

First-time proposals

Identification of first-time proposals

Applications for project funding submitted to the DFG by first-time applicants are specially identified as first-time proposals. This label indicates to reviewers that the person submitting the proposal is an early career researcher with as yet little or no experience in applying for third-party funding. It notifies the reviewers evaluating the proposal to take particular account of the applicant's personal potential and the quality of the proposed project and to attribute less weight to project-specific preliminary work or publications.

By specially identifying first-time proposals, the DFG aims to encourage early career researchers to submit their first proposals for third-party funding.

Target group

The first-time proposal system is designed for:

- Early career researchers

- German researchers returning from abroad

- Researchers returning to research after working in industry or taking a career break for family reasons

Identification as a first-time proposal is only valid for individual grants and research grants, i.e. the DFG's core programme for funding short-term projects with specific, limited research aims.

Previous applications for research fellowships, publication and travel expenses, or the establishment of a scientific network are not taken into account.

Proposals submitted for the Emmy Noether or Heisenberg programmes cannot be treated as first-time proposals. If you feel you have the qualities to succeed in these excellence-focused programmes, you must be prepared to encounter a higher level of competition.

Individuals who have previously submitted a proposal for a research grant as a co-applicant and/or currently lead or have led an independent junior research group or a project within a Collaborative Research Centre or Research Unit do not qualify as first-time applicants.

How does a first-time proposal work?

The covering letter accompanying your first research grant proposal should state that this is a first-time proposal. Irrespective of the information you provide, the DFG's Head Office will check your proposal against the necessary criteria. If your proposal does not meet the criteria, it will be treated like any other proposal.

When a first-time proposal is reviewed, less importance is attached to the applicant's project-specific experience and more weighting is given to personal potential and the quality of the proposed project. It is therefore particularly important to present your academic career to date and previous research accomplishments as convincingly as possible. Previous academic work should have been published if this is the norm in your field.

However, although the aim of the measure is to encourage early career researchers to submit independent proposals, first-time applicants must still submit a proposal that convinces the reviewers that the project is deserving of financial support and that they are capable of seeing the project through to a successful conclusion. For this reason it is important to demonstrate, by including details of your academic achievements to date, that you are capable of carrying out independent research and leading your own project.

First-time proposals are subject to the same quality standards as proposals from established researchers. Different levels of experience are of course taken into due consideration. Less experienced researchers who have yet to prove their ability to lead a project would be wise not to submit over-ambitious first-time proposals that are very large in scope.

Goal: academic independence

The first-time proposal system is intended to smooth the way to academic independence. You can also submit a joint first-time proposal with a colleague, who may be another first-time applicant or an experienced researcher. However, in these cases it must be clear who is responsible for which aspects of the project. It is not advisable to name a respected and experienced colleague as a co-applicant unless he/she is making a substantial contribution to the project. Doing so will not increase the chances of your proposal being approved. Naming a co-author on a merely 'honorary' basis would be in contravention of good scientific practice.