

**Excellence Initiative by the German Federal and State
Governments to Promote Science and Research
at German Universities**

Second Programme Phase

Guidelines for Clusters of Excellence

I. Programme Objectives

Clusters of excellence enable German universities to establish internationally visible, competitive research and training facilities, thereby enhancing scientific networking and cooperation among the participating institutions. Clusters of excellence should form an important part of a university's strategic and thematic planning, significantly raise its profile, and reflect its considered long-term priorities. They should also create excellent training and career conditions for young researchers. In conjunction with the other two lines of funding, i.e. graduate schools and institutional strategies to promote top-level research, clusters of excellence help to increase Germany's attraction as a research location in the long term and improve its international competitiveness.

II. Funding and Proposals

1. Funding period

The continuation of the Excellence Initiative is currently planned for a five-year funding period for initial and renewal proposals (1 November 2012 through 31 October 2017).

2. Funding volume

An initial or renewal proposal for a cluster of excellence may apply for funding ranging from approximately 3 million to 8 million € per year, as needed. In addition to this project funding, a cluster of excellence will receive a supplemental allowance amounting to 20 percent of the funding sum to cover indirect costs related to the project.

The number of newly established and continued clusters of excellence will be based on the financial framework for federal and state funding in the second funding phase. A total of approximately 292 million € per year has been appropriated for this funding line.

3. Eligibility

Proposals must be submitted by universities, with the rector/president applying on behalf of the institution.

Several universities may submit a joint proposal for one cluster of excellence and assume the role of the speaker university if it is clear that each participating university can be expected both to generate synergies and structural added value, and to enter into a strategic cooperation that

will endure over the long term. The role of the speaker university is subject to approval by the Joint Commission.

Technically, the number of clusters of excellence that may be proposed per university is unlimited. However, the Excellence Initiative aims to encourage universities to set and strengthen, on the basis of existing structures, priorities which will clearly shape the profile of the institution beyond the funding period. Therefore the university should make a statement on the sustainability for all proposals submitted within the Excellence Initiative.

4. Participants and collaboration

Clusters of excellence are encouraged to include suitable non-university institutions in order to focus existing resources. In addition to involving non-university research institutions, clusters of excellence may also cooperate with commercial partners, museums, libraries, schools, government agencies, etc. Furthermore, universities and institutions in other countries may also participate in a cluster of excellence.

For guidelines on the financial participation of partner institutions, consult the publication *Verwendungsrichtlinien Exzellenzinitiative* (www.dfg.de/exin/exc/formulare/ >> DFG/WR form ExIn10 in German). In case of a cooperation agreement with a commercial partner, contractual provisions should follow the DFG model agreement (www.dfg.de/formulare/ >> DFG form 41.026e).

5. Type of funding

Proposals for clusters of excellence may request project funding for staff, direct project costs, and instrumentation. Staff funding is for employees who are directly associated with the project. It may also include funds for additional professors, junior research group leaders, and other staff-related expenditures (e.g. recruiting). Direct project costs cover items such as small instruments, consumables, travel, as well as funds for scientific events and the professional development. For guidelines, see the publication *Verwendungsrichtlinien Exzellenzinitiative* (www.dfg.de/exin/exc/formulare/ >> DFG/WR form ExIn10 in German).

It is important for each cluster of excellence to establish a transparent system of allocation of funds. Initial and renewal proposals should address this issue.

Professorships may be proposed as W1-scale assistant professorships, for early reappointments as W2/W3-scale professorships, or for additional professors as W2/W3-scale professorships. For professorships initially underwritten by project funds, post-programme plans must be documented.

III. Project Requirements

1. Draft, initial and renewal proposals must describe the university's research priorities, also in terms of its general strategy and including previously funded institutions of excellence and other proposals or draft proposals.

2. Universities submitting a renewal proposal for a cluster of excellence must demonstrate the extent to which they have been successful during the first programme phase in meeting goals and making scientific progress. They must also explain how they intend to further develop the cluster of excellence. Continued funding for existing institutions must be justified with significant added value beyond the objectives of the first funding period. The renewal proposal must document to what extent the plans set forth in the initial proposal have been implemented.

3. Clusters of excellence are expected to include features to promote young researchers (structured doctoral training, early independence).

4. The design of the cluster of excellence must promote gender equality in research and academia.

5. Additional clusters of excellence may also be proposed in areas of research in which clusters of excellence or DFG Research Centres or graduate schools have already been established.

6. The cluster of excellence should be presented as a framework for collaboration between participating working groups on a well-chosen topic. The research programme should be competitive at the international level and be characterised by originality and risk-taking. Furthermore, the proposal must describe the cluster's long-term goal and its developmental outlook. It must be ensured that the structural impact of a cluster of excellence is more significant than that of a Collaborative Research Centre.

7. It is recommended that initial proposals include a draft of the statutes. The model statutes for clusters of excellence may serve as a guideline (www.dfg.de/exin/exc/formulare/ >> DFG/WR form ExIn20, in German). Renewal proposals must include the current statutes.

8. Funding will be approved or declined on the basis of the proposal and only according to scientific criteria. For the individual review criteria see "Review criteria for Clusters of Excellence" (www.dfg.de/exin/exc/formulare/ >> DFG/WR form ExIn303e).

IV. Proposal and Decision Process

1. The DFG has set up a Joint Commission together with the German Council of Science and Humanities. It consists of an expert commission (whose members are appointed by the DFG Senate) and a strategic commission (whose members are appointed by the Scientific Commission of the German Council of Science and Humanities). The Joint Commission specifies the terms of funding for the programme and issues funding recommendations for all three lines of funding under the Excellence Initiative. Funding decisions will be made by a Grants Committee consisting of the members of the Joint Commission and the ministers responsible for research and science in the federal and state governments.

2. The call for proposals to establish clusters of excellence follows a two-stage process (draft proposals and proposals). Draft proposals are evaluated by international review panels. The Joint Commission will hold a selection meeting to decide which initiatives may submit proposals.

For renewal proposals, the process has only one stage (proposals only).

Renewal and initial proposals are evaluated together by international review panels. Funding for initial and renewal proposals will be recommended by the Joint Commission and decided by the Excellence Initiative Grants Committee in June 2012. For details of the review and decision process, see the call for proposals for the second programme phase (www.dfg.de/exzellenzinitiative/ in German).

3. Clusters of excellence whose first funding period ends 31 October 2011 will receive transitional funding for one year up to the amount granted for the previous 12 months of funding. Transitional funding will not be offset against a new funding period or completion funding. Applications for transitional funding may be submitted informally by 15 September 2010.

4. Clusters of excellence not approved to continue in mid-June 2012 will receive degressive completion funding for up to two years. Transitional funding will not be offset against completion funding. Expiration funding will be awarded by the Excellence Initiative Grants Committee based on recommendations by the Joint Commission.

5. Refer only to the following templates updated for the second programme phase for (www.dfg.de/exin/exc/formulare/):

- Declarations of intent >> DFG/WR form ExIn101 in German
- Notes on preparing draft proposals for clusters of excellences >> DFG/WR form ExIn302e
- Initial proposals (available in late 2010)
- Renewal proposals (available in late 2010)

6. All draft, initial and renewal proposals must be written in English. In justified cases and upon special arrangement with the DFG Head Office, the proposal may additionally be submitted in German.

7. All draft, initial and renewal proposals must be submitted to the DFG by way of the respective state agencies in charge of science and research. The states' co-financing pledges should be submitted along with the initial or renewal proposals.

For more information visit

www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/programmes/excellence_initiative/index.html
www.wissenschaftsrat.de/arbeitsbereiche-arbeitsprogramm/exzellenzinitiative/aktuelles/
www.gwk-bonn.de/index.php?id=194