Bf3R research funding of the German Centre for the Protection of Laboratory Animals at the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment

Background

The BfR's Bf3R research funding is announced every two years in spring (usually at the end of March) and funds research projects that address the 3Rs principle and serve to replace and reduce the use of laboratory animals in areas of medical research or basic biological research, or aim to identify, classify and reduce pain, suffering or harm in laboratory animals and improve the conditions under which laboratory animals are kept.

Application requirements[1]

The following criteria for the allocation of grants must be strictly observed:

- Please refer to the **FAQs** (see below), as they contain valuable information and tips for submitting your application and address frequently asked questions.

- The **application** consists of a detailed **project description** and the **BfR application package** (research application on an expenditure basis (AZA) or cost basis (AZK). Whether your institution submits an application on an expenditure or cost basis depends on the organizational structure of your institution. Your institution's administration will provide the necessary information. The project description must strictly follow a proposal structure outline prescribed by the BfR. Templates for the BfR application folder and the project description can be found on the Bf3R website at
www.bf3r.de.

- The complete application must be **legally signed** (e.g., by the dean of the university). Your institution's administration will also provide guidance on this matter. Simply sign the application by hand, add the institute's stamp and your name in block capitals, scan it and send it to us electronically. Alternatively, you are also welcome to use a qualified digital signature. The signed project description is to be submitted as a PDF file, and the BfR application folder is to be submitted as an Excel file and as a signed PDF file. Please note that the signature of the project leader alone is not sufficient.

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[1] The "Guidelines for Grant Applications on a Cost Basis (AZK) or on an Expenditure Basis (AZA) of the BfR" must be observed.

- The **BfR logo** is protected by trademark and copyright laws and may only be used with a license issued by the BfR. Therefore, we kindly request that you refrain from using the BfR logo in your application.

- The complete application (legally signed project description as PDF file + application package as Excel file **and** as legally signed PDF file) must be submitted electronically to the BfR at extramurale_forschung@bfr.bund.de. Only signed applications received by the deadline will be officially evaluated as applications.

Templates

1.) BfR application folder (.xls and .pdf)

    a) on an expenditure basis (AZA) or

    b) on a cost basis (AZK)

2.) Project description (.pdf)

FAQs

- **What should I bear in mind with regard to the Bf3R research funding from the BfR in terms of the call for proposals, duration and funding volume?**
Bf3R research funding is announced every two years in spring (usually in March). Information on this can be found on our website www.bf3r.de. This is a single-stage procedure. Innovative projects with excellent scientific quality may be considered for potential funding of up to 3 years. The requested funding volume per year must be transparently derived from the work program. The required funds should be based on the needs for the successful implementation of the project and must align with the funding policy objectives of 3R research. Depending on the quality and originality of the submitted applications, the funding volume may be adjusted according to the available total budget (approximately €350,000 per year). We therefore request a realistic assessment of the necessary funding requirements.

- **Is a 65% salary for doctoral candidates possible?**
The allocation of funds (personnel, materials, travel expenses, etc.) is entirely up to the applicants and should be clearly justified in the application. A 65% salary for doctoral candidates is therefore fundamentally possible but, of course, must comply with the relevant regulations of your organizational unit.

- **Who is eligible to apply?**

  Eligible to apply are those based in Germany: Governmental and non-governmental Universities, non-university research institutions and companies of the industry with research and development capacity.

  Scientists from all disciplines who have completed their scientific training (usually a doctorate), professors and also doctoral students are expressly encouraged to submit a research proposal, provided they can demonstrate the laboratory equipment required to carry out the project and it is evident that the project will be successfully completed. The aim is to give young researchers in particular the opportunity to work on innovative and daring research ideas that challenge established knowledge and question conventional hypotheses within the framework of a *proof-of-concept* study in order to collect experimental data for a successful application to larger funding programmes (e.g. DFG, BMBF).

- **Is my proposal topic suitable?**

  In principle, innovative topics that address the 3R principle (*Reduce, Replace, Refine*) are suitable. High priority is given to research projects that aim to recognise, classify and reduce pain, suffering or harm in laboratory animals and improve husbandry conditions, or to replace and reduce the number of laboratory animals in areas of medical research or basic biological research. Innovative *virtual reality* and *in silico* methods, as well as technologies in the field of molecular biology, genetics and microscopy, using 3D cell culture, organ-on-a-chip, tissue engineering, 3D simulation and bioimaging are explicitly desired. It is important that the research project is new and has not been worked on by the applicant or by another research group in the manner presented.

- **What are the components of a complete application and what is the difference between the AZA/AZK application folder and the project description?**

  The complete application includes a project description as a legally signed PDF file **and** an AZA (expenditure basis) - or AZK (cost basis) application package as an Excel file and as a legally signed PDF file). The project description and the application package are submitted in electronic version at extramurale_forschung@bfr.bund.de.

  The project description corresponds to the BfR proposal structure outline and should explain the research project in detail. Guidelines for this can be found on the Bf3R website in the *project description* template. The project description offers applicants the opportunity to present their research project as extensively and in as much detail as they need in order to convince the reviewers. It should explain the objective of the project as precisely as possible and include a detailed classification of the 3Rs concept, including a detailed explanation of whether animal experiments are carried out in the field of research addressed by the proposed project (see, for example, https://www.animaltestinfo.de/) and whether alternative methods already exist in this field of research

(https://www.bf3r.de/de/datenbanken_fuer_alternativmethoden-291359.html). Preliminary work for the proposed project is not mandatory but can be included to support the project, along with a list of the methods and experimental procedures used. Risks associated with individual work steps and possible alternatives ("Plan B") should be mentioned. A successful administrative evaluation requires a transparent presentation of the own contribution and the requested funds, which includes a precise listing of the personnel involved in the project (also cooperation partners).

The application package is necessary for administrative processing and contains all the necessary information and details required in the case of project funding. It contains a clear brief summary of the project description and provides all essential information in a concentrated form and at a glance. Furthermore, the application folder contains a short summary for the Research Programme Database (FPD) of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL). Among other things, the FPD serves to provide an overview of all projects funded by the BMEL's departmental research institutions.

Note, that the application package does not replace the project description in any way.

- **Are applications submitted on an expenditure basis or on a cost basis?**
  Whether applications are submitted on an expenditure basis or on a cost basis depends on the organisational form of your institution. The administration of your institution will provide you with the necessary information.

- **What criteria are used to group my project into the 3Rs relevance?**
  In 1959, William Russel and Rex Burch published the principle of 3Rs - *Replace*, *Reduce*, *Refine* as a tenet of experimental science. The aim is to reduce animal experiments to an indispensable level and to care for the welfare of laboratory animals.

  Replacement (replacement/avoidance of animal experiments):
  A scientific question is addressed with the aim of replacing animal experiments with alternative methods. For example, invertebrates, cell and tissue cultures, computer models or other replacement methods are used to replace a specific animal experiment or to identify methods / underlying molecular mechanisms that help to reduce animal experiments in a specific research area that usually uses many laboratory animals.

  Reduction (reduction of laboratory animals):
  Animal experiments are optimised with the aim of reducing the number of laboratory animals to an indispensable level. This includes, for example, optimised experimental design, statistical/biometric methods and centralised recording of the results of animal experiments, e.g. to prevent duplication of animal experiments.

Refinement (improvement of animal experiments):
Animal experiments are carried out with the aim of reducing the stress and suffering of the laboratory animal as much as possible and creating an improvement in the living conditions of laboratory animals.

- **Are certain 3R criteria prioritized for funding?**
  No, there is no preference between the individual 3R categories of *Replacement*, *Refinement*, and *Reduction* when it comes to funding. All categories are considered equally.

- **What needs to be considered for projects with an animal experiment component?**
  In order to improve the transparency and quality of research and to avoid unnecessary animal experiments, projects with an animal experiment component (e.g. in the refinement *area*) must be registered on the "Animal Study Registry" (ASR) platform at the Bf3R in the event of funding. Further information can be found online at:
  http://www.animalstudyregistry.org/

- **Are preliminary work and publications required?**
  Preliminary work for the proposed project is not mandatory but can be included to support the project, along with a list of the methods and experimental procedures used. Preliminary work and/or publications demonstrating the expertise of the applicants in the research field can be provided by the project leader and/or co-applicants. Please refrain from submitting CVs, as they will not be considered in the evaluation process.

- **Can only individual applications be submitted or also collaborative projects?**
  Both individual proposals and collaborative projects can be submitted. It is important that the collaborative project makes sense and brings added value in terms of project innovation, conception, use of personnel and equipment and/or general scientific prospects of success compared to the respective individual applications. Only when the collaborative project is approved, cooperation agreement must be concluded between the partners. Please include the full name of your collaboration partner under "Involvement of Third Parties" in the project description and attach a signed letter of declaration from your cooperation partner to your application documents. Several persons from one institution can also be joint applicants (e.g., doctoral student or postdoc and professor). In the case of the direct involvement of the head of the organization in the application process, the complete application must be signed by an independent person.

- **What must be taken into account for collaborative projects?**
  Collaborative projects are evaluated as a group. This means that if a collaborative partner is not considered worthy of funding during the evaluation, the entire collaborative project is considered rejected. Individual sub-projects cannot be considered separately from collaborative projects for funding.
  The project description is provided in a joint document. However, separate AZA or AZK application folders are submitted for each collaborative partner. Partners without financial participation do not have to submit an application folder.

- **How detailed does the project description have to be?**
  The project description serves to convince the reviewers. Therefore, it should be written as comprehensibly as necessary and as precisely as possible in order to emphasise the core statements. As a rule, proposals should not exceed 30-35 pages. For orientation, please use and follow the template for the *project description* on the Bf3R website with all important points to be addressed that are required for a review.

- **Can the project description and the application portfolio also be submitted in English?**
  As a rule, the project description and application portfolio are written in German. If a submission is only possible in English, the applicant is requested to provide a German translation of the summary in the application folder.

- **How will my data be processed or passed on?**
  In order to process the application, personal data will be processed in accordance with Art. 6 Para. 1, lit. e, DSGVO in conjunction with § 3 BDSG (name, address, e-mail, telephone number).
  The personal data and other information contained in the application will be collected, processed and used by the BfR and its representatives within the scope of their responsibility. Disclosure of this data to other bodies is governed by the Federal Data Protection Act (BDSG) or legal provisions preceding it (Section 1 (3) BDSG).
  In the case of funding of the project application, the funding recipient, topic, summary of the project (short summary incl. problem definition) incl. project-related keywords and the amount of federal funding are regularly published by the BfR in databases.

- **How exactly should the personal contribution be quantified?**
  The own contribution includes the contributions that the applicants themselves make to the research project and must be listed in detail in the project description. It will be asked for as a non-monetary contribution, such as personnel directly involved in the project or the use of

existing material resources and access to existing equipment. Separate proof of these own contributions is not required.

It should be noted that the chances of success of a project depend not least on the persons available to design the project and carry it out in the laboratory. Therefore, it is requested that the composition of the personnel and their respective tasks that contribute to the success of the project are stated precisely. The participation in the project should be given as a percentage (e.g., scientific MA 20%, project management 30%, TA 50%, etc.). It is also requested to list cooperation partners and their declaration of consent (a short confirmation is sufficient).

If own financial resources (own funds) or further third-party funds / income are brought in for the implementation of the project, these must be shown and taken into account in the application file under project expenditure and in the annual financing plan.

- **Is there "overhead" funding?**
  No, there is no "overhead" funding.

- **How long does the review process for applications take, when can I expect a response, and when does funding begin?**
  After the application deadline, all applicants receive a written acknowledgement of receipt by e-mail. The evaluation is conducted in a joint meeting with all reviewers, who identify projects worthy of funding based on the following criteria, provided the application documents are complete and the points under "**Application requirements**" (see above) have been observed:

  3R relevance, scientific quality (e.g. project idea, scientific standard), quality of the project description (e.g. structure, innovation, work packages, milestones, time planning, methods, "Plan B"), scientific excellence of the applicants (e.g. infrastructure, preliminary work, expertise), expenditure planning/economy (e.g. personnel, material, travel funds).

  After the evaluation is completed and a decision is made regarding the allocation of funds, the institution will be informed in writing whether their funding application has been approved or rejected. This typically occurs five months after the application deadline. Project leaders are notified via email with a copy of the original letter attached. Subsequently, funding decisions are issued and sent to all recipients (project leaders) by post and email.

  The start of funding depends on administrative processing and budgetary regulations. It will be coordinated with the grant recipients and scheduled no earlier than fall or January of the following year.

- **What criteria are used to select the reviewers and can individual reviewers be excluded?**
  An appropriate funding decision is made on the basis of the opinions of competent and unbiased reviewers from the Bf3R/BfR and external research institutes who have their own

research experience and a good knowledge of the scientific community. The participation of persons with a bias is excluded. In the application, applicants may name individual reviewers who are to be excluded, e.g., due to bias.

- **Can I resubmit my project if it is not funded?**
  Yes, projects that were not funded in the current funding round can be resubmitted as part of the next Bf3R call for proposals. The project will be reviewed again and will compete with all submitted proposals.

- **Is there an overview of projects that have already been funded?**
  Yes, a list of previously funded research projects can be found on our website at www.bfr.bund.de.

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