Opening new horizons

Information session

SBO call 2020
Preface

- What you should learn from this presentation
  - Understand the characteristics of the SBO programme
  - Grasp the scoring and evaluation procedure
  - How to prepare an application that meets the evaluation criteria

- This presentation
  - serves as applicant’s “quick starting guide” (key topics only)
  - more details: SBO webpage

- DISCLAIMER
  - Official & binding documents: regulations (in Dutch) on FWO website
    - English regulations have no legal status
Outline

1. FWO: Mission and key facts
2. Characteristics of the SBO-programme
3. Submission of an SBO project proposal
4. Evaluation process and framework
5. Practical recommendations
6. Further reading & contact
1. FWO: Mission and key facts
Research foundation Flanders: mission

• Funder of
  • Curiosity-driven scientific research
  • Strategic research

• Funding programmes
  • Individual researchers (pre-, post-doc, mobility Pegasus)
  • Research teams (projects, SBO, Odysseus,...)
  • Research infrastructure
  • Flemish Supercomputer Centre (VSC)
  • Scientific prizes

• Bottom-up in all disciplines
• Interuniversity (incl. Research Centres) competition
• Transparency and equal opportunities

May 2020
Information session FWO
2. Characteristics of the SBO-programme
SBO = Innovative scientific research that has a clear relationship with practice, starts from the needs of the field and is aimed at a sustainable implementation of the results.
SBO: Strategic basic research

- Open to all scientific disciplines and fields of application (bottom up)
- High-quality basic research with focus on challenging, high-risk, inventive and original research
- Research is not a goal in itself but an essential mean to allow for important new knowledge utilisation

- Clear vision about the potential for translation into concrete applications
- Clear plan on how to bring innovation to the field
- Engagement by economic and/or societal actors in Flanders to ensure effective transfer to and exploitation by these actors
- Two finality parts: economic (E) or societal (M), defined by the main type of actors who embrace the applications
SBO: Strategic basic research

• SBO research: still far away from the market: successful SBO project should initially result in follow-up (R&D and/or translational) activities.

• Applicants remain owners of the project results: Transfer of valuable results to be carried out at prevailing market conditions and open to all companies in the European Union, including those that are not a member of the advisory committee.
SBO: **Strategic** basic research

**Routes for valorisation/utilisation:**

- **Economic utilisation strategies:** economic value (i.e. employment + investments)
  - Transfer results to existing companies → follow-up R&D activities
    - Requirement for an Industrial advisory committee
  - Transfer to a to be founded spin-off company → follow-up R&D activities & development of business strategy
    - Optional Industrial advisory committee

- **Societal utilisation strategies:** societal value creation
  - Transfer results to existing organisations → follow-up R&D & implementation activities
    - Requirement for a societal advisory committee
Two challenges for the SBO applicants

1) **Science**: Demonstrate innovation, scientific added value, feasibility, appropriate research approach, adequate project management, expertise, ....
Two challenges for the SBO applicants

2) **Utilisation:** Demonstrate utilisation potential and utilisation approach.

- Clear **vision** on the **potential** for utilisation
- Clear **plan** on how to bring innovation to the **field**

- Involvement of the utilisation partners: Requirement of reciprocal **cooperation** across institutional boundaries
  - Requires an investment in **meaningful interactions** and network building during the preparation phase of the SBO project with users in the field.

Substantiated early & meaningful interactions and cooperation between researchers and the ‘users’ of the intended applications
Two challenges for the SBO applicants

• **Involvement** of the *societal/economic* community in the SBO project cycle to facilitate a *smooth transition* between the end of the SBO-project and the further development and implementation pathway within the user organisations.
  • Advisory committee

• **Active effort** to enable the effective transfer to and *commitment* for utilisation of research results by these actors.
  • Engagement for follow-up R&D activities and implementation efforts by members of Advisory committee
  • SBO-E: Mandatory contribution by all companies of the advisory committee (Monetary/substantiated in kind contribution – not for spin-off earmarked projects)
  • Substantiated in Letters of Intent
Advisory committee (FAQ)

- Compulsory for SBO-E (transfer to existing companies) and SBO-M (optional in case of a *spin-off* earmarked project)

- **Open** to all interested companies or societal actors, including those outside the Flemish region

- Covers entire *utilisation chain*: elaborate on the role of each individual user

- Elaborate on **active involvement** and **commitment** of user organisations (pre-, intra-, post-project)

- **Dynamics** of the advisory committee & **members’ expectations**: elaborated vision on intellectual property rights/transfer of project results, especially for members that are active in overlapping areas of applications and/or field were exclusivity is common
Advisory committee

• Spin-offs: importance of early interactions with interface and transfer services, potential customers and capital providers

• Mention parallel R&D collaborations, follow-up R&D activities and implementation efforts → beneficial for feasibility/likelihood of the utilisation approach after the SBO-project

• SBO-M: Application oriented activities from the third project year onwards to bridge the gap between SBO-results and societal implementation (potential advantage in selection process!). Activities to be performed by the societal actors – no FWO funding

Substantiated in letters of intent
Advisory committee SBO-E

- **Monetary contribution mandatory** for all commercial members of the advisory committee

  - **Amount:**
    - SME: €250/year
    - Large enterprise and other organisation: €1,000/year
    - Higher contribution is not obligatory but may be positively assessed in the evaluation of the proposal

- ‘**In kind**’ contribution can be accepted provided the added value for the project and its intrinsic value is well **substantiated**

- **Scientific institutions, governments or societal actors:** No hard requirement for financial contributions

- Contribution needs to be confirmed in the ‘letters of intent’ of companies
Eligible applicants

Eligible partner organisations: all Flemish Research institutions*:

• Universities
• University colleges (‘Hogescholen’)
• University Hospitals
• Strategic research centres
• Other research centres with Flemish office
• IMEC, VITO, VIB, Flanders’ Make, Flanders Marine Institute, and scientific institutions with a government grant and an establishment in the Flemish Region
  • obliged to submit the proposal together with at least one other Flemish research institution

• Optional involvement of non-Flemish Research institutions: maximum 20% of the project budget
  • useful knowledge transfer towards Flanders (“missing links” in essential expertise) & clear added value for the SBO-project (including utilisation objectives)

• If there might be any doubts about a participating organisation meeting the definition, compliance with this definition should be argued! Please contact the FWO administration for further assistance via SBO@fwo.be beforehand.

* Definition of a ‘research and knowledge-dissemination organisation’ as stated in Article 2, section 83 of the Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of the commission of June 17, 2014— Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation (2014/C 198/01)
SBO programme budget & duration

- **Programme Budget**: circa **37.5 M€** (of which 2.5M€ is earmarked for ERA-net)

- **Pre-established allocation key**
  - 2/3 for projects with a economic finality
  - 1/3 for projects with a societal finality

- **Project duration**
  - Max. 4 years of workload
  - Project-related costs made for 2 additional years following the end of the official project period are acceptable at the final financial verification
SBO project budget

- **Support:** 100% of acceptable costs

- **Acceptable costs:**
  - Overhead costs should **no longer be included** in the project budget that is submitted to FWO.
  - **Max. requested budget** is **€ 425,000 (excluding overhead)** per project year per participating legal entity with a share of at least 15% of the total project budget.
  - Eligible costs: Research and ‘utilisation preparing’ staffing*, consumables, equipment, subcontracting
  - Non-binding **guideline** on the magnitude of a consortium’s **project budget:** about **€ 1,7M (excl. overhead)**

* Directly integrated into the relevant research teams of the SBO project consortium, excluding individuals employed in interface services or research coordination services and for whom another form of funding is already available.
3. Submission of an SBO project proposal

Practical guidance
Two steps: pre-notification & submission

• Submission via FWO e-portal

• Pre-notification: transfer of application to host institution in FWO e-portal: deadline 18/09 at 5 PM
  • Importance of timely interactions with TTO offices & a smooth start-up of the evaluation procedure
  • Preliminary application should contain at least:
    • project consortium members
    • summary of scientific & utilisation goals
    • experts to be avoided (max. 3)
    • i.e. tabs general, summary, applicants, co-supervisors, referees, expert panel
  • Other parts: if not finalised, uploading is not necessary

• Final submission: 09/10 5 PM by the main applicant’s institution

Mind your institution’s internal deadlines!
The online submission: the tabs

- GENERAL: title, project duration, ...
- SUMMARY:
  - non-confidential summary for communication purposes
  - innovation goal(s) for inclusion in FWO contract (when funded)
- APPLICANTS:
  - = organisations (i.e. not at the level of the research unit!) that are part of the consortium
  - consortium = ‘main applicant’ or ‘main applicant + co-applicant(s)’
The online submission: the tabs

- **CO-SUPERVISORS:**
  - The person who fills in the information in the e-portal = supervisor. He/she is the contact person for the main applicant.
  - Co-supervisors = representatives from the different research units in the consortium. For each co-applicant, one of these co-supervisors must be appointed as contact person for this co-applicant.

- **EXPERT PANEL**
  - Select your expert panel, main (& secondary) topic for your proposal and provide some keywords

- **REFEREES - OPTIONAL:**
  - If you have a good reason why FWO should not contact certain experts for the evaluation of your proposal, you may provide their names + motivation). The list should be limited (max. 3)!
The online submission: the tabs

- ETHICS: you have to indicate whether your study involves ethical aspects that require approval by an ethical committee.
- BUDGET:
  - Rules are explained in the ‘Cost Model’ on the website.
  - Sub-budget for each applicant.
  - Budget has to be prepared in the excel template (available via the e-portal), and should (XLS w/o macros) be uploaded in the e-portal afterwards.
  - Quotes for large subcontractors have to be uploaded in the e-portal as well.
  - Next to the uploading of the Excel-sheet, an overview of the total costs should be entered in the e-portal.
The online submission: the tabs

- **SCIENTIFIC PROJECT DESCRIPTION**
  - Template downloadable in e-portal, to be uploaded as PDF
  - In English
  - Max. 15 pages

- **INTENDED UTILISATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER**
  - Template downloadable available in e-portal, to be uploaded as PDF
  - In English
  - Max. 15 pages

- **EXPERTISE AND TRACK RECORD**
  - Template downloadable available in e-portal, to be uploaded as PDF
  - In English
  - Max. 1,5 page per research unit in the consortium
The online submission: the tabs

- DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN
  - Info available on FWO website (see SBO manual)
  - Contact persons within several organisations

- EXTRA DATA
  - Letters of intent of the advisory committee ONLY
    - will be transferred to external experts
      → in English
    - uploaded when submitting the project
      → no additions can be made afterwards
The online submission: the tabs

- EXTRA DATA
  - Intellectual property

**You have the choice:**

1. To accept the **model cooperation agreement** as agreed upon by the Tech Transfer Offices Flanders ([https://ttoflanders.be](https://ttoflanders.be)), which is made available on the FWO-SBO website
2. Not to agree with the standard template used by universities and most research organisations.
3. To indicate that you have **not yet settled an agreement** on the main principles of the consortium agreement.

- In case of a tailor-made cooperation agreement (**option 2**) or of a currently unsettled collaboration agreement (**option 3**): **provide a short motivation**
- **Full cooperation agreement** is requested **after granting the project proposal**. This cooperation agreement & any changes to it during the execution of the agreement is **subject to approval by the FWO**.

Seek timely advice with your Tech Transfer office!
Declarations by applicants

Declarations per **participating legal entity** on authorisation of inquiries, absence of double financing & declaration of status of research organisation

- For applicants *with* e-portal back office:
  - Checkbox in e-portal (done by research coordination offices after transfer of the application to FWO) e.g. universities, strategic research centres, ITM, ...

- For organisations *without* e-portal back office:
  - **letter(s) of intent** for these organisations **signed by a legal representative of the organisation** (template: on SBO website) should be uploaded in e-portal together with the project application.
4. Evaluation process and framework
Evaluation process and framework

• **Score grids** available on website SBO

• **Peer review** of the scientific quality & utilisation quality by **four international experts**, selected by FWO

• Rebuttal (January 2021)

• Expert recommendations and written feedback from the applicants are followed by a **two-stage internal peer review**
  • A **thematic SBO-expert panel** assigns a consensus score on the scientific and utilisation dimension of a limited set of SBO-proposals. The panel members act as generalists with respect to the set of proposals to be evaluated within the panel.
  • **SBO steering committee** reviews, amends, modifies, and ratifies the evaluation reports and then ranks the proposals

• Decision on support by the FWO **board of directors** (May 2021)
Scientific evaluation criteria

• **S1**: The *strategic character* of the research and its contribution to the development of a broad knowledge base with broad possibilities for further research activities
  Added value to the international state-of-the-art? Basic research, high scientific quality with good level of risks, challenges and inventiveness? Feasibility to achieve scientific goals within the project boundaries (project period, budget, person power)?

• **S2**: The efficiency and the *quality of the research approach*, the *project planning* (including the way in which coordination is ensured for project proposals that are carried out within a consortium),
  Elaboration of work programme (clear objectives, performance levels, milestones and deliverables) and project management, allocation of tasks, mutual interactions, research approach well-elaborated and justified, adjusted to the realisation of the research objectives, no significant shortcomings?

• **S3**: The “*value for money*” and the *feasibility* of the proposed research with the planned personpower and resources
  Balance between the workload and the requested resources. Need for special research equipment and sub-contracting?

• **S4**: The existing *competence, infrastructure* and potential available to the project applicant(s) to conduct the proposed research
  Overall scientific or technical expertise and infrastructure present? Synergy within the consortium?
Utilisation evaluation criteria

• **U1:** The importance and the scope of the anticipated economic/societal utilisation potential in Flanders

  Probability to achieve the intended application, translation potential, application potential (size and spectrum of applications), relevance of the scientific approach for the anticipated utilisation and opportunities for the users, optimal path for achieving implementation, differing from fundamental research and applied/contract research, proposal creates prospects for follow-up R&D(&I) activities by the users, commitment (see: Letters of intent) to participate in follow-up projects, concreteness of the follow-up projects, embedding and impact of utilisation value chain in Flanders.

• **U2:** The quality of the proposed strategy and the approach for the support of the further economic/societal exploitation of the research results (knowledge transfer)

  Substantiated and realistic/feasible utilisation plan dealing with bottlenecks, utility and relevance of the advisory committee, involvement & interaction with the advisory committee, evidence for a preparatory phase with clear impact on the scientific activities and utilisation approach. For SBO-E Spin-off: concrete and viable business concept.

• **U3:** The available competence as regards the management of research results and their transfer to economic/societal stakeholders

  Competence and track record with regard to utilisation.

• **U4:** The added value of the project in the field of sustainable development (where appropriate)

  The sustainable development objectives that are tackled are eligible socio-economic SDG challenges. The application contains an implementation plan and an assessment of the significance of the expected effects. See the "sustainable development manual" for more information.
Sustainable development

- SBO projects with an elaborated focus on **particular sustainable development goals** may be granted an excellent score on the sustainable development criterion U4.1. Others will receive a neutral score.
- The ‘distance to the SDG 2030 targets’ in Belgium (Sachs et al., 2019; https://dashboards.sdgindex.org) is used to delineate research topics that are eligible for an excellent score.
- Each project proposal with an elaborate focus on SDGs must
  - Mention the eligible IAEG-SDGs indicator for which it seeks to offer a solution (fit within SDGs),
  - Present an SDG implementation and utilisation plan with intense collaboration between the academic ecosystem and socio-economic partners such as industry, non-governmental and intermediary organisations and the government.
  - Include a quantitative, or, if not possible, at least a very thorough qualitative assessment of the expected direct effects, the significance and the sustainability of these effect, indicators for monitoring the change, and the added value compared to alternative approaches.

Evaluation process and framework

• *Minimal requirements and ranking mechanism*

Possible scores that can be awarded per (sub)criterion are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Δ-score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient information to assess the criterion</td>
<td>exclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
<td>exclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak/Non-competitive</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation process and framework

- **Minimal requirements and ranking mechanism**

  - Double weight to criteria S1.1 (delta with respect to state-of-the-art) and S1.2 (challenging, high-risk and inventive character of the research)

  - Minimal eligibility requirement: “reasonable” (delta score > -2) for both assessment dimensions (scientific quality or utilisation)

  - Projects which meet the minimal requirements are ranked: equal weight for the scientific quality and utilisation quality scores

  - Selection advantage (for SBO-M only) for projects with application-oriented activities from the third project year onwards to bridge the gap between SBO-results and societal implementation.
    - Activities to be performed by the societal stakeholders – no FWO funding

  - In case of equivalent scores at cut-off: diversity of application areas can be aimed for by steering committees

  - The highest ranked project proposals are supported within the limits of the available budget
The overall appreciation score

- Assigned by panel/steering committee

- **A**
  - Application is eligible for support, but may not be funded because of insufficient budget.
  - No restrictions on resubmission.

- **B**
  - Application does not meet the minimum quality requirements and cannot be supported in its current form.
  - Shortcomings in the current application are relatively easy to remediate.
  - Project may be resubmitted in the next call
  - Applicants must explain how the research and/or utilisation plan has been revised

- **C**
  - Application clearly does not meet the minimum quality requirements for support.
  - Project is excluded from being resubmitted in the next SBO call: a call year must be skipped before a proposal with the same research questions and utilisation strategy can be submitted.
  - The individual researcher(s) with a C-project is (are) not prohibited from submitting a project proposal with another research question during the next call.

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Refrain from submitting proposals that are prematurely elaborated on scientific and/or utilisation level. You may waste an additional year.
5. Practical recommendations
Some recommendations

• Process of creation of an SBO-proposal is different from a “classic” academic research proposal

• Be prepared to invest adequate time and effort in the proposal preparation process
  • Key importance of meaningful two-way dialogue and interaction between researchers and economic or social/societal users from the early project conception onwards and over the entire project life cycle. Discuss project scope + cooperation principles + utilisation intentions.
  • Interact early with university interface or tech transfer services.

• Think beyond the end date of the SBO-project
  • Let users elaborate on follow-up R&D project implementation, interests and opportunities & sustainable implementation
Some recommendations

- Utilisation is **not** just ‘dissemination’
- User involvement is **not** ‘declaring to be interested’
- Ensure good coherence between the scientific part and the utilisation aims of your proposal
- Adopt a project management approach
- Write for your peers but make sure that the application is understandable for panel members outside your very specific area of research as well
6. Further reading & contact
Support of potential applicants

- Potential applicants may request an **exploratory meeting** ("verkennend gesprek") with FWO

E-mail a short abstract, most important questions (max. 1 A4 p.) & preferred date(s) to **sbo@fwo.be**
Important dates

- Transfer preliminary application by promoter to main applicant (institution): **September 18, 2020 5 PM**
  - *Importance of timely interactions with TTO offices & a smooth start-up of the evaluation procedure*
  - *Tabs general, summary, applicants, co-supervisors, referees, expert panel should be completed*
- Main applicant (= organisation) submits final application to FWO: **October 9, 2020 5 PM**
- Receipt referee reports for rebuttal: **January 11, 2021 (7 working days to submit rebuttal)**
- Announcement of results: Board meeting end of **May 2021**
Further reading & contact

• For the preparation of a proposal, consult the appropriate SBO-Manual and Application Templates (FWO e-portal)

• Information and documents are available on:
  - www.fwo.be/nl/mandaten-financiering/onderzoeksprojecten/sbo-projecten/ (NL)

?  ▪ SBO contact: SBO@fwo.be

🛠️ ▪ Helpdesk e-portal (questions regarding the functionality of the e-portal)
  - fwohelpdesk@fwo.be
  - 0800 23326 (during office hours)
More information about the FWO

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