Bilateral Scientific Research Cooperation Projects

Between the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO – Flanders) and the National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED – Vietnam)

Guidelines call 2025

1. Introduction

Science is increasingly global. Many research questions and "grand challenges" cannot be resolved without cross-border collaboration between scientists. Vietnam and Flanders wish to invest in joint research projects, creating a leverage for scientific excellence.

This intention will be realized through the implementation of a call for proposals, to be launched jointly in Vietnam and Flanders by respectively the National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) and Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO).

Each proposal should be an integrated Flemish-Vietnamese research project with both partners from Flanders and Vietnam that join their strengths to execute a joint research project. Applicants are expected to propose a coherent research project, in which the added value of both the Vietnamese and the Flemish partner, and the complementariness of both teams, is clearly shown. The research should be carried out both in Vietnam and in Flanders.

The research proposal must be submitted both at FWO and NAFOSTED according to each agency's own regulations and procedures. The evaluation will be organised by FWO and NAFOSTED together. In a first step, both NAFOSTED and FWO will invite external referees to assess the applications. In a second step, a joint scientific committee consisting of Vietnamese and Flemish experts will rank the proposals based on their scientific value. The boards of NAFOSTED and FWO will thereafter ratify the ranking made by the joint evaluation panel. The Vietnamese part will be funded by NAFOSTED, the Flemish part by FWO, each according to its respective rules and procedures.

This document describes the procedures for the call 2025 of the bilateral scientific cooperation programme NAFOSTED – FWO.

2. Scope of funding and project duration

Proposals for bilateral research projects between researchers from Vietnam and Flanders can be submitted in **all scientific domains** and should cover **fundamental scientific research**.

The projects, all starting in 2026, have **a duration of three years**. Please note that the project duration must be the same on both sides.

3. Guidelines for applicants

3.1. How to apply?

In order to be eligible, a proposal must meet the following criteria:

- It must be **submitted** both by a Flemish principle investigator (PI – also named supervisor-spokesperson) **at FWO** and a Vietnamese PI **at NAFOSTED**:
  - At NAFOSTED: To check the eligibility requirements for Vietnamese researchers, applicants should refer to Article 10 and Article 11 of the Circular No. 37/2014/TT-BKHCN dated on 12th February 2014 was amended and supplemented by Circular No. 10/2024/TT-BKHCN dated on 30th December 2024 of the Ministry of Science and Technology (Consolidated document). The main points include:
    - Eligible Host Institutions: a) Has legal status, has operational functions appropriate to the project's research field, and has sufficient material and technical facilities to serve the project's research activities; b) It has submitted a final report for projects funded by NAFOSTED that will end and has fulfilled requests by NAFOSTED to refund funding allocate to previously funded NAFOSTED projects (if any) before submitting the proprosal.
    - Eligible Principal Investigators (PI): Each project has only one Principal Investigator that meets the following requirements: a) Has expertise appropriate to the research content of the project; b) Has research capacity that meets the requirements of the project: hold a doctorate degree and be the main author of at least 01 relevant specialized research publication in prestigious international journals (Q1 or Q2 ranking group) within the last 5 years up to the call announcement; c) Is not acting as PI for more than 01 project funded by NAFOSTED (except in the case of acting as PI of an urgent scientific and technological project); d) Is not allowed to act as PI within 02 years from the date of issuance of the Decision recognizing the results "Fail" of the latest Project implementation.
    - Eligible Scientific Secretary and Main members: a) Have professional qualifications and skills appropriate to the research content of the project; b) Hold a doctorate degree and have research results consistent with the project content published in scientific journals within the last 5 years up to the call announcement. In case of master's degree, there must be appropriate research results, with 01 article published in a prestigious international journal in the field of natural sciences and engineering; 01 article published in a prestigious international journal or 01 monograph or 02 other scientific articles in the field of social sciences and humanities within the last 5 years up to the call announcement; c) **Besides the PI the team must consist of at least 02 main members**

that hold a doctorate degree and have at least one publication in prestigious international journals within the last 5 years up to the call announcement.

- Minimum project outcomes: publishing at least 02 articles in prestigious international journals in Q1 or Q2 ranking group and support training of at least 01 PhD student.

- At FWO:
  - Eligible host institutions: Your research will be carried out under the supervision of an applicable Flemish principle (main) host institution defined in article 7§2 of the regulations research projects fundamental research. Where appropriate, the principal (main) host institutions from article 7§2 can carry out their research in collaboration with a Flemish or Federal scientific institution, but not in collaboration with a non-Flemish research institution other than those in Vietnam, eligible for funding at NAFOSTED.
  - Eligible (co-)supervisor(s): Your research project will be carried out under the direction of a supervisor per host institution, possibly in collaboration with one or more co-supervisors in line with Article 10 (except §4 till §6 - there is no division into junior and senior projects in this call) and Article 11 (except §3) of the regulations research projects fundamental research.
  - **In the framework of this call with NAFOSTED, you can only act once as a principle investigator (supervisor) or co-investigator (co-supervisor).**
  - Applications submitted in the frame of this NAFOSTED-FWO project call are not taken into account in for the maximum of one project per application round for which you may act as (co-)supervisor, nor are they taken into account for the maximum of two projects applied for and ongoing on the start date of the newly allocated project.

- In Flanders it can only be submitted according to the regulations of FWO; in Vietnam it can only be submitted according to the regulations of NAFOSTED;
- It must be submitted, using the appropriate application forms, which are available through the website of FWO (FWO E-portal) for Flanders and through the website of NAFOSTED (NAFOSTED E-services system) for Vietnam. **Please note that the NAFOSTED submission should include a PDF of the full FWO application (not only the 10 page project outline) as generated by the Flemish PI in the FWO application portal.**
- It must be submitted by the **deadline:**
  - **At FWO: September 30th, 2025 (5PM Brussels time)**
  - **AT NAFOSTED: October 1st, 2025 (5PM Hanoi time)**

After the deadline, FWO and NAFOSTED will check whether the proposals have been submitted simultaneously in Flanders and Vietnam. They will inform each other of the results. **If a proposal is submitted only in one country and/or received after the deadline it is *ipso facto* ineligible.**

Points of attention include:

- FWO submission:
    - All PIs and co-investigators of the **Flemish AND Vietnamese research team** must include **a CV based on the FWO CV template** in the FWO submission and have an **online FWO E-loket profile including an updated list of publications** before the submission deadline. Please note that the registration of your E-loket profile (login/password) takes 24 hours. It is therefore strongly advised to start well in advance.
- NAFOSTED submission:
    - PI and all project members of the **Vietnamese research team** must include a **CV based on the NAFOSTED CV template** in the **NAFOSTED E-services system**. In addition, the **CV based on the FWO CV template** (see FWO submission above) needs to added for all PIs and co-investigators of the Flemish research team.
    - **A PDF upload of the full FWO application PDF (not only the 10 page project outline) as generated by the Flemish PI in the FWO application portal.**
- The proposal should be clearly integrated and contain one central issue to be investigated reflected in an integrated methodology and implementation plan. **The project description in the proposal submitted by the Vietnamese and the Flemish research team should be identical** as well as the title, the abstract, and included (co-)PI's. The work packages and budget should be specified clearly and separately for respectively the Vietnamese and the Flemish part of the project. At FWO, the Vietnamese budget (in EUR) must be added in the online application tool by adding the foreign host institution(s) and subsequently allocating budget to it. At NAFOSTED, the Flemish budget (in EUR) must be added in the register form in NAFOSTED E-services system.

3.2. What can be applied for?

The **Flemish part of the project budget** can only be used for one or more of the following cost categories:

- Scientific staff and consumables;
- Equipment;
- Travel and accommodation costs of Flemish researchers going to Vietnam;
- Accommodation costs, daily allowances, and local travel costs of Vietnamese researchers staying in Flanders;
- Production costs of joint publications;
- Travel insurance is the responsibility of the person traveling and should be arranged and claimed in accordance with the policies and procedures of the Flemish host institution of the person traveling. If the Flemish host institution of the person traveling does not cover such an insurance, related costs can be budgeted as a consumable.

On the Flemish side the following budget regulations apply in the frame of this bilateral collaboration with Vietnam:

- The total project budget for staff and consumables may not exceed 85.000 EUR/year;
- The budget for staff and consumables of the Flemish main host institution must be minimally 45.000 EUR/year;
- Per project a maximum amount of 150.000 EUR for equipment can be applied for. This can take the form of matching funding;
- No overhead costs must be charged on the Flemish budgets.

The **Vietnamese budget** should primarily be used for one or more of the following cost categories:

- Scientific staff;
- Small equipment;
- Travel costs of Vietnamese researchers going to Flanders;
- Accommodation, meals, and local travel costs of Flemish researchers staying in Vietnam;
- Costs of travel insurance for Vietnamese researchers staying in Flanders;
- Expenses for material and consumables;

To add value to the collaboration, NAFOSTED encourages all proposals should have a balance in research contents and activities between both sides. All the budget estimation should be prepared in accordance with: Circular No. 02/2023/TT-BKHCN dated on 8th May 2023 by Ministry of S&T *on guiding norms for constructing and allocating cost estimates and settlement for scientific projects using state budget*; Circular No. 03/2023/TT-BTC dated on 10th January 2023 by Ministry of Finance *on Regulations on estimating, managing, using and finalizing state budget funds to carry out scientific and technological tasks*; Joint Circular No. 27/2015/TTLT-BKHCN-BTC dated on 30th December 2015 by Ministry of Finance and Ministry of S&T *regulating funding allocation for conducting scientific projects using state budget*; Circular No.40/2017/TT-BTC dated on 28th April 2017 by the Ministry of Finance *on work-trip allowances and conference expenditures applied to state agencies, public service providers, political organizations, socio-political organizations, other organizations or associations using state budget*; Circular No. 102/2012/TT-BTC by Ministry of Finance dated on 21st June 2012, *stipulating the regime of work-trip allowances for state officials and employees travelling abroad on short working missions funded by the state budget*; Circular No. 71/2018/TT-BTC dated on 10th August 2018 by Ministry of Finance *governing the allowances for welcoming and receiving foreign delegation into Vietnam, and for organizing international workshops/conferences in Vietnam*.

Please note that the requested budget shall be assessed by NAFOSTED and items that do not show clear relevance to research needs in the research plan or do not match national cost-norms and regulations can be cut down.

3.3. Application timeline

The call for 2025 will be published in May 2025. The timeline is as follows:

- 20th of May 2025 — Opening of call
- **30th of September 2025** — **FWO Deadline for proposals (5PM Brussels)**
- **1st of October 2025** — **NAFOSTED Deadline for proposals (5PM Hanoi time)**
- October 2025 — Eligibility check
- October 2025-April 2026 — (Remote) peer review
- April 2026 — Joint NAFOSTED/FWO evaluation committee
- May 2026 — Ratification panel decision
- End of May 2026 — Communication of results
- 1st of July 2026 — Start of the projects

4. Evaluation

4.1. Evaluation Procedure

The applicants shall respect the evaluation procedure outlined by FWO and NAFOSTED. The projects will be evaluated using a two-step procedure.

1. In a first step the proposals submitted at NAFOSTED will be subjected to the remote peer-review procedure of NAFOSTED. Concomitantly, the proposals submitted at FWO will be subject to international remote peer-review according to the standard procedure at FWO (see regulations internal and external peer review) making use of the evaluation criteria listed in section 4.2.
2. A joint selection panel comprising of experts designated by the FWO and the NAFOSTED will evaluate all eligible proposals and allocate the funding. The composition of the joint scientific committee is only determined after the submission deadline in order to make sure that the selected panel members can cover the submitted applications. The composition of the joint scientific committee will be openly available after the finalization of the evaluation process.

The boards of FWO and NAFOSTED will thereafter ratify the ranking made by the joint evaluation panel. The involved Flemish and Vietnamese researchers will be notified about the evaluation results after the ratification by both Boards. The Vietnamese part will be funded by NAFOSTED according to its own rules and procedures; the Flemish part by FWO according to its rules and procedures. In due time, the researchers will also receive the necessary feedback about the decision taken. In due time, the researchers will also receive the necessary feedback about the decision taken.

4.2. Evaluation criteria

- Researchers (25%)
  - Competence of the individual researchers
- Project (50%)
  - Scientific added value, rationale, and originality
  - Quality of the research approach (methodology), feasibility and focus
  - Work plan
- Collaboration (25%)
  - Added value of the proposed collaboration
  - Balance in terms of work contribution amongst the diverse research groups

FWO and NAFOSTED encourage applicants to consult the Score Grid, which can be consulted on the FWO and NAFOSTED webpage, prior preparing the proposal.

5. Implementation of the granted project

Involved researchers of a funded FWO-NAFOSTED projects are obliged to enter into a partnership agreement to ensure, amongst other items, the effective protection and correct distribution of the intellectual properties resulting from the projects funded under this call. Please note that no specific format for this agreement will be provided by FWO or NAFOSTED. The involved host institutions are free to elaborate such a document as long as it contains the necessary basic information.

Flemish and Vietnamese researchers involved in a projects funded under this call, will implement the approved project as laid out in the initial application, following each funding council's regulations (respectively FWO and NAFOSTED), including the regulations on financial and scientific reporting. The joint grant panel's recommendation for budget suggestions of Vietnamese researchers will be considered and revised by NAFOSTED after releasing the evaluation outcomes. In general, with the same research activities and duration, the budget funded by NAFOSTED can have a lower cost norm than it in FWO side.

NAFOSTED note: Regarding the project outcomes, the PI, main members need to be the main authors of at least 01 article published in a prestigious international journal as results of the project. The PhD student need to be the author of at least 01 article published in a prestigious international journal as results of the project. Publications that are results of the project must acknowledge NAFOSTED's funding according to the correct project code. In case of the publication acknowledges funding from multiple projects funded by NAFOSTED or funding simultaneously by NAFOSTED and another funding organization, there must be a detailed explanation and full evidence of not duplicating the use of NAFOSTED's funding sources or other State funding sources.

6. Contact information

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