

HFSP Research Grants Guidelines for applicants Award year 2020

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Extract from the HFSP Statutes

"HFSPO aims to promote and fund basic research focused on the elucidation of the sophisticated and complex mechanisms of living organisms for the benefit of all humankind, through international cooperation."

"HFSPO attaches the highest importance to scientific merit, internationality (especially intercontinentality) and interdisciplinarity in implementing the Program."

1. Research Grants

1.1. Distinguishing Features of the HFSP Research Grant Program

The Human Frontier Science Program (HFSP) is a unique program that supports **innovative** basic research into **fundamental** biological problems with emphasis placed on **novel** and interdisciplinary approaches that involve scientific exchanges across national and disciplinary boundaries.

Awards are made to international (preferably intercontinental) teams of 2 to 4 members. HFSP encourages projects that are at the frontiers of knowledge and therefore entail risk (see [2.2.e](#) below). The participation of scientists from disciplines outside the traditional life sciences such as biophysics, chemistry, computational biology, computer science, engineering, mathematics, nanoscience or physics has made biological research increasingly quantitative and will continue to do so. Such collaborations have opened up new approaches for understanding the complex structures and regulatory networks that characterize living organisms, their evolution and interactions.

To stimulate novel, daring ideas and innovative approaches, preliminary results are not required in research grant applications. The HFSP places special emphasis on encouraging scientists early in their careers – this is expressed both in the establishment of a special Young Investigators' Grant and in encouraging scientists early in their careers to participate in the Program Grants. Applicants are expected to develop **new** lines of research through the collaboration. The Program aims to complement, not duplicate, the frontier life science programs of the countries that provide HFSP financial support.

1.2. Guidelines for applicants

These guidelines provide the essential information necessary to submit a **research grant** application for the **award year 2020**. You should pay particular attention to the types of innovative projects that fall within the funding scope of the HFSP, and to the aims of the Young Investigators' and Program Grants (for details see below). See also ['Writing a letter of intent'](#) for tips.

You must first submit a **"letter of intent"** to apply for a grant. **To submit, you must connect to our HFSP extranet site** (see [item 8](#)) **and obtain a reference number LIXXXXXX/2020 by March 18th 2019**. The deadline for receipt of this letter, also submitted via the extranet site, is **March 28th 2019** for awards to be announced in March 2020. You will be notified early July 2019 whether you are invited to submit a full application, with a deadline mid-September 2019. More details are provided in [item 8](#), "How to Apply".

Projects will be pre-screened upon reception by a small *ad hoc* scientific committee for their innovative nature, the novelty of the combination of expertise proposed in the field and their international, preferably intercontinental, nature. Any project that does not meet these requirements or those of section [2.2](#) will not be sent for review and the Principal Applicant will be informed as soon as possible after the submission date.

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. Furthermore 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).

Eligibility requirements for applicants: The Principal Applicant of a Research Grant must have a laboratory in a member country (with the exception of HFSP Career Development Awardees – see section [4.2.](#)). **All team members are expected to direct a research group (however small) and must have a doctoral degree (PhD, MD or equivalent). The HFSP award is not intended to create scientific independence, this is a decision of the research institute prior to the application.** Team members must be able to determine the course of the HFSP-funded project and have freedom to administer the grant award.

Two kinds of research grants are available, the **Young Investigators' Grants** and **Program Grants**. The following guidelines apply to both unless stated otherwise.

Contact for correspondence: grant@hfsp.org

2. Scientific scope

2.1. General areas of support

Research grants are available for projects concerned with basic approaches to understanding the complex mechanisms of living organisms. The HFSP funds novel collaborations that bring scientists with distinct expertise together to focus on problems at the **frontiers** of the life sciences. The innovative aspect of the project is a major criterion in the review of HFSP research grants. **A brief explanation of the contributions of the different expertise should be provided in the summary which will be used in guiding the review process.**

2.2. Specific requirements

- a. Novel combinations of expertise are a major feature of HFSP-sponsored projects and those involving truly novel interdisciplinary collaborations will be given clear preference. Special conditions apply for Young Investigators (see [3.1.](#) below).
- b. Applicants are expected to develop new lines of research through the collaboration. Projects must be distinct from applicants' other research funded by other sources.
- c. 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.
- d. The HFSP funds basic research. We aim to support teams of scientists at the forefront of research in their respective areas, whose collaborative projects open up new frontiers in fundamental biology. HFSP does not fund the following:
 1. Projects 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 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 the HFSP to fund fundamental research.
 3. Observational projects or systematic screening approaches.
 4. Large-scale data collection as such, unless there is a convincing rationale for the collection and detailed methodology for the data analysis; this includes the systematic multi-species-omic 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).
- e. Applicants should appreciate what HFSP means by ‘risk’. It is not simply that « It's risky because it may or may not work ». A hand waving « but we hope it will », followed by a few vaguely described experiments, will not convince the reviewers. What is expected is that according to the team's calculations there is a reasonable chance that it will work (this is developed further in the [FAQ](#) sheet).

See also the [FAQ](#) sheet on the HFSP site for common reasons for rejection.

3. Types of award: Young investigators’ and Program Grants

3.1. Young Investigators’ Grants

Specific features of the Young Investigators’ Program.

General aims: It is to be expected that outstanding young scientists, in the initial period of their independent careers, are in a particularly good position to formulate innovative and fertile research projects. Typically, “Young Investigators” will have completed one or two periods of postdoctoral training and be appointed to staff independent positions that allow them to initiate and direct their own independent lines of research.

Recognising the challenge of establishing an independent research group at an early stage of a career, a special consideration will take into account the overall level of interdisciplinarity in Young Investigator applications. Newly appointed 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). Projects from more established investigators will preferably involve collaborations with scientists from outside the life sciences, as in the Program Grants. The Review Committee will be instructed to assess this when reviewing applications.

Formal eligibility requirements: **all** members of a Young Investigators’ grant team must be within 5 years of obtaining an independent position (see below) but must have obtained their **first doctoral degree (PhD, MD or equivalent)** not 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. Within the framework of the objectives of the HFSP and these formal requirements, the deciding factor in making awards will be whether the basic aim of the Young Investigators’ program is fulfilled.

- a. A Young Investigator should be a project leader directing a research group. They must have full responsibility for the day to day running of their laboratories and will have full control of the HFSP funds. A scientist who has an established research theme with personnel (students and technicians)

assigned to this theme may be considered independent. In such cases, written confirmation may be requested from the Head of Department that the applicant is able to carry out the research independently.

- b. "Postdocs" are not eligible to apply.

3.2. Program Grants

General aims: Program Grants are meant to allow teams of independent researchers to develop **new** lines of research through the collaboration. Priority will be given to new, innovative research projects. Preliminary results are not required. Applications including independent investigators early in their careers are encouraged.

Eligibility: all members of a Program Grant team must be in a position to initiate and direct their own independent lines of research. They must have full scientific and financial responsibility for their own laboratories (however small). "Postdocs" are not eligible to apply.

3.3. Features common to both Young Investigators' Grants and Program Grants

Amount of award: Teams will receive up to \$450,000 per year for the whole team depending on the size of the team (see [5.2.](#) below).

Interdisciplinarity: Two applicants may establish a national interdisciplinary collaboration involving scientists with widely differing expertise, but this must be integrated into an international team (with emphasis on intercontinental collaborations – please see the [FAQ](#) sheet). Two applicants from the same institution are strongly discouraged because of HFSP's aim to promote new collaborations across the world. In the case of two team members from the same country representing different disciplines, they will be considered as 1.5 team members for calculating the amount of the award. Two team members from the same country having closely related expertise will be considered as a single team member for calculating the amount of the award. Such calculations are made only after the scientific review is completed and an award recommended. All team members, even those located in the same country, must be designated as co-applicants on the online form.

Applicants are strongly advised to be clear about the content of any proposed modeling contribution. Reviewers are expecting details of the mathematical methods and an appreciation of the limits of the proposed approach.

Review Procedure: Applications for Young Investigators' Grants and Program Grants will be reviewed in parallel but considered independently for funding. The final numbers of awards of Young Investigators' and Program Grants will be decided considering the proportion of applications received, the relative quality of applications in the two groups and the funds available.

4. Research Teams

In addition to the above special requirements for the Young Investigators' and Program Grants, the following conditions must be met by all grant applications:

4.1. Structure of research team

Scientists applying for a research grant must organize an "international research team" or "team".

The team is to be made up of "members", whereby one member of the team is designated as the "Principal Applicant" and the others as "Co-Applicants". For the rules on the country of team member affiliation, please see [4.5](#).

Only international research teams (with emphasis on intercontinental collaborations), not individual researchers, are eligible. HFSP promotes new interdisciplinary collaborations across the world. Therefore team members are expected to have their labs in different countries; they should not have collaborated before and must propose a project significantly different from their ongoing research.

Although HFSP supports new collaborations, a few co-publications may be considered acceptable **by the review committee**, depending on their nature. A multi-author review summarizing the field will not be considered equivalent to a recent joint research publication on the principal topic of the application. Similarly, a joint publication in a different field resulting from an earlier collaboration may not be considered an issue. You will need to enter the number of co-publications between team members in the application form to guide the review committee in their assessment. More than 3 co-publications will be scrutinised initially. Any omissions revealed in the course of the review process will lead to the rejection of the application.

4.2. Principal Applicant

The international team must designate one of its members as the Principal Applicant. The Principal Applicant must be located in an HFSP member country (see [4.5](#)). However, current or former CDA awardees can also 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. He/she will also act as the liaison with HFSP and be required to submit annual budgets as well as progress reports. If, on the basis of those progress reports, the Principal Applicant considers that a team member is not contributing as planned to the project, then, in liaison with HFSP, he/she may propose a reduction in that member's budget, or, exceptionally, ask them to leave the project. If a team member changes institute, the Principal Applicant will be asked to confirm that this move will not be deleterious to the project.

4.3. Affiliation

The Principal Applicant must be from a non-profit academic institution. The team may include members from for-profit organizations if their expertise is necessary for the project. However, team members from for-profit organizations may not receive any funds and will not be considered in calculating the amount of award. In the case of a two-member team with one member in a for-profit institution, the total award will be reduced to \$125,000 per year (see also item [5.2](#)).

4.4. Number of team members

The number of team members should normally be 2 – 4 and no more than 4 unless a fifth member is clearly critical for the interdisciplinary nature of the project. However please note that teams of 5 members are rarely successful. Similarly, team "members" regrouping several independent investigators as a single component ("hidden partners" or "node"), thus forming a de facto consortium, are not eligible.

4.5. Country of Affiliation

The Principal Applicant representing the international team must be located in one of the member countries. Co-Applicants can be located in any country.

The member countries are currently Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus (EU part only), the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Italy,

Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Ireland, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

For scientists in institutions that are classified as extraterritorial such as the EMBL (Grenoble/France, Heidelberg/Germany, Hinxton, UK or Monterotondo/Italy), ICPT or ICGEB (both in Trieste/Italy) the host country will be considered as its location. In the case of overseas campuses such as Max Planck Institutes (Jupiter/Florida or Nijmegen/The Netherlands), Nottingham University Malaysia or Monash University Malaysia collaborations between different campuses of the same institution will not be eligible for HFSP support.

4.6. Internationality

- a. Clear priority will be given to intercontinental collaborations.
- b. A research project carried out within only one country is not eligible.
- c. At least one member of the international research team must have his/her laboratory in a country other than that of the Principal Applicant. Applications with most team members having their laboratories in a single country, e.g. 2/3, 3/4 or 3/5 members in the same country, will not be judged favourably. In addition, teams with 2 members from the same institution are strongly discouraged (see 3.3 Interdisciplinarity).
- d. Teams should normally have only one member with a laboratory in any one country unless an increase in the number of members from one country is clearly critical for the interdisciplinary nature of the project (see “Interdisciplinarity” in 3.3 and 5.2. for the financial consequences of including more than one team member from any one country). **When applicants have a double affiliation, both will be considered active** and will be taken into account when calculating the budget for successful teams.

4.7. Concurrent applications

- a. **No individual may be an applicant on more than one letter of intent** in this review round. Please make sure that ALL applicants (either Young Investigators’ Grants or Program Grants, as Principal Applicant or Co-Applicant) are aware of this rule. If anyone applies on two or more letters of intent (including a Young Investigators’ Renewal – see below), these will all be removed from the competition.
- b. Scientists cannot hold an HFSP Research Grant and an HFSP Fellowship at the same time.
- c. Holders of HFSP Career Development Awards may apply for HFSP Research Grants (see also 4.2. above).

4.8. Renewals for Young Investigator teams

Applications for renewals of a HFSP grant will not be considered, except for those of Young Investigator teams in their third year (or the period of a no-cost extension) of a current award (currently awardees from 2015 and 2016). The Principal Applicants of the eligible teams will be contacted directly with the conditions and application instructions. This will be highly competitive and these applications will be considered in competition, with the new full applications at the January meeting of the Review Committee. Such renewals are exceptional.

4.9. New applications from previous awardees

- a. Scientists cannot hold more than one award at any one time. Those who are currently receiving support from an HFSP research grant (as Principal Applicants or Co-Applicants) are not eligible to apply for a second research grant. However awardees from 2016 may apply for a new grant on condition that it does not start until after termination of the current award (which includes the approval of their final financial report), and that the project and team members are distinct from the current grant. Awardees from 2017 and 2018 are not eligible.

- b. Each applicant (Principal Applicant or Co-Applicant) who has been awarded an HFSP research grant (as Principal Applicant or Co-Applicant), since award year 2014, must provide information about the objectives and outcome of the former project, together with a statement of its relationship to the current application. Applications bearing a strong similarity to previous awards, either in team composition or topic of research, will be seen as renewals, and thus not considered eligible.

5. Budget

5.1. Use of funds

The research institutions in which the proposed research is to be carried out 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. However, if additional scientific equipment is essential in order to perform the joint collaborative research, this can be purchased using the grant funds. Additional scientific personnel must also be part of the new collaborative element.

5.2. Amount of award

- a. The current mode of funding is as follows, but may be subject to revision before full applications are invited, to take into account HFSP's budget: \$250,000 for a team of 2; \$350,000 for a team of 3; \$450,000 for a team of 4 or more. These figures represent the amount awarded to the whole team per year for a period of 3 years.
- b. Two members from the same country will be considered as a single team member for purposes of calculating the award, unless they constitute an interdisciplinary collaboration in which case they will be awarded an amount equivalent to 1.5 team members (currently \$300,000 for a team of '2.5' and \$400,000 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 \$125,000. In other cases the for-profit member will not be included when calculating the amount of the award.

Important: 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 for each annual payment). HFSP reserves the right to transfer funds in local currency.

5.3. Tenure of Grant

Each grant is awarded for a period of three years.

5.4. Method of payment

In the event of an award being made, the distribution of funds will be decided by the team members. The funds will be transferred by the HFSP to each team member's institute separately.

5.5. Financial reporting

Institutions are expected to maintain complete lists of all expenditures from the HFSP award. A financial report based on these lists will be required for the full three years of the award. This will be 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 HFSP Board of Trustees or auditors.

5.6. Permissible expenses

Note that a budget proposal is **not** required at any stage of the application process. The following information is provided to allow applicants to see the scope of funding 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. HFSP grants are not awarded to institutions but to individuals in an international collaborative research team; as a consequence, equipment purchased through the support of an HFSP research grant should follow the grantee in case he/she moves to another institution.

5.6.2. Materials and supplies

Costs of reagents, animals, disposables. Computer software necessary for the scientific collaboration is permissible, general office software may be included in [5.6.7.](#) (within the 10% maximum limit).

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

The participation of additional personnel must be essential for the new collaborative research. Salary support or other direct remuneration cannot be allocated for the Principal Applicant or Co-Applicants or other faculty (including “summer salaries”). Salaries are allowable for research assistants (post-doctoral scientists, graduate students, technicians) but not for institutional staff such as secretaries, nor laboratory managers. The salaries shall be in accordance with the salary scales of the institutions concerned. These awards are intended to support research by trained personnel. They are not training programs. In consequence, while student stipends or salaries are allowed, **student tuition fees are not a permissible expense.**

5.6.5. Communication expenses

- a. Publication (costs of publication of research results including open access fees - see link <http://www.hfsp.org/funding/open-access-policy>): article translations, mail etc...
- b. Express courier services.

5.6.6. Travel and per diem

- a. For individual team members and their laboratory personnel visiting other team members (domestic and foreign travel, per diem allowances for up to three months each year). This may also include joint meetings of team members and their laboratory personnel. Scientific advisors, exterior to the project, may also be invited to such meetings.
- b. Scientific meetings, or external training courses, related to the HFSP project (may include registration fees for scientific conferences).
- c. All team members are expected to attend a meeting of awardees organised by the HFSP in the final year of the award. Awardees are expected to cover travel and accommodation expenses for this out of the grant award.

5.6.7. Indirect costs (overheads)

No more than 10% of the direct costs of the award, at each research institution, may be used for indirect costs. These must be taken from the funds awarded; no further funds will be provided by HFSP for indirect costs (overheads).

5.7. Impermissible expenses

5.7.1. Investigators' salaries

The Principal Investigator or Co-Investigators may not receive personal remuneration from an HFSP grant either in the form of a salary (even in part) or consultation fees.

5.7.2. Tuition Fees

While student stipends or salaries are allowed, student tuition fees are not considered a permissible expense.

6. Ethical considerations

Awardees must observe the highest ethical standards in conducting all research supported by the Program. The Awardee agrees 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 laboratories/institutions. Institutions must inform HFSP if national or institutional codes of practice, regulations, or laws have been infringed and about any investigations or actions that have been initiated against an awardee. The awardee also agrees 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 in the collaborating laboratories/institutions. Examples of national guidelines can be found via links on <http://www.hfsp.org/funding/scientific-misconduct-policy/good-scientific-practice>). HFSP's policy on scientific misconduct (<http://www.hfsp.org/funding/scientific-misconduct-policy>) is available on the HFSP website.

7. Intellectual property rights and publications

HFSP will not claim any intellectual or commercial property rights that may be generated through the research it sponsors. HFSP 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, the awardee agrees 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 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:

Deadlines:

- i. **Compulsory initiation of a letter of Intent by obtaining a LIXXXX/2020 reference number by March 18th 2019**
- ii. **Submission of Letters of Intent: March 28th 2019**

Please read the guidelines and the document [‘Writing a letter of intent’](#) carefully to establish whether your project is clearly in tune with the requirements and emphasis of the research grant program. You must first submit a letter of intent to apply for a grant, which must be done online as described below. 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 his/her primary laboratory in a member country. See Item [4.3.](#) of the guidelines (“Research Teams”) 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 [4.7.](#) in the guidelines). Failure to ensure this will result in all those applications being withdrawn from the competition.
3. The Principal Applicant must obtain a 2020 reference application number on the HFSP extranet site (at the address <https://extranet.hfsp.org/> this site will be accessible from mid-January 2019). The Principal Applicant will first have to set up a password (if not already in the HFSP database) that will give access to the online application form and further instructions concerning online submission (including the addition of the other team members). It is essential to obtain a 2020 reference number as soon as the team has seriously decided to submit a letter of intent. Team members can be modified up to the final submission date. An application number must be obtained by March 18th at the latest. Principal applicants already listed in the HFSP database (e.g. those re-applying from last year) **must** also obtain a 2020 reference number by March 18th.
4. **In all cases, the co-applicants must approve their participation via a link generated by the Principal Applicant before the application can be completed and submitted.**
5. The letter of intent must be submitted by March 28th 2019. No changes can be made to the letter of intent after final submission.
6. The Principal Applicant will be notified by the beginning of July if the team is invited to submit a full application. The deadline for the full application will be mid-September 2019.

9. Technical tips

Tips for each section are given on the website itself. If new problems are reported to us, tips will be added to the relevant pages to help in the submission procedure.