



**Manual Strategic Basic Research (SBO)
Call for project proposals with a primary economic finality**

Version 2022

**Preparation and submission of a project application: see
SBO website
([Research Foundation - Flanders - SBO-projects \(fwo.be\)](https://www.fwo.be/en/research-projects))**

and [e-portal](#)

PROJECT DATA SHEET

Key characteristics of strategic basic research

1. The focus is on inventive and innovative research
2. The strategic importance and scope of long term utilisation prospects in Flanders

Important dates: *See website*

Documents

available on [Research Foundation - Flanders - SBO-projects \(fwo.be\)](https://www.fwo.be/en/research-foundation-flanders-sbo-projects).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. POSITIONING	3	
1.1. Key characteristics of the SBO support channel		3
1.2. Choice between the economic and societal component		3
1.3. Clarification regarding an SBO proposal with a primarily economic finality		4
2. PROGRAMME CHARACTERISTICS	7	
2.1. Project applicants (consortium) and users		7
2.2. Supported activities		8
2.3. Project budget and support		9
2.4. Use of the results - ownership issues		10
2.5. Technology readiness level (TRL)		11
2.6. Data management		12
3. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT PROPOSAL	12	
3.1. Important deadlines and project assessment timeline		12
3.2. Description of the assessment procedure		12
3.3. Choice of the thematic SBO expertpanel		13
3.4. Assessment framework		14
3.5. After the decision		16
3.6. Procedure complaints and appeals		16
3.7. Rights and obligations during project execution		17
4. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	17	
4.1. Exploratory or feedback meeting		17
4.2. Contact		18

1. POSITIONING

1.1. Key characteristics of the SBO support channel

The SBO (strategic basic research) financing channel focuses on innovative research, which, if scientifically successful, opens up prospects for later economic or societal applications.

The name of the programme can be broken down in two parts: '*strategic*' and '*basic research*'. The term '*strategic*' refers to the problem-driven and application-oriented focus of the programme. This implies that in order to fit the SBO programme, a proposal should address a specific economic or societal need or problem.

The term '*basic research*' refers to the requirement of the SBO programme to gain knowledge regarding the topic of interest. An SBO proposal should consist of research that, if successful, results in an important contribution to the international state-of-the-art.

The SBO programme thus distinguishes itself from applied research (or experimental development) because of the need for additional basic research on the topic of interest to come to the intended application. The difference of the research intended in the SBO programme with curiosity-driven fundamental research lies in the fact that knowledge generation as such (i.e. acquiring new knowledge without any concrete practical application or use in view) is not the objective of this funding programme.

The SBO programme breaks down into two finality parts: an economic programme part for projects with a primarily economic finality and a societal programme part for projects with a primarily societal finality. This manual is intended for applicants of projects situated in the economic part of the programme (SBO-E). Another manual for the societal part of the programme is available on the [SBO website](#).

A good SBO-E research project is clearly related to practice, starts from the needs of the relevant economic stakeholders and is aimed at a sustainable implementation of the results. Consequently, the targeted research results should contribute to an increased flow of novel ideas and concepts that, at a later stage, could form the basis for a new generation of products, processes or services in the Flemish industry and/or could solve issues that hamper economic innovation. To reach this goal, applicants should embark in a joint project definition with economic stakeholders, whereby the latter indicate their needs and strategic interests, and knowledge centres then respond to these by formulating a research project. SBO is thus not aimed at pure and one-directional knowledge dissemination, but at the acquisition of new knowledge in a dialogue between one or more research centres that carry out the research and the companies that will subsequently translate the results into concrete applications. From the conceptual phase onwards, the implementers of an SBO project are expected to develop a clear vision on the potential for utilisation and to make efforts to ensure the effective use of the results.

Because it is carried out far away from the market, a successful SBO project will initially result in follow-up R&D and implementation activities, which may (partly) qualify for financial support through e.g. the industrial research programmes of the Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

1.2. Choice between the economic and societal component

The first choice to be made by the project applicants is the choice between the economic or societal component of the SBO programme. The finality of the project proposal is determined by the primary nature of the stakeholders who will be utilising the targeted research results at a later stage:

- If the planned utilisation of the research results will occur primarily through economic stakeholders (such as companies) for the purpose of economic value creation, the SBO project proposal falls within the economic finality component.
- If, by contrast, the impact and utilisation is aimed primarily at societal stakeholders (public departments, societal organisations, social profit sector, etc.) and at societal value creation, the SBO project proposal is considered to belong to the societal component.

The following examples illustrate this distinction:

- An SBO project that will enable companies to develop new medicines through follow-up R&D for the purpose of economic value creation, fits within the economic finality component. The fact that the use of these medicines is societally relevant is not a determining factor for the primary finality of the project.
- A (macro)economic SBO project whose results are used as inputs by governmental actors or societal partners to develop new societal policy visions and strategies fits within the societal finality component. The research discipline in itself is not determining for the primary finality of the project.
- An SBO project that is targeted at sustainable development does not a priori belong to the societal finality component. If the further absorption and utilisation of the research results takes place primarily through companies, then the project falls within the economic finality component.

There may, of course, also be hybrid forms, where the results of a project in the economic finality component may, on an ancillary basis, also be utilized by societal stakeholders. The same applies to a project in the societal finality component whose results may, on an ancillary basis, also be used by companies. It is essential to indicate and substantiate where the focus lies in terms of utilisation, so that you can opt for the most relevant finality. The evaluation by FWO will be carried out within the finality indicated by the applicant at the time of submitting the proposal.

1.3. Clarification regarding an SBO proposal with a primarily economic finality

The utilisation potential resides in the capability of the project to contribute to the resolution of certain needs or strategic interests (driven by the demand side, i.e. companies) or to the creation of new opportunities for economic value creation (driven by the supply side, i.e. research centres). The latter is especially true for SBO projects aiming at the development of a spin-off company.

The two most important key utilisation strategies of an SBO project with an economic finality are:

- the **transfer of the research results to existing companies**. In this case, the applicability of the project to several companies must be demonstrated. If the project exhibits selectivity to a single company or is strongly embedded in the product range of a specific company, it might be more suitable for financial support as an industrial R&D project (by the Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, cf. [Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship | Agentschap Innoveren en Ondernemen \(vlaio.be\)](https://www.vlaio.be)).
- the **creation of a new spin-off company** by the research centre(s) involved. This strategy may be indicated in situations where the project results offer a clear potential for Flanders, but where the existing industrial ecosystem in Flanders is as yet inadequate to absorb the SBO results.

Obviously, combined strategies are also possible. It is then up to the applicant to weigh the anticipated utilisation routes against each other and to identify the most important one.

1.3.1. Advisory committee

If one opts to transfer the results to existing companies, an advisory committee (including potential users) has to be set up during the project implementation (this will be a very important aspect in the project evaluation).

- The advisory committee is open to all interested companies, including companies established outside the Flemish region.
- For a company that wishes to join the advisory committee of an SBO-E project that aims for utilisation via the transfer to existing companies, the following requirements apply during the project implementation:
 - A limited financial contribution: for the duration of the contract with FWO (2 to 4 year project period. all commercial members of the advisory committee are required to make a monetary

contribution of minimum € 250/year in the case of an SME or minimum € 1,000/year in the case of a large enterprise or another organisation. A demonstrable equivalent deployment of personpower and resources for the project implementation may also be taken into consideration, if clearly substantiated and valued. A significantly higher contribution than the minimal required amounts may be positively assessed during the evaluation of the proposal. There is no hard requirement for a financial contribution by scientific institutions, governments, and societal actors within such advisory committee. However, a financial contribution is strongly recommended, considering it a sign of commitment and support by the organisation.

- A commitment to a substantive contribution and a time investment to participate in bilateral consultations with the project executors and/or meetings of the advisory committee.
- The SBO project proposal must explicitly specify the companies that have committed to participate in the committee.
- Companies that wish to participate in the advisory committee of an SBO project must back up their commitments by substantiated letters of intent (addressed to the SBO project supervisor). These letters are an integral part of an SBO project proposal. As these documents will be provided to the external referees, to the respective SBO expert panel and to the SBO-E steering committee, the letters of intent are to be written in English.
- It is essential that the letters of intent are concrete and properly substantiated and not limited to a general non-binding expression of interest. It should be explicitly specified, in as much detail as possible, what the specific added value of the expected project results is for the respective company and what further concrete development and implementation projects are foreseen after the SBO project period. In addition, the letter should include a commitment to the mandatory financial contribution. The letter of intent confirming the membership of the advisory committee should be signed by a legal representative of the company as evidence for the internal support within the company for its involvement in the advisory committee.
- The composition of the advisory committee, including substantiated letters of intent with commitment to financial contribution by the members, should be finalized at the time of submission of the project and submitted together with the SBO application. Letters of intent that arrive after the deadline or arrive at the premises of FWO are not eligible.
- The SBO project executors are the owners of the results. The members of an advisory committee are not automatically entitled to the exploitation of the results. Any subsequent transfer of results should be carried out at prevailing market conditions. The transfer of results of research centres is open to all companies in the European Union, including those that are not a member of the advisory committee (see 2.4). Companies can, however, from the outset of the project, negotiate a right of first negotiation or a right of first refusal with the executing research centres.
- In order not to disturb the dynamics of the advisory committee, non-exclusive access to the results is to be preferred. In a number of sectors, however, this will not be feasible. That is why an exclusive licence or transfer is not excluded a priori, as long as it does not disturb the dynamics of the advisory committee. This is possible, for instance, in a situation where the members of the advisory committee are active in complementary fields of application, where a given company acquires exclusivity in its own niche without claiming exclusivity in other fields of application.
- It is important to make arrangements, already before submitting the project proposal, about the way in which the members' expectations regarding intellectual property rights will be dealt with and to develop a vision on the possible transfer of project results to users. During the project assessment, special attention will be paid to the feasibility of the possible applications, which depends, among other factors, on a good understanding between the companies. That is why it is appropriate to detail this vision already in the project proposal, especially for companies that are active in overlapping areas of application with possible exclusivity.

If the applicants opt for the creation of a spin-off, an advisory committee is optional. In case an advisory committee is installed, a financial contribution by the members is not mandatory.

1.3.2. *Interactions with users before, during and after the SBO project*

It is important to pursue sufficient interaction between the research centres and the potential users of the project results, both during the SBO pre-project phase, the SBO project implementation phase, and the SBO post-project phase (see also manual for participation of users on the [SBO website](#)).

- *SBO pre-project phase*

During the drafting of an SBO project proposal, researchers are urged to contact companies for bilateral consultation or for a preparatory brainstorming together with other companies. Conversely, companies may contact researchers to discuss needs, bottlenecks or opportunities for which strategic research could provide an added value.

During the assessment of SBO project proposals, great emphasis is placed on the active participation of companies from the early phase of drafting a project proposal. Interaction with interested companies in an early phase allows to tailor the project proposal to the actual needs of the companies and thereby maximise the likelihood of future utilisation of the results. The applicants of an SBO project and the members of the advisory committee must provide evidence of such preparative activities as well as substantiate their impact on the project proposal.

- *SBO project execution phase*

During the project execution, a two-way dialogue between the researchers and the user field involved remains essential to achieve the targeted transfer from scientific research to concrete applications. Hereto, companies may participate as members of the advisory committee.

Companies cannot participate as a funded co-applicant in the research consortium.

In the assessment of the project proposals, good R&D interactions between researchers and companies may result in a selection advantage. An example is the situation where the company (as a member of the advisory committee) carries out R&D activities that are substantively linked to the SBO project. This R&D cooperation must be verifiable and should overlap with the planned implementation phase of the SBO project. The presence of such collaboration does not suffice for granting a selection advantage. It is up to the SBO expert panels and the steering committee to give an appreciation about the meaningfulness, relevance and added value of such collaborations.

It is essential that the SBO project implementers duly inform all other members of the advisory committee about such ongoing cooperation(s).

Also in situations where companies cooperate through parallel R&D activities, the SBO project remains strategic basic research with an innovative strategic character over a longer-term and broad horizon. The idea is never to bring the SBO projects more into line with the horizon of industrial R&D projects in terms of ownership, challenge and innovative character. Furthermore, the research centres remain the owners of the results obtained during the SBO project, and transfers must conform to accepted market practices (see 2.4). The interactions with the advisory committee of the SBO project should not be impeded by utilisation agreements under existing R&D cooperations with one or more companies. These companies have the same rights and obligations as all other members of the advisory committee.

In addition to the above-mentioned situation, other forms of interaction with companies are positively evaluated, such as:

- cooperation in a broader framework;
- a (financial or in kind) contribution that significantly exceeds the required minimum requirement;
- short corporate internships for researchers on the basis of bilateral agreements;
- exchange of equipment, etc.

- *SBO post-project phase*

A successful SBO project gives rise to subsequent research, development and implementation projects and activities. The focus thereby shifts to the companies. These follow-on projects cannot be supported through the SBO financing channel, but could qualify for support through the financing channels with the Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (industrial R&D projects, innovation mandate, Baekeland fellowships, etc.).

It is important that possible follow-up projects to be carried out by companies are specified already in the project proposal and the letters of intent.

2. PROGRAMME CHARACTERISTICS

2.1. Project applicants (consortium) and users

2.1.1. Project applicants

An SBO project proposal is submitted by at least one Flemish research centre. Based on their mission, this includes e.g., Flemish universities and their university hospitals, Flemish university colleges (in Dutch: *hogescholen*)¹ and the Flemish strategic research centres. Otherwise, all other organisations that meet the definition of a research centre and that are located in the Flemish region² may act as applicants of a SBO project. A research centre is defined as *an entity (such as universities or research institutions, technology transfer agencies, innovation intermediaries, research-oriented physical or virtual collaborative entities), irrespective of its legal status (organised under public or private law), or way of financing, whose primary goal is to independently conduct fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development, or to widely disseminate the results of such activities by way of teaching, publication or knowledge transfer. Where such entity also pursues economic activities, the financing, the costs and the revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately. Undertakings that can exert a decisive influence upon such an entity, for example in the quality of shareholders or members, may not enjoy preferential access to the research capacity of that entity or to the results generated by it (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).*

If there could be any doubts whether a particular applying organisation meets the definition of a research centre (e.g. if the organisation concerned has never applied for an SBO proposal before), you should support compliance to this definition, possibly through an independent legal advice. Please contact the FWO administration for further instructions via sbo@fwo.be.

Two or more research centres together may also form a consortium. In this case, one of the Flemish research centres is appointed as the main host institution.

Furthermore, the following specific basic conditions apply:

- The Interuniversity Micro-Electronics Centre, the Flemish Institute for Technological Research, Flanders Interuniversity Institute for Biotechnology, Flanders Marine Institute, Flanders' Make and the Flemish scientific institutions receiving an allocation from the Flemish government must submit an SBO project proposal in collaboration with at least one other Flemish research centre.
- A Flemish university college (*hogeschool*) must always submit an SBO project proposal in collaboration with or at least after a positive advice of the university with which it is associated. This takes the form of a document in which the university agrees to the submission of the project proposal

¹ See article II.2 en II.3 in: [wet: Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering tot codificatie van de decretale bepalingen betreffende het hoger onderwijs \(citeeropschrift: "Codex Hoger Onderwijs"\) \(vlaanderen.be\)](#).

² Or in the Brussels region if they resort under the authority of the "Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie".

by the university college. Flemish university colleges must always submit a project proposal in collaboration with at least one other Flemish research centre.

All applicants (on the level of their legal entity) must subscribe to the principles of the SBO programme in the form of a declaration of intent. This declaration includes a formal statement in which the applicant declares that the organisation fulfils the definition of a research centre (see above). For applicants that regularly submit SBO project proposals³, the research coordination or TTO offices have (or will receive upon request) an account in the FWO e-portal, allowing them to submit this declaration online. For others, including sporadic applicants (such as non-Flemish research institutes, ...), the declarations (signed by a legal representative of the organisation) have to be uploaded as attachments to the project application at the time of submitting the proposal via the e-portal. A [template](#) is available on the website.

The main applicant appoints a supervisor. The supervisor must be employed by the main applicant and is responsible for the proper execution of the project. The supervisor is the first contact person for FWO. The main applicant ensures that the supervisor has sufficient time and experience to carry out this assignment properly. If the project is submitted by a project consortium, the main applicant represents the applicants towards FWO and, when the grant is awarded, ensures the coordination of the activities of the awarded project grant.

2.1.2. *Non-Flemish partners*

A Flemish research centre can submit a project proposal together with one or more non-Flemish research centre. In this case, it must be demonstrated in the project proposal that the input of this partner is necessary to carry out the research and to achieve the objectives for utilisation in Flanders. The aggregated sub-budgets of non-Flemish research centres being part of the consortium as project partner or intended to carry out specific sub-tasks as preferred subcontractor, may not exceed 20% of the proposed project budget.

Excluded from international collaboration are all Russian and Belarusian research centres. In the light of the growing attention towards foreign interference, applicants that wish to team up with a Chinese university that belongs to the 'Seven Sons of Defence', public research universities who collaborate closely with the People's Liberation Army of the People's Republic of China (in particular: Northwestern Polytechnical University; Harbin Engineering University; Harbin Institute of Technology; Beihang University; Beijing Institute of Technology; the Nanjing University of Science and Technology and Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics) are strongly requested to contact FWO well before the submission deadline.

2.2. **Supported activities**

The supported activities for research centres include the implementation of the strategic basic research as such and also activities linked with the planned utilisation approach (meetings with the advisory committee, preparation of patent applications, surveys of bilateral follow-up projects with companies, etc.). This implies that the deployment of people with a task related to utilisation of the project results during the project period can also be incorporated into an SBO project⁴.

Although typically belonging to the post-project phase, case studies with industrial relevance/ownership are not a priori excluded from the SBO program but care should be taken to guarantee ownership, and

³ Catholic University of Leuven (incl. University Hospital Leuven), Ghent University, University Hospital Ghent, University of Antwerp, University Hospital Antwerp, Free University of Brussels (incl. University Hospital Brussels), University of Hasselt, Flanders Institute for Biotechnology, Flemish Institute for Technological Research, Interuniversity Micro-Electronics Center, Flanders Make, Prince Leopold Institute of Tropical Medicine.

⁴ This applies to people who are directly integrated into the relevant research groups of the SBO project consortium, and therefore not to individuals who are employed in interface services or research coordination services and for whom another form of funding is already available (cf. interface decree: decision of the Flemish Government of 29 May 2009 concerning the support of Industrial Research Funds and interface activities of the associations in the Flemish Community).

ensure freedom to operate and generic applicability to make it eligible for government-funding for non-economic activities support within the context of research organisations.

2.3. Project budget and support

2.3.1. Project duration and project budget

In principle, an SBO project has a duration of four years. With proper justification, the project may also have a shorter duration.

The project budget is initially set to maximum € 500,000 per year (including overhead costs). Overhead costs are set at a fixed percentage and paid separately. Overhead costs are not included within the budget which is to be provided to FWO. The maximum amount per applicant (excluding overhead) is set at € 425,000 per year. However, if the project is carried out by a consortium, the project budget may be increased to a maximum of € 425,000 per year (excluding overhead) multiplied by the number of legal entities acting as a project applicant that have a share of more than 15% of the total project budget.

This does not mean that each applicant within a consortium must at least commit to 15% of the project budget. The 'minimum 15%' rule refers only to the consortiums' budget advantage, according to which the overall project budget can be increased by up to € 425,000/year (excluding overhead) when this minimum is reached.

The combined sub-budgets of non-Flemish research centres being part of the consortium and non-Flemish third parties intended to carry out specific sub-tasks as preferred subcontractor, may not exceed 20% of the total project budget.

As a guideline, an SBO project budget of approx. 1,7 million euros (excluding overhead) is proposed. Larger budgets are possible if duly substantiated.

2.3.2. Support

The support percentage amounts to 100% of the acceptable costs provided the research centres meet the definition of a research centre (see 2.1.1).

2.3.3. Cost model

The project budget structure and the acceptable costs are described in detail in the cost model (see <https://www.fwo.be/media/1024777/kostenmodel-sbo-en-tbm.pdf>). Only the main aspects are described here. An Excel template for preparation of the budget is available on the FWO e-portal. This file makes use of macros to facilitate its completion by the applicant. Its use is mandatory and the version that corresponds to the requested project budget has to be uploaded in the FWO e-portal when submitting the project proposal. *Please note:* Before uploading this file to the FWO e-portal, you need to save this document as an Excel file without macros (due to the FWO server's security measures against uploading malicious files).

Personnel costs

The acceptable personnel costs are calculated for personnel directly involved in the execution of the project. Only staff executing research activities or preparing activities related to the utilisation of the project results can thus be taken into account in the project budget. Staffing costs of 'ZAP' members or other personnel that are charged to the general operating resources of the research institutions and governments, cannot be allowed any remuneration or cumulation with their remuneration from the project resources. Likewise, a grant cannot be used to pay civil servant's salaries, unless they are exempted from their usual duties [with (temporary) suspension of salary] to carry out the work in the context of the project proposal. The employer is obliged to ensure that the government does not finance these persons twice for the same work.

Consumables

This section also includes large subcontracting (if any).

The application must include a realistic estimate of the costs. The level of detail that is required for the justification of the consumables for an SBO project is limited to a list of large categories and their related cost (e.g., materials/commodities, IT costs, travel/accommodation expenses, depreciation of research equipment, preferred subcontractors, etc.). The share of small subcontracting (< € 8,500) in the listing must be clearly specified.

From a cost of € 8,500 onwards, an anticipated/preferred subcontracting needs to be specified separately from the other consumable costs and the necessity of the subcontracting needs to be justified (large subcontracting). The outsourced tasks and cost drivers must be documented. When awarding the actual contract to a subcontractor during the project execution, the applicants should comply with the law on public procurement. The total cost of the tasks proposed to be carried out by subcontractors may not exceed 30% of the proposed SBO project budget.

Equipment

Only equipment that is needed for the project and that is specified in the application, can be charged to this category. The maximum amount for this category is limited to € 150,000 for the entire project.

Cumulation with other government support

For the calculation of the acceptable support, possible parallel subsidy flows from other services of the Flemish or other governments are taken into account, as well as any other non-governmental support (sponsorship, patronage, ...) in so far it covers the same costs. Cumulation or potential cumulation with other (pending) subsidies has to be declared in the application.

2.4. Use of the results - ownership issues

Owner of the results

The project applicants/executors are the owners of the project results. In the case of a consortium, each partner is the owner of its own results and is not entitled to the results of the partners. For a research group belonging to a university or a university college, the provisions of art. IV 48 of the Higher Education Code apply.⁵

Transfer of the results to existing companies

When intellectual property rights or user rights arising out of research results obtained by a research centre are transferred to a company for the purpose of further utilising the results, the following provisions apply:

- the research results are available on an equal and non-discriminatory basis to all companies within the EU;
- a compensation in accordance with normal market conditions is payable which is equal for all companies within the EU, including members of the advisory committee and companies taking part in the project execution (as non-funded partners or subcontractors). Possible contributions of the companies to the costs of the research centres towards the results may be deducted;
- the revenues from the transfer are reinvested in the primary activities of the research centre.

The research centres and interested companies may agree on a *right of first negotiation*, provided such agreements are based on a commitment to transfer at market conditions. When it is decided to transfer part of the results, this can be done on an exclusive basis, provided sufficient room is left for interactions with other companies for the remaining results. Alternatively, research centres and companies may agree that the results will be shared on a non-exclusive basis and at market conditions with all members of the consortium.

Transfer of the results to a new spin-off company

⁵ Coordinated decrees on higher education ("Higher Education Code") of 11 October 2013.

When intellectual property rights or user rights arising out of research results obtained by a research centre are transferred as part of the creation of a new spin-off company, the requirement for compensation in accordance with normal market conditions and the requirement for reinvestment of the revenue in the primary activities of the research centre also apply.

Cooperation agreement

When there are several legal entities in the consortium, good mutual arrangements are to be in place between the participating consortium partners concerning what has been agreed on joint working agreements, project management and the allocation of the intellectual property rights (IPR).

As part of the project proposal, the applicants have the choice to indicate to

- 1) accept the model cooperation agreement ([nl/eng](#)) as agreed on by the Tech Transfer Offices Flanders ([Home | TTO Flanders - Technology Transfer Offices](#)) which is made available on the FWO-SBO website
- 2) The consortium partners do not agree with the standard template used by universities and most research organisations.
- 3) have not yet settled an agreement on the main principles of the consortium agreement.

In case the members of the consortium have not yet come to an agreement on the way they will collaborate, applicants should provide a short description of the alternative regulation they envision and give their motivation for the specific adaptation(s) and/or indicate the remaining bottlenecks to be solved in order come to a collaboration agreement.

FWO does not need to receive a signed term sheet between the partners of the consortium in the course of the evaluation procedure. Irrespective the choice made in the application, a full cooperation agreement is requested after granting the project proposal. This cooperation agreement, as well as any changes to it during the execution of the agreement is subject to approval by the FWO.

2.5. Technology readiness level (TRL)

Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) serve as a measurement of the maturity level of particular technologies. This measurement system provides a common understanding of technology status and addresses the entire innovation chain. By evaluating a technology project against the parameters for each Technology Readiness Level (see below), one can assign a TRL rating to the project based on its stage of progress. There are nine technology readiness levels; TRL 1 being the lowest and TRL 9 the highest. The following definitions of TRL applies:

- TRL 1 – basic principles observed
- TRL 2 – technology concept formulated
- TRL 3 – experimental proof of concept
- TRL 4 – technology validated in lab
- TRL 5 – technology validated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)
- TRL 6 – technology demonstrated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)
- TRL 7 – system prototype demonstration in operational environment
- TRL 8 – system complete and qualified
- TRL 9 – actual system proven in operational environment (competitive manufacturing in the case of key enabling technologies; or in space)

Applicants are requested to indicate the technology readiness level of the intended application at the onset of the research project as well as the TRL they intent to reach at the end of the project period. The primary purpose of requesting the TRLs is to give the evaluation panels a reference concerning the development status and the intended progress of application during the project phase. The intended

progress in TRL level during an SBO project might be different for applications in various domains. A priori, there is no desired start of end TRL level imposed within the SBO call.

2.6. Data management

Research data management covers the way research data are managed, from their date of creation or collection, to the moment they are published or used and possibly preserved for the long term.

Research data management is therefore an integral part of sound scientific research and thus FWO has made data management a key element of its policy. It covers procedures on the description of research data and metadata, their storage and long-term preservation, the discoverability, the designation of responsible persons, the handling of highly sensitive data, and the open access to and sharing of research data. The FWO expects researchers to pay due attention to this dimension before, during and for at least five years following their research.

The application form in the FWO e-portal contains several issues that need to be addressed concerning data management:

- the data types that the research will use and/or generate
- the provisions that are in place in order to preserve the data for at least 5 years after the end of the research
- possible reasons to deviate from the principle of preservation of data, sharing and of the minimum preservation term of 5 years
- specific security measures for research data due to ethical issues
- other relevant issues related to data management

The abovementioned issues regarding data management will also be taken into account during the evaluation procedure. If a proposal receives funding, a data management plan will be requested by FWO. More information on data management can be found [Research Foundation - Flanders - Data Management Plan \(fwo.be\)](https://www.fwo.be/en/research-fundings/strategic-basic-research/data-management).

3. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT PROPOSAL

3.1. Important deadlines and project assessment timeline

For an overview of deadlines that apply for the current call: see the SBO website: [Research Foundation - Flanders - SBO-projects \(fwo.be\)](https://www.fwo.be/en/research-fundings/strategic-basic-research/sbo-projects)

3.2. Description of the assessment procedure

The deadline for submission of an SBO project proposal is indicated on the SBO website. Project proposals are submitted via the FWO e-portal. Any other way of submission is considered ineligible.

The initially submitted project proposal remains the basic document throughout the selection procedure.

The SBO assessment procedure consists of a single selection round:

- For every SBO project proposal, the FWO administration provides at least four international experts who have agreed to evaluate the project (external peer review). For a highly multidisciplinary project proposal, the number of experts may be increased. The assessment by the international experts is based on the assessment framework given in 3.4.2 and covers both the scientific aspects and the utilisation aspects.
- To avoid any conflicts of interest, the applicants may submit to FWO a short list of maximum 3 experts to be avoided. Such a short list must be submitted at the deadline of pre-submission (i.e. transfer of the project proposal to the coordinating office of the main applicant). The short list must be specific, i.e. based on the name of the expert or particular organisation to be challenged. Also a short motivation to exclude an expert should be provided.

- The written expert recommendations are sent anonymously and unabridged to the applicants. The applicants have the opportunity to provide a rebuttal to the expert recommendations. Its length is maximum 3 A4 pages and the timing hereof is indicated on the SBO website. The sole aim of this rebuttal is to clarify misunderstandings originating from the external peer review process and/or to provide an answer to open questions. If necessary for the interpretation and assessment, (a part of) the applicant's response to the referee's comments may be shared with the external experts for additional feedback.
- The project application, expert recommendations and the written feedback from the applicants, is then assessed by two-stage internal peer review: First, a thematic 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 for the set of proposals to be evaluated within the panel. Secondly, the steering committees review, amends, modifies, and ratifies the preliminary evaluation reports of the thematic expert panels and then ranks the proposals within their particular finality (economic or societal) and submits a proposal for funding for approval by the FWO board of trustees.
- Throughout the evaluation process, FWO is supported by staff of the [Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship](#) (Vlaio).

3.3. Choice of the thematic SBO expertpanel

The applicants have to assign their proposal to an SBO expert panel that will perform the intermediary internal peer review of their application. This choice is based on the broad scientific field in which the proposed research is primarily situated. An overview of the panels that can be selected during the submission of a proposal can be found in the table below. If necessitated by the number of submissions per scientific theme, the FWO reserves the right to split themes into multiple SBO-expertpanels or merge related expert-panels. FWO can, if opportune for a proper evaluation, have the application processed by another panel. The latter action is subject to approval by the applicant of the project proposal concerned.

Name expertpanel	Panelscope
APPLIED BIOLOGICAL, ENVIRONMENTAL & EARTH SCIENCES	Agronomy & agricultural engineering Bio(techno)logical sciences (non-medical) Earth and spatial sciences Food science Environmental and ecological sciences
(BIO)MEDICAL & HEALTH SCIENCES	Medical sciences Health sciences Biomedical engineering (incl. Biomechanics) Pharmaceutical sciences Clinical & health psychology Veterinary science
CHEMISTRY, PHYSICS AND MATERIAL SCIENCES	Material sciences Nanotechnology Chemistry & Chemical Engineering Applied physics
INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY	Informatics and computing technology Telecommunication technology Data sciences
SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES	Pedagogy & social psychology Forensic sciences Administration and management Social & political sciences Economics

	Law History Language and linguistic science Art, architecture and design
TECHNOLOGICAL SCIENCES	Architectural engineering & building science Electronics Civil engineering Applied mathematics Mechanical engineering Astronomy and astrophysics Energy technology Nuclear engineering Signal processing

3.4. Assessment framework

3.4.1. Formal eligibility analysis

The following eligibility criteria apply:

<p>E1. The project proposal is submitted by the set deadline and is complete and consistent with the requirements of the application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The preliminary registration of the project proposal is complete and was done by the set deadline, as specified on the SBO website. - The project proposal is submitted by the set deadline as specified on the SBO website. - The project proposal is submitted electronically in accordance with the specifications of the application template. - The parts of the project proposals that are intended for the experts are written in English. The project summary is also provided in Dutch. - The maximum number of pages or characters as specified is not exceeded. The appendices are consistent with the specifications of the application. - An advisory committee is foreseen in the project proposal. - The project application includes a project budget in accordance with the cost model.
<p>E2. The research consortium is made up of stakeholders from the target group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The project proposal is submitted by at least one Flemish research centre. - IMEC, VITO, VIB, Flanders' Make, Flanders Marine Institute, Flemish scientific institutions with a public budget allocation ("dotatie"), and university colleges ("hogescholen") cooperate with at least one other Flemish research centre.
<p>E3. All applicants of the consortium have subscribed to the principles and regulation of the SBO programme. The project proposal includes the necessary declarations and/or non-amended letters of intent by the applicant(s) of the consortium.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All applicants of the consortium have subscribed to the principles of the SBO programme and are accepting all the rules and regulations of the FWO SBO-program. Flemish universities, university hospitals and strategic research centres can provide the necessary declaration through the FWO e-portal. Other applicants must copy the statement <u>verbatim</u> from the available model and provide it, signed by a legal representative, to the FWO.

The FWO may take a negative decision on eligibility or set additional conditions in the following cases:

- 1) a project applicant does not fulfil all obligations or authorisations set by the authorities;
- 2) a project applicant has behaved incorrectly on the occasion of previous project proposals, including with regard to the provision of information, substantive or financial obligations, or reporting.

These eligibility criteria remain valid throughout the evaluation procedure. Project proposals that are found ineligible do not qualify for support and will not be considered in the further selection procedure. FWO may contact the applicant during the eligibility analysis to complete the application. FWO may also use information from other financing bodies.

3.4.2. *The assessment*

The assessment framework for an SBO project application is based on the evaluation of the following criteria:

1. Scientific dimension S
S1 Innovative value of the basic research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The added value to the international state-of-the-art and to ongoing research - The level of scientific challenges, qualification as basic research with a clear high-risk/high-gain profile - The presence of clear and realistic scientific goals
S2 Quality of the research approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A clear description of the research approach for all scientific goals - A thorough substantiation of the research approach - No gaps, shortcomings or superfluous activities in the research approach
S3 Project planning & resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A clear and appropriate allocation of research tasks within the individual research groups and/or among the consortium partners, with sufficient mutual interaction - A proper justification of all resources suited for the scientific objectives - A suitable project planning, with clear and realistic objectives, performance measures, milestones and deliverables.
2. Utilisation perspectives U
U1 Relevance/Strategic importance and applicability amongst which in Flanders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A research approach that is fully aligned with the intended utilisation - The project outcome's utilisation potential, resulting in a major stride forward and well-substantiated socio-economic added value. - A predominant part of the anticipated utilisation value chain located in Flanders
U2 Utilisation approach and knowledge transfer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The relevance of the project to all users and vice versa. No users, important in the value chain, are missing. The impact of early interactions with these users on the project design is fully substantiated - The thoroughness of the utilisation plan, including evidence for intensive involvement of the users during the project and containing plans to assess and validate the effectiveness of the project's outcomes. - In the user's letters of intent, there is clear self-reported commitment by the users to engage in concrete follow-up R&D <p><i>For spin-off oriented projects</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>The business concept is realistic and clear, with attention for the required profiles/expertise of the management and for the viability in the first years of the independent business.</i>
U3 Added value of the project in terms of Sustainable Development Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A project can receive a score of 9 or 10 if the applicants can demonstrate, based on an analysis and on an overall estimate, that the project and the anticipated follow-up R&D&I activities in the post-project phase show a high level of ambition to improve the integration of particular <u>eligible</u> IAEG-Sustainable Development Goals indicators into government's policy, with socio-economic organisations and/or to achieve a sustainability oriented system innovation or transition in society. The impact of the proposed research on reaching the SDG and/or the necessity of strategic basic research for reaching the SDG is thoroughly elaborated and substantiated in the project application. For further info on the assessment of this criterium and the eligible sustainable development goals indicators, see https://www.fwo.be/media/1024781/sbo-manual-sustainable-development.pdf.
3. R&D capacity, competence and infrastructure (C)
C1 R&D capacity and competence; infrastructure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The available research competences and infrastructure, complementarity and synergy within the consortium
C2 Competence and track record with regard to transfer and utilisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilisation-oriented focus and track record of the consortium with regard to the socio-economic transfer of research results

For more information about the scoring criteria, see the [SBO-E score grid](#) on the SBO website.

The decision model for the overall score and the differentiation of the project proposals is as follows:

- For each of the above mentioned criteria a score between 0 and 10 is given.
- Projects scoring lower than 6 on one or more of the criteria are ineligible for support and will not be considered for funding.
- Projects scoring at least 6 on each of the criteria are ranked based on the sum of the individual scores on each of the criteria. A double weight is granted to criteria S1, S2, U1 and U2. The highest ranked project proposals are supported within the limits of the available budget.
- In addition to a consensus score for each of the criteria, the SBO expert panel also awards a **general appreciation score (A, B, C)** to the project proposal.
 - **A:** The application meets the minimum quality requirements and is eligible for support, provided sufficient budget is available. If ranked below the limits of the available budget, an A-type project can be resubmitted within the subsidy channel concerned in the next call.
 - **B:** The 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. A B-type project may be resubmitted in the next call. At that occasion, the applicants must explain how the research and/or utilisation plan has been revised in order to meet the criticism of the previous year, with an emphasis on the criteria on which the score was substandard.
 - **C:** Category C concerns applications that clearly do not meet the minimum quality requirements for support (e.g. proposal does not fit the finality of the program, project (parts) submitted too prematurely; clearly negative appreciation on both assessment axes; particular negative appreciation of the scientific quality; shortcomings that are difficult to remediate and/or applications that are deemed not to fit in the subsidy channel...). This list is not exhaustive. In case an application is classified in category C, it is not allowed to resubmit the next call. In other words, a call year must be skipped before a proposal with the same research questions and utilisation strategy can be submitted.
- The general appreciation score is also submitted to the SBO steering committee. The SBO steering committee has the right to change the general appreciation score of the expert panel.
- The individual researcher(s) with a C-project is not prohibited from submitting a project proposal with another research question during the next call. At all times, the evaluation bodies have the right to not evaluate a application and/or exclude it from the final ranking, if it is too similar in terms of research question, utilisation objective and/or methodology to a project with a C label from the previous call. This assessment is part of the exclusive and discretionary competence of the evaluation body concerned.

3.5. After the decision

The project data sheet with the decision-making process is forwarded to the main applicant when the decision is made public. The applicants can subsequently request a debriefing (a request can be sent to sbo@fwo.be). See further chapter 4 of this manual.

In case of a positive decision, an agreement is drafted between FWO and the project applicants.

3.6. Procedure complaints and appeals

It is at the discretion of the expertpanels and steering committees of the FWO to assess, in all autonomy, the submitted applications

If you are not satisfied with the procedure followed during the evaluation process, an appeal for review of the decision can be filed with FWO. An appeal for review must be initiated within a period of 30 working days after notification of the board of trustees decision and be based on 'clear and verifiable', such as errors committed to the applicable FWO regulations. The words "clear" and "verifiable" mean that the elements on which the request for review is based must be understandable for a third party or layman, enabling an assessment of its truthfulness/well-foundedness.

If dissatisfied with the way FWO has handled the application, a complaint can be filed at any time in writing or electronically. Complaints are handled within 45 days of their receipt. Complaints concerning

a negative appraisal of a project application by the FWO board of trustees may, however, only be submitted after an appeal for review of the decision has been filed with and handled by the board of trustees.

3.7. Rights and obligations during project execution

3.7.1. Agreement

The main obligation of the beneficiary is a commitment of resources: with the help of the awarded resources, the beneficiary will make the necessary efforts to reach and apply the described project objectives through research and development activities to ensure utilisation in Flanders.

3.7.2. Final cooperation agreement

The final cooperation agreement must include at least the following aspects:

- designation of a main applicant and a supervisor;
- designation of the research activities to be performed;
- joint working agreements and project management
- agreements regarding ownership and user rights to background knowledge and project results for implementation of the utilisation plan;
- procedure for settlement of mutual disputes;
- reporting obligations.

The cooperation agreement must concur with the FWO SBO regulation, and in particular with the provisions regarding the utilisation of the project results. The final legally signed cooperation agreement must be submitted to FWO within 4 months of the date of receipt of the board of directors decision on the support.

3.7.3. Follow up, reporting and payment of support

If the project is approved, the beneficiary will have to report at regular intervals on the proper scientific and utilisation progress of the project.

If an advisory committee is set up, an annual meeting must be held, to be attended by the members of the advisory committee. The FWO must be invited to this meeting and the minutes of the meeting must be sent to the FWO. These minutes are an integral part of the mandatory reporting.

A separate webpage is available with all essential practical and administrative information for the benefit of the beneficiaries of an SBO project grant: [Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek - Vlaanderen - SBO \(Strategisch Basis Onderzoek\) projecten \(fwo.be\)](https://www.fwo.be/nl/onderzoek-en-ontwikkeling/strategisch-basisonderzoek)

4. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4.1. Exploratory or feedback meeting

Applicants preparing a proposal or applicants whose application was previously not granted, have the opportunity to request an exploratory meeting or feedback meeting, respectively, with the FWO staff. Such an interview takes about one hour. The information provided during such meeting is based on the FWO staff's own insight and experience with the SBO program and may not necessarily reflect or be in line with the opinion of external referees, expert panel members and members of the steering committee that deal with the evaluation of the proposal concerned. The information that is provided should therefore be interpreted as non-binding advice and no rights can be derived from this information.

Please send an e-mail to sbo@fwo.be including a short abstract and key questions (max. 1 A4 page). The applicants should concurrently provide a number of possible dates when this exploratory interview could take place at the FWO offices.

4.2. Contact

For questions with regard to the modalities of the SBO programme, please contact sbo@fwo.be.

Questions regarding the functionality of the e-portal should be addressed to fwohelpdesk@fwo.be.

In order to guarantee a neutral and independent assessment and equal treatment of all application under evaluation, communication about SBO files under review may only be done in writing.