



**FFG**

Promoting Innovation.

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**COMET COMPETENCE CENTERS FOR EXCELLENT  
TECHNOLOGIES**

**GUIDELINES FOR COMET MODULES**

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This document is a translated version of the original German version. In cases of unclear formulation, the German version is the decisive document.

## **1 PREAMBLE**



FFG is your partner for research and development. This guideline is designed to support you in submitting your COMET Module application. It describes:

- how to obtain funding
- what conditions must be met
- how the application process works

The goals and priorities, the budget and the submission deadlines relevant to your project are described in the corresponding call-guidelines.

## 2 THE BASIS FOR GETTING FUNDED

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### 2.1 COMET

COMET comprises three lines.

#### The 3-line model enables

- access to COMET via a COMET Project in a consortium (min. 1 scientific partner, min. 3 company partners)
- development of competences and human resources in a physical COMET Centre (min. 1 scientific partner, min. 5 company partners)
- opening up of new research areas for a COMET Centre via a COMET Modules (min. 1 scientific partner, min. 3 company partners)

The COMET lines are assigned to FFGs instruments summarized under "Structure", which serve to establish and improve structures of research and innovation.

#### Overview of COMET lines

All COMET lines (COMET Project, COMET Centre, COMET Module) are characterised by high research expertise and links to science as well as by high relevance of implementation in industry.

All lines are open with regard to research fields and topics, but each individual project must focus on a clearly defined theme. The research programme is defined jointly by science and industry and does not simply constitute a conglomeration of individual projects, but creates substantial added value as a result of cooperation and joint strategic orientation.

The degree of novelty of the research, and therefore the strategic orientation, is increasing from COMET Project to COMET Centre to COMET Module. While research programmes of COMET Projects and COMET Centres consist of a relevant mix of strategic and multi-firm projects, COMET Modules, due to their high degree of novelty, focuses exclusively on strategic research, which is also reflected by the high funding rate (80%).

Bilateral research collaborations (single-firm projects) in COMET Projects and COMET Centres must be limited to a maximum of 20% of eligible costs. No single-firm projects are allowed for COMET Modules.

COMET Centres can have projects focusing rather on basic oriented research with higher funding and more application-oriented projects with lower funding. Thus there is no specified funding rate, but rather a funding range, depending on the type of research (basic research, industrial research, experimental development). In contrast, a fixed funding rate of 80% was specified for COMET Modules due to their high degree of novelty.

COMET addresses enterprises of all sectors and sizes. The rates defined for financial contributions from companies apply at project level and don't have to be met by each individual company.

**The strategic objectives of COMET are:**

- **Developing and focussing competences** through long-term research cooperation between science and industry at the highest level.
- **Strengthening Austria as a business location:** accelerating technology transfer to industry should serve to create new products, processes and services, open up new markets and increase the innovative capacity of companies.
- **Strengthening Austria as a research location:** excellent cooperative research should trigger new research impulses and establish promising/ emerging fields of research.
- **Strengthening the competitiveness of science and industry by driving internationalisation** as a sign of high quality cooperative research: involving internationally-renowned scientists, organisations and companies, positioning COMET Centres as internationally attractive partners, and ongoing benchmarking with top research institutions are designed to generate an edge in international competition.
- **Establishing and developing human resources:** increasingly attracting scientists of international renown, creating structured career models for scientists, and actively supporting intersectoral mobility for research personnel in order to intensify the transfer of know-how.

**Sustainability:**

The call makes reference to the global Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (SDGs) and the European elements of the EU Green Deal. More detailed information can be found in chapter 6.2 and on the [FFG Website](#).

## 2.2 What are COMET Modules?

COMET Modules aim to establish promising/emerging fields of research and to develop thereby new fields of expertise in order to strengthen Austria as a research location and prepare it for the challenges of the future. COMET Modules are characterised by particularly high-risk research.

COMET Modules are thematically defined research units that perform excellent research on the highest level to open up new fields of research way beyond the current state of the art. This enables research with particularly high-risk. Incremental research is not a goal of COMET Modules.

In COMET Modules the COMET Centres have to cooperate with the best researchers and research institutions on a national and international level in order to achieve an international top position that is to be ensured through continuous benchmarking with the best.

Central to each application is a research programme defined jointly by science and industry which does not simply constitute a conglomeration of individual projects but, as a result of cooperation and joint strategic orientation, creates substantial added value as defined by the COMET objectives.

COMET Modules consists, due to the high degree of novelty required, exclusively of strategic projects (see glossary). The participation of companies is possible, but single-firm projects (with the participation of only one company) are ruled out.

The COMET Module generally consists of individual projects of reasonable and adequate size.

Rights and obligations of the partners are to be specified in a cooperation (consortium) agreement (see glossary).

These requirements have to be met:

- 4 year duration.
- Public funding: 80 %
- Funding amount:
  - max. 2 million Euro federal and 1 million Euro provincial funding for 4 years
  - max. 0,5 million Euro federal and 0,25 million Euro provincial funding per year
  - Share of participating research institutions: 5%
  - Share of participating companies: 15%.
- The consortium leader has to be situated in Austria.
- The consortium leader is the contact to FFG.
- The consortium leader submits the application.
- Only existing COMET Centres (K1) and COMET Centres (K2) of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Call are eligible for application.
- COMET Modules have to start during the regular runtime (excluding Phasing-out) of an existing COMET Centre.

- A maximum of 2 Modules per COMET Centre can be applied for in each call and a maximum of 2 Modules per COMET Centre can be funded at the same time.

## 2.3 What are the requirements for a consortium?

### The consortium consists of

- at least one (1) **research and knowledge dissemination organisation** (research organisation – see [General Block Exemption Regulation \(GBER\): Commission Regulation \(EU\) No. 651/2014, amended by Commission Regulation \(EU\) 2023/1315 of 23.06.2023](#) and
- at least three (3) **companies** with one or more participants that are independent of each other. Participants are independent, if they own less than 25% of capital or voting right of each other (for more information regarding affiliated entities see [SME definition](#)).

### Additional requirements to the consortium

- Participation in the consortium is evidenced by a **Letter of Commitment (LOC)** including the relevant contribution.

A collaboration with other non-commercial institutions is possible. In this case, the requirements to the consortium still have to be fulfilled.

### Requirements for the cooperation with research organisations:

- Research institutions must have the right to publish the results they have obtained in the project.
- Contract research and the provision of research services are not considered as collaborations within the definition of a cooperative R&D project.

The consortium (cooperation) agreement regulates the collaboration within the consortium and the intellectual property rights (IPR) relating to the project results. A [sample consortium agreement](#) is available to help you in drawing up a consortium agreement.

The conditions to the consortium have still to be fulfilled at the end of the project. If there are changes during the project not according to the demanded consortium structure, a reclaim of the funding is possible.

## 2.4 What are the responsibilities of the consortium leader?

The consortium leader (the COMET Centre) has the following responsibilities throughout the project duration:

- project management
- communications with the funding agency and the project participants
- examining the reports and accounts provided by the consortium partners



In your capacity as consortium leader you confirm, that:

- you manage the funding yourself
- you communicate any changes in due time
- you provide accounts and reports in accordance with the funding contract

The consortium leader must ensure that a legally valid cooperation (consortium) agreement has been concluded prior to the start of the project, in which all the regulations required by the [Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation of the 20.10.2022 \(hereinafter Community Framework\)](#) have been agreed. Moreover, the consortium leader confirms that:

- the costs charged can be clearly attributed to the COMET Module.
- the project costs and content are in accordance with the approval.

## 2.5 Who is eligible for funding?

The COMET Centre is the sole funding recipient (and contracting party). Participating companies and scientific organisations are not funding recipients, but may claim eligible costs relevant for the calculation of the total funding amount.

The granting of funding for a COMET Module depends on the existence of the COMET Centre.

- If the COMET Centre ends before the start of the COMET Module, an application is not possible.
- If the COMET Centre ends before the end of the COMET Module, the continuation of the COMET Module has to be applied for and will be approved by FFG.

Legal entities, partnerships and sole traders that are not part of the Austrian federal administration are eligible for funding.

### Eligible for funding:

- Companies of any legal form
- Institutions of research and knowledge dissemination
  - Universities (see glossary)
  - Universities of applied sciences
  - Non-university research institutions
  - Technology transfer institutions, innovation agents and other research-oriented organisations such as associations with a relevant purpose
- Other non-commercial institutions
  - Local authorities and autonomous bodies (Note: Activities of local authorities falling within their statutory mandate are not eligible for funding)
  - Non-profit making organisations such as NPOs (see glossary)

**Eligible for participation but not for funding:**

- Subcontractors: they are not participants within the definition of a COMET Module. They provide defined tasks for project participants which are listed under the cost category “third-party costs” and are not entitled to exploit the project results.
- Other participants: Their participation has to be justified in the application. Possible "other participants" also include institutions of the Austrian federal administration, provided they neither claim costs nor contribute financially to the project. Their rights and obligations are contractually agreed.

**Not eligible:**

Due to incompatibility, organisations which have, in the name of the FFG or the funding authority, contributed essentially to the evaluation or the design of a funding measure in connection with this specific call within the last three years, are not allowed to participate in this call in any way.

If this refers to different units of an organisation, a participation in this specific call has to be coordinated with the call management of the FFG. In any case, it has to be explained that no conflict of interest can occur.

The FFG reserves the right to exclude applicants due to incompatibilities.

**Can further COMET Centres participate?**

A co-operation between existing competence centres is possible. The COMET Centres may join as scientific partners in their non-economic area. If existing COMET Centres participate as scientific partners, the projects must be carried out in the Centre’s non-COMET area (see glossary).

## **2.6 Can partners from outside Austria participate?**

A consortium may have participants from outside Austria.

A major aim of COMET is to promote internationalisation by involving internationally renowned researchers, organisations and companies in order to strengthen the competitiveness of science and industry. The participation of international partners is therefore desired and should be set out accordingly in the application.

The following conditions apply:

The non-Austrian partners accept the FFG’s obligation and entitlement to review the project as specified in the funding contract and submit relevant documentary evidence in German or English.

The European [EUREKA](#) initiative provides funding support for cross-border collaborations across calls. The call guidelines will specify whether these collaborative agreements can be used for COMET Modules.

Organisations from outside Austria may also be involved as subcontractors.

## 2.7 How much support is granted?

Support is paid in the form of non-repayable grants and is limited to a maximum of **2 million EUR federal funding** and **1 million EUR provincial funding** per project over the four-year duration of the COMET Module

The maximum amount of federal funding is **0.5 million EUR per year**. The provinces have committed themselves to provide additional funds at a fixed **ratio of 2:1**, and therefore max **0.25 million EUR** per year. The total amount of provincial funding can be divided between several participating provinces.

The overall **funding rate** for the COMET Module is **80%**, due to the high degree of novelty and ground breaking research.

- Prerequisite for the funding of research institutions is the non-commercial contribution.
- It has to be stated in the application if additional funding is granted by any other funding institution.

Non-commercial activities of research institutions include:

- primary activities such as education
- research and development, independent or as part of an effective collaboration
- knowledge dissemination and transfer (see [Community Framework](#))

The research category must be clearly specified for each individual project. A distinction is made between basic research (see glossary) and industrial research (see glossary).

## 2.8 How are COMET Modules financed?

The total financing of a COMET Module comprises public funding (federal and provincial funding) as well as contributions of scientific participants and companies:

- |   |      |
|---|------|
| – Public funding:                       | 80 % |
| – Contribution scientific participants: | 5 %  |
| – Contribution companies:               | 15 % |

The balance must be covered.

Example of financing for a COMET Module in EUR per year with a funding rate of 80% and maximum eligible funding:

Table 1: Example of financing for a COMET Module

Type of contribution / cost	Amount in EUR	amount in %
<b>Federal funding (max.)</b>	<b>500.000</b>	<b>53,33%</b>
<b>Provincial funding (max.)</b>	<b>250.000</b>	<b>26,67%</b>
<b>Contribution of scientific participants</b>	<b>46.875</b>	<b>5,00%</b>
<b>Contribution of companies</b>	<b>140.625</b>	<b>15,00%</b>
<b>Total costs</b>	<b>937.500</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

### 2.8.1 Contribution of scientific participants

The accumulated contributions of the scientific participants must be at least 5% of the eligible overall costs and cannot be replaced by contributions from companies. Contributions can be up to 100% in-kind.

In-kind contributions are contributions in the form of materials and/or manpower. Cash contributions are payments in cash.

### 2.8.2 Contribution of companies

The contributions of the participating companies must be at least 15% of the eligible overall costs for COMET Module.

Companies may provide both cash contributions and in-kind contributions. As a matter of principle, companies are not allowed to provide general co-financing in the form of a basic subsidy. Costs of the participating companies are to be accounted for as in-kind contributions. Services from participating companies may only be purchased in justified individual cases and require prior approval.

## 2.9 What costs are eligible?

Eligible costs must be allocable directly to the project. This means that:

- they incur during the funding period, additionally to the normal operating costs.
- they are in accordance with the funding contract.
- they can be evidenced by receipts.

For details on the eligibility of costs see the [Cost Guidelines in its current version](#).

The period for which costs may be recognised corresponds to the contractual duration of the COMET Module, which commences with the start date and ends with the conclusion of the project.

## 2.10 What about intellectual property rights?

Intellectual property rights relating to the project results belong to the consortium. The provisions of the [Community Framework](#) apply to collaborations between commercial companies and research institutions.

This document stipulates that the intellectual property rights are to be allocated to the research institutions in a manner which adequately reflects their work, contributions and interests. If the rights are assigned to the companies involved, the research institutions shall receive compensation equivalent to the market price.

Please note in this context that expenditure for the protection of intellectual property (IPR) is eligible for funding. This includes costs for patent applications and patent searches. Patent maintenance costs are not eligible for funding.

## 2.11 What criteria are used to assess applications for funding?

Funding applications will be evaluated according to the following four criteria:

1. Quality of the project
2. Suitability of the project participants
3. Benefit and exploitation
4. Relevance to the call

The table below shows the relevant sub-criteria. In the course of the assessment, points will be assigned to each criterion.

### Evaluation criteria

Table 2: Criterion „Quality of the project“

1. Quality of the project	max. points
<b>1.1 Quality of strategic research in promising/emerging fields</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To what extent does the research programme open up to promising/emerging fields and develop new expertise?</li> <li>– Are the approaches characterised by high risk (no incremental research) and are they designed to meet grand challenges?</li> <li>– Does the research go way beyond the state of the art? Have existing national and international research activities been sufficiently taken into account?</li> <li>– Does the research programme have potential to generate ground-breaking new findings?</li> <li>– Have the objectives of the research programme been described clearly? Are the approaches and methods adequate to achieve these objectives?</li> </ul>	<b>40</b>
	<b>50</b>

<b>1. Quality of the project</b>	<b>max. points</b> <b>50</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What is the added value of the research programme as compared to a sum of individual projects? Do the individual projects complement each other? Do they provide significant synergy effects?</li> </ul>	
<b>1.2 Quality of planning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Are the work and time schedules in line with the planned research programme?</li> <li>– Are the costs and financing plans realistic? Is the size of the individual projects adequate for the strategic research of the COMET-Module?</li> <li>– Are the individual projects coherent in terms of structure and content? Are the collaborative relationships and the allocation of tasks between the partners at project level plausible?</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.3 Gender relevance of the research programme</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– If the content of the project and the research results affect people: Have gender specific topics been taken into account in the planning process?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Quality of the analysis of the gender-specific topics</li> <li>– Consideration in the methodological approach of the project (more information can be found <a href="#">here</a>)</li> </ul> </li> <li>– If the content of the project and the research results do not affect people: Has the lack thereof been adequately explained?</li> </ul> <p>Projects, where the analysis justifiably reveals no gender relevance will receive full points.</p>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.4 Sustainability</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To what extent does the project take into account sustainability goals (ecological, social, economic)?</li> <li>– How is sustainability taken into account in the planning and implementation of the project and is the methodological approach chosen adequate (more information can be found <a href="#">here</a>)?</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>

Table 3: Criterion „Suitability of project participants“

<b>2. Suitability of project participants</b>	<b>max. points</b> <b>20</b>
<b>2.1 Quality of the consortium from a scientific perspective</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Are the scientific qualifications and resources of the consortium sufficient to ensure successful implementation of the research programme?</li> <li>– Can the key persons demonstrate relevant reference projects? Do the key persons have the potential to make new ground-breaking findings?</li> </ul>	<b>8</b>

<b>2. Suitability of project participants</b>	<b>max. points</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Is the consortium complete or does it require additional expertise and relevant partners?</li> </ul>	<b>20</b>
<p><b>2.2 Quality of the consortium in terms of the company partners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To what extent can the company partners contribute to the future exploitation of the results from the research programme?</li> <li>– Do the key companies have the potential to implement new findings on the market?</li> <li>– Is the consortium complete or does it require additional expertise and relevant partners?</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>
<p><b>2.3 Organisation and management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Is the planned management of the COMET Module adequate?</li> <li>– Are the planned target values adequate?</li> </ul>	<b>8</b>

Table 4: Criterion „Benefit and exploitation“

<b>3. Benefit and exploitation</b>	<b>max. points</b>
<p><b>3.1 Market relevance of strategic research in promising/emerging fields</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Do the new research fields address potential future markets with a long-term development potential?</li> <li>– How large is the potential market and what is the competitive advantage and the impact on the sector?</li> <li>– Can the expected research results provide a basis for new ground-breaking technologies?</li> <li>– What are the impacts and effects (positive and negative) of the project in terms of sustainability (social, ecological, economic)?</li> </ul>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>3.2 Benefit and exploitation at the Centre</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Will the research results be exploited at the Centre or by the partners (in the form of IPR, patents, licences, non-COMET projects, etc.)?</li> <li>– Is the work designed to establish a knowledge base for the future of the Centre?</li> </ul>	<b>5</b>

Table 5: Criterion „Relevance to the call“

4. Relevance to the call	max. points
<b>15</b>	
<b>4.1 Development of human resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What measures are put in place to attract internationally renowned researchers to the COMET Module?</li> <li>– Are the measures for recruiting and personnel development coherent with the research programme of the COMET Module?</li> <li>– Are the planned gender mainstreaming measures sufficient? Does the Module provide for a balanced participation of women researchers?</li> </ul>	<b>7</b>
<b>4.2 Internationalisation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Is cooperation with internationally renowned researchers and research institutions planned?</li> <li>– What are the options / the potential of the Centre to reach a top position in the Module’s research area in comparison with the internationally best?</li> </ul>	<b>7</b>
<b>4.3 Incentive effect of funding</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To what extent is the incentive effect of funding necessary to implement the project as proposed?</li> <li>– How do you judge the incentive of funding?</li> <li>– How much does the funding contribute to the project in terms of ambition, speed and scope of the project.</li> </ul>	<b>1</b>

## 2.12 Target values

In COMET, the applicants set target values, which are intended to indicate the expected impact and outcome of the research. The evaluation process reviews the extent to which these values are appropriate and realistic for the respective research area. If necessary, the values can be adjusted by the evaluation committee. Throughout the duration of the project, the progress towards achieving the target values is reported and checked.

## 2.13 Which content and what documents are required for submission?

The required documents or attachments can be found in the call guidelines. The call guideline specify the language in which the application for funding must be written - for COMET Modules this is English.

The document templates are available on the [FFG website](#) and must be used. Explanations can be found in the corresponding templates.

All documents and attachments may only submitted via [eCall](#).



## 2.14 Is it necessary to mention other projects?

To support the assessment of the projects content, the application for funding must list further projects related to the current application. The results of those projects and the generated know-how have to be described. Relevant are:

- Pre-projects which delivered results for the applied project
- Ongoing or finished projects (in the last 3 years) related to the applied project

The multiple acceptance of already funded costs or part of costs is not possible. The proposed project must be clearly distinguished from related projects that have already received funding.

## 2.15 Is scientific integrity ensured?

Funding may only be granted to applicants who demonstrate high scientific integrity during application and project execution.

The FFG is a member of the [Austrian Agency for Research Integrity – OeAWI](#) and is thus committed to safeguarding good scientific practice.

If we suspect a lack of scientific integrity or misconduct in the course of the formal checks or of the proposal check, the relevant documents may be forwarded to the OeAWI's Commission for Scientific Integrity. The OeAWI will then decide whether to initiate an independent investigation procedure and, if necessary, will undertake the necessary investigations.

If the investigation reveals a lack of scientific integrity or misconduct (e.g. plagiarism), the application has to be rejected due to formal reasons. If funding has already been granted, the funding must be reduced, retained or reclaimed.

## 3 SUBMISSION

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### 3.1 What is the procedure for submission?

Applications must be submitted electronically, before the deadline via [eCall](https://ecall.ffg.at): <https://ecall.ffg.at>. The funding application can not be submitted until all participants have submitted their partner applications via eCall.

#### How does it work?

- Download and complete the template for the project description and fill out the annexes from the FFG website.
- Create an application in the eCall, invite partners, enter costs (on an overall level) in the eCall.
- Upload the documents in the eCall (the documents are to be uploaded according to the specified folder structure).
- Complete the application and press " Submit application".
- After successfully submitting the application, a submission confirmation will be sent automatically by e-mail.

#### Not necessary:

- Signature and additional postal submission

#### Not possible:

- Editing or revision after submission of the application.

The application documents are to be submitted by the consortium leader (COMET Centre). FFG may request evidence of power of representation. If such evidence is not provided, FFG reserves the right to reject the application for formal reasons.

Details can be found in the [eCall tutorial](#).

### 3.2 What is the procedure for applying for provincial co-funding?

The provinces support COMET with additional funds of their own to strengthen their respective regional technology policy objectives. This is based on a written agreement between the federal government and the provinces.

Details on provincial funding can be found in the call guidelines.

### 3.3 How will confidential project data be used?

FFG processes the personal data of funding applicants and funding recipients provided by the data subjects as part of the application for funding, data collected by the FFG for the purpose of concluding the funding contract, and data generated by searches in the transparency portal according to Sec. 32 (5) of the Transparency Database Act (TDBG 2012) for the following purposes:

- Processing of the funding application and assessment of whether the general and specific funding requirements have been met,
- Conclusion of the funding contract and (if a funding contract has been concluded) compliance with the relevant contractual obligations, including but not limited to administration of the funding payments and monitoring of compliance with funding requirements,
- Compliance with statutory obligations, including but not limited to reporting obligations and control purposes in order to avoid double funding (i.e. Sec. 38 in conjunction with 18, 27 ARR, as well as Sec. 12 FTFG and Sec. 9 FFG-G).

The legal basis of processing is therefore Art. 6 (1) (b) GDPR, i.e. performance of a contract, and Art 6 (1) (c) GDPR, i.e. compliance with legal obligations.

The personal data will be disclosed to the following institutions in compliance with legal obligations.

- the federal ministries as owners of the FFG, other contracting authorities for the management of funding measures (e.g. other federal ministries, regional governments, KLIEN)
- third parties, which may include the Court of Audit, EU bodies, and other federal or regional funding agencies

National and international experts will get access to the submitted documents for the evaluation of the proposals. Such experts act as processors on behalf of the FFG and are required to take technical and organisational measures to ensure data security and data confidentiality.

Project content and results may only be published (e.g. on the website or in social media forums) with the consent of the funding recipient (Art 6 (1) (a) GDPR) unless the FFG has a legal obligation to do so.

FFG must also obtain the consent of the data subject for any other data use exceeding these provisions.

FFG is under a legal obligation to maintain secrecy concerning company and project information pursuant to Sec. 9 (4) of the Austrian Research Promotion Agency Act (FFG-G, Federal Law Gazette BGBl. I No. 73/2004).

FFG will ensure a level of security appropriate to the risk in terms of confidentiality, integrity, availability and resilience of the systems by implementing technical and organisational measures within the meaning of Art. 32 GDPR that are sufficient and

appropriate for protecting the data against accidental or unlawful destruction, loss and unauthorised access.

Further information about ensuring the confidentiality and security of personal data during the course of the project is available in the [eCall-Tutorial](#).

## 4 ASSESSMENT AND DECISION

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### 4.1 What is the formal check?

In the formal check the application is examined for formal accuracy and completeness.

The FFG communicates the result of the formal check within 4 weeks via eCall:

- If the formal criteria are not met and the deficiencies cannot be corrected, the application for funding will not enter the subsequent steps of the procedure.
- If the deficiencies can be corrected, they may be rectified within a reasonable period of time.

Incorrect information that transpires after the formal check will equally lead to the removal of the funding application from the procedure at a subsequent point.

The checklist for the formal check can be found in the project description template as well as in the call guidelines .

### 4.2 How is the evaluation procedure organised?

National and international experts will review the submitted documents based on the criteria in chapter 2.11.

Taking into account the written reviews, an evaluation panel will make a funding recommendation.

International reviewers (individuals or members of particular organisations) can, in justified cases, be excluded. The eCall provides an corresponding entry field.

FFG experts will check the financial potential, like credit rating and liquidity, of the COMET Centre and the participating enterprises. They may request additional documents that are required for completing the financial check. Undertakings in difficulty cannot participate. The assessment if an enterprise is to be classified as an “undertaking in difficulty“ takes place in accordance with the [General Block Exemption Regulation \(GBER\)](#) being the European legal basis of this funding.

In the course of the assessment, additional recommendations and requirements may be formulated. Recommendations are non-binding remarks of the evaluation panel, aimed to support the consortium in the implementation of the project. Requirements are binding, see chapter 5.2.

### 4.3 Who takes the funding decision?

Information as to who takes the funding decision can be found in the respective call guideline.

## 5 FUNDING PROCEDURE

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### 5.1 How is the funding contract concluded?

In case of a positive funding decision, the FFG will provide the consortium leader with a view in the eCall system containing the most important basic parameters of the funding contract (e.g. amount of funding, amount of eligible costs, start and end date of the funding period, reporting obligations and possible binding requirements).

After acceptance of the view within the given deadline, the FFG prepares the funding contract and delivers it to the consortium leader. The consortium leader returns the duly signed funding contract. Thereby the funding contract is valid in law. Until then, there is no title for being funded. Funding recipient is exclusively the COMET Center.

Separate funding contracts in accordance with the respective terms must be concluded with the co-financing provinces.

### 5.2 How are requirements and recommendations taken into account?

In the course of the assessment of the funding application, binding requirements may be formulated.

Two types of requirements are possible:

- Requirements that must be met prior to the conclusion of a funding contract.
- Requirements that the consortium must meet by during the course of the project.

Requirements are part of the funding contract. Their implementation is to be described in the interim reports.

### 5.3 How are the funding instalments paid?

The first instalment will be paid once the requirements have been met and the funding contract has been signed. Payments are made to the bank account specified by the consortium leader.

Subsequent instalments will be paid in accordance with the progress of the project:

- once the interim reports and interim accounts have been approved
- where necessary: once additional requirements have been met
- according to the FFG instalment scheme

If the interim reports indicate a delay in project progress or if the costs are below budget, the instalment can be reduced.

The payment of funding during the course of the project does not imply approval of the costs. At the end of the term, the required financing quotas of the scientific partners and the companies partners must be met according to the funding agreement / approved cost plan. If these quotas are not met, there may be a proportional reduction in federal funding.

### Instalment scheme

Table 6: COMET Module instalment scheme

Report number and instalment	48 months project duration
<b>Number of reports (interim and final)</b>	4
<b>1<sup>st</sup> instalment in % of funding amount</b>	25 %
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> instalment in % of funding amount</b>	25 %
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> instalment in % of funding amount</b>	25 %
<b>4<sup>th</sup> instalment in % of funding amount</b>	15 %
<b>Final instalment in % of funding amount</b>	10 %

## 5.4 What reports and accounts are required?

- One month after the reporting deadlines specified in the funding contract, an interim report including monitoring data and interim accounts must be submitted via the eCall reporting function.
- Within three months of the conclusion of the project, a final report, a (publishable) summary and the final accounts must be submitted via the eCall reporting function. The publication of a summary may be omitted in case of incompatibility with commercial exploitation, confidentiality obligations because of security reasons or because of data protection regulations.
- If the project is aborted during the project term, the consortium must submit a final report and final accounts. FFG is entitled to reclaim money if the funding already paid exceeds the funding with regard to the eligible costs.

### Requirements for reports and accounts:

- They contain the description of activities and in addition the cost statements of all consortium members mentioned in the funding contract.
- Reports must be prepared using the provided templates.
- FFG will be responsible for reporting, controlling and auditing the COMET Modules with regard to both federal and provincial funding. The consortium leader (COMET Centre) has to send the reports to the relevant bodies of the provinces, as needed. The provinces may accept the results of this audit, but may also perform audits of their own.

Support of public relations: The funding recipients agree to work together with the FFG and the responsible ministries to support PR work, if required. This includes in particular making available non-confidential project information (e.g. fact sheet, success stories) and images for electronic dissemination portals and other media purposes.

## **5.5 How should changes to the project be communicated?**

Any changes to contractual points such as project content, consortium partners, costs, deadlines or funding period must be substantiated and submitted for approval:

- via eCall message
- in the interim or final report

All relevant documents should be uploaded as an attachment to the eCall message or sent by post. Any changes to the contract parameters require the approval of the FFG.

Immediate notification is required for:

- substantial changes to the project
- changes to consortium partners such as new ownership structure or insolvency proceedings

The following changes should be communicated in the interim or final report:

- cost reallocations between cost categories, e. g. material costs to personnel costs

## **5.6 Can the funding period be extended?**

The funding period may be extended for up to one year on a cost-neutral basis, if the project goals have not been achieved and the approved level of costs has not been exceeded.

The following requirements must be met:

- the funding recipients are not responsible for the delay
- the project is still eligible for funding
- an eCall application for extension has been submitted within the approved funding period



## 5.7 When will the review take place?

For COMET Modules a review (see glossary) is foreseen for the mid of their duration. This allows for a first feedback and is primarily of advisory character. It assesses the degree to which goals have been achieved and reviews development and management as well as implementation of planned measures.

The results of the review is a set of recommendations for the remaining duration of the COMET Module.

## 5.8 What happens after the conclusion of the project?

After the end of the project the FFG Project Controlling & Audit Division will examine whether the funding has been used appropriately. The audit will establish the final level of eligible costs.

You will receive the result of the audit in writing:

- In the event of a positive result, the appropriate use of the funding will be confirmed.
- In the event of a negative result, procedures may be initiated to secure repayment of funding.

Funding details: If the specified costs have been reached, the fixed final instalment will be transferred. If the project has underspent, funding will be reduced accordingly. The amount of funding may also be reduced due to content-related, formal and legal reasons.

For more information about eligible costs, see the [Cost Guidelines in their current version](#).

## 6 ANNEX

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### 6.1 Glossary

#### Incentive Effect

Funding can only be found compatible if it has an incentive effect. An incentive effect occurs where the aid changes the behaviour of an undertaking in such a way that it engages in additional activities, which it would not carry out or it would carry out in a restricted or different manner or at another location without the aid.

The following criteria may be used in addition to other factors as evidence of the incentive effect:

Implementation: the funding enables the project to be implemented in the first place

- Acceleration: the funding accelerates implementation
- Scope: the funding increases the scope of the project
- Range: the funding makes the project more ambitious through:
  - a more radical innovation approach
  - higher risk
  - new or extended collaborations
  - long-term strategic orientation

#### Cash- contributions

Cash contributions are payments in cash.

#### Excellence

The concept of excellence refers both to the excellent quality of science and the orientation towards implementation and application. The assessment of excellence is carried out by experts as part of the evaluation and is based on the unique selling points of the research program presented compared to the current international state of the art, as presented in the application.

#### Research programme

A research programme is defined jointly by science and industry and outlines the area of activity for the COMET Module. A research programme must relate to a clearly defined subject matter.

#### Basic Research

Basic research is experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new basic knowledge, without any particular application or use in view.

## **Industrial research**

Industrial research includes planned research or critical investigation to acquire new knowledge and abilities with the aim to develop new products, procedures or services or significantly improve existing ones.

This may also include:

- developing parts of complex systems
  - if required for the validation of technological fundamentals
  - building prototypes in a laboratory environment or in an environment with simulated interfaces to existing systems
  - building pilot lines

Industrial research does not extend beyond the proof of concept. Industrial research takes place mainly in the laboratory or at laboratory scale. The development risk is higher than for experimental development. The technology readiness level is lower. The time horizon for market introduction is longer.

## **In-kind contributions**

In-kind contributions are provided in the form of non-cash contributions and/or manpower.

## **Key Researcher**

Key Researchers are renowned scientists who owing to their expertise and standing will exercise a significant influence on the further development of the relevant research topic or programme. As a rule, such Key Researchers will be recruited from among the scientific partners (e.g. university professors).

## **Consortium Agreement**

The Consortium Agreement is concluded by the consortium partners involved (Centre, company partners, scientific partners) and defines the basic principles of cooperation within the COMET Module. The issues to be regulated include, but are not limited to, the rights and obligations of the contracting parties, IPRs, liability issues, organisational and decision-making procedures, admission and withdrawal of partners, aims and reporting obligations.

## **Non-COMET-area**

COMET Centres should develop a “Non-COMET area” complementing the research programme funded under the COMET (“COMET area”). It serves to carry out contract research for companies (company partners or other clients) in market-oriented fields at full cost and to fulfil complementary objectives of public interest, e.g. of the provinces. Other funded national and international projects (e.g. EU projects, etc.) are also carried out within the Non-COMET area.

## **NPOs**

A "non-profit organization" does, according to its legal status or according to its statutes, not distribute any profits to owners, members or other natural or legal bodies.

### **Public funding**

Public funding comprises federal and provincial funding.

### **Projects**

Projects are defined as research units to be carried out within the framework of a COMET Module and must be described in project sheets in the application; projects are divided into work packages. The size of the project must be appropriate to the planned activities.

### **Review**

For COMET Modules, a so-called review is planned halfway through the duration. The aim is to determine whether the content and results planned in the application appear to be reachable by the end of the term. The written content is assessed by external experts. In an online meeting any questions will be answer and discussed.

### **Strategic research projects**

Strategic research projects are characterised by a high degree of novelty and excellence and are based on a Centre's long-term objectives beyond the short-term requirements of company partners. They should drive new research impetus in their fields and be open to high-risk research. Such research is generally far from development and implementation.

### **Province of domicile**

The province of domicile is the province in which the COMET Centre is based.

### **Universities**

The smallest possible organisational unit of a university that is able to participate as a scientific partner is a university institute or a comparable unit according to UOG 2002/§20. To participate, these organisational units have to possess the necessary power of attorney according to UOG 2002/§ 27. Organisational units underneath the level of university institutes or comparable units (e.g. work groups) may not participate as project partners.

### **Companies**

Enterprises that are independent of each other hold less than 25% of the capital or voting rights in one another. This rule also applies to shareholdings via parent companies. For more information see [SME definition](#)

## 6.2 Sustainability

Responsible and future-oriented research and development seeks to achieve the current European and global goals that are designed to put us on a path to a sustainable future. Research funding must therefore be in line with the objectives of the two underlying initiatives, i.e. the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (SDGs) and the eight elements of the EU Green Deal.

Based on the [2030 Agenda](#), the United Nations adopted in 2015 a set of **17 Sustainable Development Goals** (UN SDGs) which Austria, as a UN member state, pledged to achieve.

The specific sub-goals of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) which are of relevance for Austria and can be practically implemented at the national level can be found on the website of the [Federal Chancellery](#)

In 2019 the European Commission published the [EU Green Deal](#), a strategy comprising eight elements with the aim to make Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050.

The topic of sustainability was therefore integrated into the assessment criteria of the present funding instrument. Both funding applicants and funding recipients are required to describe and report on how their project contributes to achieving the ecological, social and economic sustainability goals and how sustainability aspects are taken into account in project planning, implementation and exploitation.

Further information is also available on the [FFG website](#).

## 6.3 Call milestones

Figure 1: Milestones of a call

