

Bilateral Scientific Research Cooperation Projects

Between the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO) and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC)

Guidelines call 2024

1. Introduction

Science is increasingly global. Many research questions and “grand challenges” cannot be resolved without cross-border collaboration between scientists. Flanders and China 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 Flanders and China. It is envisaged that applications will be for a balanced partnership, not specifically in monetary terms but with equivalent research commitment and efforts from both sides. Each proposal should be an integrated Flemish-Chinese research project with both partners from Flanders and China 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 Flemish and Chinese partner, and the complementarity of both teams, is clearly shown**. The research should be carried out both in China and Flanders.

The research proposal must be submitted both at FWO and NSFC according to each agency’s own regulations and procedures. The evaluation will be organised by FWO and NSFC together. In a first step, both FWO and NSFC will invite external referees to assess the applications. In a second step, a joint scientific committee consisting out of Flemish and Chinese experts will rank the proposals based on their scientific value. The boards of FWO and NSFC will thereafter ratify the ranking made by the joint evaluation panel. The Chinese part will be funded by NSFC according to its own rules and procedures; the Flemish part by FWO according to its rules and procedures. FWO and NSFC aim to fund around 12 joint projects.

2. Scope of funding

Proposals for bilateral research projects between researchers from Flanders and China should cover **fundamental research** and can be submitted in the fields of natural sciences, engineering sciences, management sciences and medical sciences. Within the Chinese application form, applicants need to indicate in which of the following NSFC remits the application falls:

- Mathematical & physical sciences
- Chemical sciences
- Life sciences
- Earth sciences
- Engineering & material sciences
- Information sciences
- Management sciences
- Health sciences

For more information on the NSFC scientific departments please consult: <http://www.nsf.gov.cn/publish/portal0/xmzn/2020/17/>. Project proposals within humanities and other social sciences not defined above are not eligible.

3. Project duration

The selected projects, all starting on January 1st 2025, have a duration of **three years**. Please note that the project duration must be the same on both sides.

4. Application procedure

4.1. How to apply?

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

- Proposals should always involve both a Flemish principal investigator (PI) and a Chinese PI. If needed co-promotors can be included both in Flanders and China.
 - o At NSFC:
 - On the Chinese side, up to maximally 10 researchers (including the Chinese PI) from no more than 3 different institutes and universities can be included in the application. So the maximum amount of participating Chinese institutes or universities in one project is three;
 - Chinese applicants should have a senior academic title and should be the PI of an NSFC on-going or completed project with a duration of 3 years or longer. Please consult the NSFC contact point (see below) for more specific details on the eligibility criteria at Chinese side.

- At FWO:
 - Eligible host institutions: Your research will be carried out under the supervision of an applicable Flemish principal (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 China, eligible for funding at NSFC.
 - 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 NSFC, you can only act once as a supervisor(-spokesperson) or co-supervisor.**
 - Applications submitted in the frame of this FWO-NSFC project call are not part of the regular competition research projects fundamental research and as such not taken into account for the maximum of two projects 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.
- Proposals must be submitted by the Flemish PI at FWO and the Chinese PI at NSFC. In Flanders it can only be submitted according to the regulations of FWO; in China it can only be submitted according to the regulations of NSFC.
- Proposals must be submitted, using the appropriate application forms, which are available through the [FWO E-loket](#) for Flanders and through the [website of NSFC](#) for China. At FWO the full proposal needs to be submitted in English. At NSFC the full proposal must be submitted in Chinese and in English. **This English NSFC submission consists of a PDF upload of the FWO application (not only the 10 page project outline) as generated by the Flemish PI in the FWO application portal.**
- **Proposals must be submitted:**
 - **At FWO by the deadline, 22 May 2024 (5pm Brussels Time)**
 - **At NSFC by the deadline, 23 May 2024 (4pm Beijing Time)**

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

- Specific items to include in the:
 - o NSFC submission:
 - A **'Letter of Engagement'**, signed by both the Flemish and the Chinese PI, as a proof of partnership.
 - A **PDF upload of the FWO application (not only the 10 page project outline)** as generated by the Flemish PI in the FWO application portal.
 - o FWO submission:
 - A **CV of each involved Flemish and Chinese (co-)supervisor(-spokesperson)** that is structured according to the [FWO CV template](#) that is available in the FWO application form. Please note that only the Flemish PI can upload these CVs in the FWO application.
 - All Flemish (co-)supervisors, the Chinese PI (supervisor-spokesperson) affiliated to the main Chinese host institution, and for each additional involved Chinese institution the lead researcher for that institution (supervisor) should register at FWO by creating an **online profile including an overview of academic positions and an updated list of publications** on the [FWO E-portal](#) before the submission deadline. Other involved Chinese researchers (co-supervisors) should not register at FWO. **Please note that the registration of your login/password takes 24 hours.** It is therefore strongly advised to start well in advance.
- The proposal should be clearly integrated and contain one central issue to be investigated, as well as a methodology and an implementation plan; the project description in the proposal submitted by the Flemish and the Chinese research team should be **identical**; the work packages and budget should be specified clearly and separately for respectively the Flemish and Chinese part of the project. Besides the scientific part, also the title, abstract and included (co)-PI's must be identical in the submission at FWO and the one at NSFC. At FWO the Chinese budget (in EUR) must be added in the online application tool by adding the foreign host institution and subsequently allocating budget to it.

4.2. 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 China;
- To cover production costs of joint publications.

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

- 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.

During their travel and stay abroad, all researchers (from the Flemish as well as from the Chinese research teams) involved in FWO-NSFC projects and independent of nationality, can rely on a travel and assistance insurance ('reis-en bijstandsverzekering') and repatriation covered by FWO. This insurance is not a health insurance. Regardless of the aforementioned insurance, all researchers should have a valid health insurance entitling the holder to free emergency medical treatment in the host country. The responsibility for the provision of adequate insurance against accidents that may occur during the stay in the host country ('arbeidsongevallenverzekering') rests with the research institution to which the researcher stays affiliated during the joint exchange project. The research institution to which the researcher is travelling, shall provide the visitor with all indispensable organisational assistance in situations requiring such steps.

The Chinese budget per project is fixed at 2.000.000 RMB/3 years and should primarily be used for one or more of the following cost categories:

- Equipment Cost
- Operational Cost;
- Labor Cost;

4.3. Application timeline

The call for 2024 will be published in March 2024. The timeline is as follows:

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| • 05 March 2024 | Opening of the call |
| • 22 May 2024 (5pm local time) | FWO deadline for proposals |
| • 23 May 2024 (4pm Beijing time) | NSFC deadline for proposals |
| • May-September 2024 | Eligibility check and peer review |
| • November 2024 | Joint scientific committee appointed by FWO/NSFC |
| • November-December 2024 | Ratification panel decision/communication results |
| • 01 January 2025 | Start of the projects |

5. Evaluation

5.1. Evaluation Procedure

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

1. In a first step the proposals submitted at NSFC will be subjected to the remote peer-review procedure of NSFC. Concomitantly, the proposals submitted at FWO will be subject to international remote peer-review according to the standard procedure at FWO (see [Regulations FWO - Internal and External Peer Review](#)) making use of the evaluation criteria listed in section 5.2.
2. A joint selection panel comprising of experts designated by the FWO and the NSFC 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 boards of FWO and NSFC will thereafter ratify the ranking made by the joint evaluation panel. The involved Flemish and Chinese researchers will be notified about the evaluation results after the ratification by both Boards. In due time, the researchers will also receive the necessary feedback about the decision taken.

5.2. Evaluation criteria

The following criteria will be used by the joint selection committee described in section 5.1.

- Researchers (30%)
 - o Competence of the individual researchers
- Project (40%)
 - o Scientific added value, rationale, and originality
 - o Quality of the research approach (methodology), feasibility and focus
 - o Work plan
- Collaboration (30%)
 - o Added value of the proposed collaboration
 - o Balance in terms of work contribution amongst the diverse research groups

The evaluation score grid that will be used by the joint selection committee members can be consulted [here](#).

6. Intellectual Property

Based on the FWO regulations, Flemish researchers involved in funded FWO-NSFC projects will be obliged to enter into a **partnership agreement** with their Chinese partners 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. The involved host institutions are free to elaborate such a document as long as it contains the necessary basic information.

7. Contact information

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