronic system by the deadline specified in the Call. All team members should be registered in the EPP system prior to submitting the proposal. A single researcher may have only one profile in the EPP system.

The Croatian Science Foundation will take all necessary measures to ensure availability of the proposal submission system. However, we urge all applicants not to submit their project proposals immediately before the submission deadline, when the system load is high, which could affect the submission process.

Incomplete proposals and proposals submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

Mandatory documents:

- **Administrative Form –** is completed directly in the EPP system. Upon completion, the Form should be printed out, validated and uploaded into the system. The Administrative Form should bear the signature of the head of the legal entity (Applicant) and its official stamp.
- **Application Form,** consisting of the following parts:
  - Part A - contains a detailed description of the project proposal,

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[2] Applies only to higher education institutions and scientific institutes.

- o Part B - contains the Principal Investigator's CV and track record in the last five years,
- o Part C - contains a description of project management, risk analysis, list of research team members, their CVs and project tasks.
  - **Financial Plan/Budget Form** contains the elaboration of the required financial resources related to each objective and activity in the Work Plan.
  - **Work Plan** shall include an overview of the deliverables in terms of objectives, their sequence and timing, and the team members that will implement them.
  - **Research Data Management Plan (DMP)** describes how Principal Investigators will store data generated during the research and what will happen to it after the project is completed.

Additional documents

- Ethical clearance (depending on nature of research). Ethical clearance from the Applicant should be delivered upon submission of proposal, while in cases where clearance from a higher-level entity is required, proof that the application has been sent for approval should be submitted before the contracting stage.
- Signed letter of intent to participate in the proposed project for all team members who are not employed by the Applying Organization. Letters of intent should not be submitted for team members on bilateral and trilateral projects in the role of a partner research group.
- Other research-oriented legal entities should deliver proof that they employ at least five PhD holders for at least one year.

Eligibility check

Upon closure of the Call for Proposals, HRZZ will conduct an eligibility check of the submitted proposals. HRZZ may request clarifications and minor corrections from the Applicant, but subsequent submission of documents will not be possible. Clarifications and minor corrections should be delivered within the set deadline of five working days. If the project proposal does not meet the eligibility check even after the clarifications or minor changes have been delivered or if they have not been delivered within the deadline, the project proposal will not be forwarded for evaluation. Proposals which contain plagiarised parts of text will be rejected in the eligibility check stage. HRZZ may use artificial intelligence methods to analyse project proposals.

Evaluation

All proposals that passed the eligibility check are referred to peer review. Evaluation panel members nominate peer reviewers, who shall be mostly international experts and who shall evaluate proposals according to evaluation criteria that are available as part of the call documentation. HRZZ will secure three peer reviews for each proposal.

After the peer review, the members of the evaluation panel will give a final recommendation and opinion on the project proposals according to the criteria that are available as part of the call documentation and draft a ranking list of proposals that shall serve as the basis for the funding

recommendation presented to HRZZ Board. The estimated duration of the evaluation procedure is six months.

As per the Weave initiative, researchers from the Republic of Croatia may submit a joint proposal to the Croatian Science Foundation, which acts as the Lead Agency and shall evaluate the submitted project proposals according to its own prescribed evaluation criteria. Under the terms of the Weave Agreement, 20% of the top-ranked project proposals in individual ranking lists within the areas of Life Sciences, Natural and Technical Sciences, and Social Sciences and Humanities will be financed. On an exceptional basis, proposals that have been evaluated positively but are not within the 20% top-ranked proposals may be financed as well, if agreed so by all partner organizations.

Reporting dynamics

The funding beneficiary shall be obliged to submit a financial report at the end of each project period as well as a report on dissemination activities. A narrative report on the achieved results shall be delivered at the end of the first and final project period.

Outside the regular reporting periods, the beneficiary may be asked by HRZZ to deliver an exceptional report supported by additional documentation.

Indicators for monitoring project impact

In order to assess the results and impact of the "Research Projects" programme, the applicants shall allow access to information related to the project proposal. HRZZ shall ensure that the information is kept confidential and available only to persons that participate in the process of evaluating results and impact of the Programme. HRZZ will conduct post-implementation surveys to collect information for the purpose of evaluating results and impact of the Programme and monitoring indicators (e.g. publishing research results and impacts in open access, number of researchers included in project implementation, number of early-career researchers included in project implementation, newly acquired research equipment, project proposals submitted for new funding from EU or other international sources, networking, collaboration).

Application deadline

Deadline for submitting project proposals is **24 February 2025 until 13.00 (CST).**

Contact and additional questions

All questions regarding this Call should be sent via e-mail to the following address: programi@hrzz.hr. Answers to questions received will be posted twice a week to HRZZ's website in the Q&A section. Before submitting a question to the email address above, Applicants should review the responses that have already been posted. Enquiries that have already been answered on the Foundation's website shall be considered answered.