



AXA
Research Fund
Through Research, Protection

Post-Doctoral applications Guidelines

2014

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1. About this guide

This guide contains all the necessary information to apply for a Post-Doctoral fellowship financed by the AXA Research Fund (ARF). You will also find a general overview of our selection process.

2. Eligibility criteria

2. 1 General information

2.1.1 Institutions

To apply for these fellowships, institutions must be registered with the AXA Research Fund. The AXA Research Fund does not accept unsolicited applications from individual applicants.

Please note that although a given candidate may be presented twice by the same institution, she/he cannot submit the same proposal twice.

Applications must be submitted by the research institution to which the candidate's host laboratory belongs, and where the post-doctoral work is to be carried out.

2.1.2 Candidates

Applicants must comply with the following conditions in order to be submitted for peer-review and final selection by the Scientific Board of the AXA Research Fund:

- Applications must be filled out in English.
- A candidate can be presented through one institution only.
- Candidates must have defended their Ph.D. thesis before the beginning of their Post-Doctoral grant.
- Less than 5 years since awarding of first Ph.D. Extensions to this period may be allowed in case of eligible career breaks which must be properly documented.
- We wish to finance projects from start to finish: projects that are already underway are thus not eligible for funding with the ARF.

ARF Post- Doc grants are not compatible with permanent academic positions.

2.2 Geographical scope

Our geographical scope for Post-Doc funding includes:

- Member states of the European Union,
- Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Bahrain, Belarus, Brazil, China, Croatia, Hong Kong, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Malaysia, Mexico, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Norway, Oman, the State of Qatar, Philippines, the Republic of Macedonia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam

Only host institutions located within this geographical scope are eligible to present candidates to our Post-Doc funding campaigns.

Please note that this geographical scope is reviewed on a yearly basis.

2.3 Eligible research fields

The mission of the AXA Research Fund is to fund basic research dedicated to a better understanding of risk. The word risk as we understand it is connected to:

Phenomena that are perceived - or yet to be perceived - as hazards or threats and which must be identified and measured for frequency and impact.

Post-Doctoral projects funded by the AXA Research Fund must be related to one of the general topics listed below, and should contribute to a better understanding of one of these three clusters of risks:

Environmental risks

- Climate change, from glacier retreat to sea-level rise.
- Natural hazards, from earth hazards to atmospheric and space-weather phenomena.
- Human-driven environmental changes such as urban pollution, nanotechnologies or pesticide exposure.

Life risks

- Aging and long-term care, e.g. trends in individual longevity, age-related diseases, population demographics
- Biomedical risks, from the analysis and evolution of infectious diseases and pandemics to exposure to new technologies.
- Addictions and risky behaviors, from the perspectives of psychology, biology, medicine, etc.

NB: The AXA Research Fund wishes to finance basic research only. This excludes R&D research programs, as well as clinical trials involved in clinical research projects. Please note that research programs aimed at understanding the fundamental mechanisms of a disease and its impact on health are considered basic.

Socio-economic Risks

- Geopolitical risks, e.g. access to natural resources, international and civil conflicts, political upheavals, international security.
- Macro-economic and financial systemic risks, i.e. all uncertainties affecting the aggregate behavior of the economy.
- Individual and collective behaviors towards uncertainty
- Large corporate risks, from internal corporate governance risks to threats and challenges inherent to the corporate environment.

2.4 Ethical disclaimer

For ethical reasons, the AXA Research Fund does not finance research in the following areas:

- research violating national regulations, research having direct military use
- research having potentially dangerous environmental impact, research relying on the artificial production of highly infectious pathogens with potential large scale harmful/lethal effects for humans
- biomedical research led without the informed consent of the donors research on embryonic stem cells
- research processing private personal data without the informed consent of the concerned parties (incl. genetic information)
- research activities aiming at human cloning

3. Our application & selection process

The application and selection processes have been modified so that the effort of candidates is proportional to the chance of success at each stage of the process. It is organized in three steps:

- **First Round: Selection of institutions**

The operational contact fills in the form in which the fields the institution wants to propose candidates on the AXA Research Fund's application website.

Opening: October 18th, 2013

Closing: November 15th, 2013 at noon (Paris Time GMT +1)

- **Second Round: Submission of Outline proposal and pre-selection**

- a. Internal selection of candidates by the Institution: The operational contact submits the names and emails of the pre-selected candidates.

Opening: November 25th, 2013

Closing: December 16th, 2013 at noon (Paris Time GMT +1)

- b. Submission of the outline proposals: candidates are provided with an access to the application platform to submit their outline proposals.

Opening: December 17th, 2013

Closing: January 9th, 2014 at noon (Paris Time GMT +1)

- **Third round: Submission of Full proposal and selection**

- a. Submission of Full proposals: Pre-selected candidates are invited to submit a full proposal on the application website.

Opening: February 13th, 2014

Closing: March 13th, 2014 at noon (Paris Time GMT +1)

- b. Interview by AXA experts: Pre-selected candidates are interviewed to assess their ability to popularize and share their research with non academics.

Opening: March 13th, 2014

Closing: April 8th, 2014

- c. Rebuttal phase: Pre-selected candidates are given the opportunity to answer to the evaluation performed, to correct factual errors or misunderstandings

Opening: April 21th, 2014

Closing: April 28th, 2014

- **Communication of results of the campaign** on June 10th, 2014.

3.1 Step-by-step overview

In order to improve our process of call for applications and external review, we have decided to collaborate with the European Science Foundation (ESF). ESF will be responsible for collecting the names of candidates submitted by institutions, as well as the collection of applications (outline and full proposals) and the review process. ESF will carry out the external review using the AXA Research Fund criteria.

European Science Foundation is an independent, non-governmental organization dedicated to pan European Scientific network and collaboration. It has a key role to play in mediating between a multitude of heterogeneous research cultures and agencies. The ESF hosts an array of instruments to accommodate various types and levels of international collaboration. For further information about ESF, please do not hesitate to visit their website: <http://www.esf.org>

1. Institution registers with the ARF	<p>This first step happens only once. Once an institution has been registered with the ARF, it becomes part of our community.</p> <p>To check whether your institution is already registered, please go to: https://secure-researchfund.axa.com/Public/InstitutionSearch.aspx.</p> <p>For more information on how to register an institution, please go to: http://www.axa-research.org/how-to-register-an-institution</p> <p>Please note that we stop processing registration requests <u>3 days before campaign deadlines</u>.</p>
2. First round of applications	<p>At the start of each campaign, registered institutions wishing to present candidates must take part in this first round of applications, by filling out our online form.</p> <p>The operational contact from each institution selects 1 to 12 research fields, thereby indicating their institution's strongholds in terms of fundamental research.</p> <p>We recommend they make a strategic choice within the 12 available fields, as the point is to highlight their institution's strategy. They are not limited to these initial choices in the second round and are of course allowed to present candidates in other research fields.</p> <p>The operational contact may also submit a short text (500 words max.) Commenting on the strengths, values and strategy of their institution.</p> <p>NB: Neither applicants' names nor specific project descriptions are expected at this point.</p> <p>Institutions are then informed of the number of applicants they may present for the second round of applications (from 0 to 4).</p>
3. Second round of applications	<p>The AXA Research Fund relies on each operational contact to present candidate(s) on behalf of their Institution by entering her/his name & email address online.</p> <p>Each candidate then receives all the necessary information to access the application form via email. The candidate(s) are responsible for filling out their application form online.</p> <p>Please have the following documents ready (as separate pdf) for your outline application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- An extended synopsis of the Postdoctoral project (1.5 pages max + references).- A detailed CV (2 pages max + ½ page of the most relevant

	<p>publications)</p> <p>A career statement (1 page max)</p> <p>Selection of applications is a multi-stage process:</p> <p>An initial review of all applications ensures that all applications are complete and meet our eligibility criteria.</p> <p>Applications are then reviewed by a Panel of independent experts in their fields to assess their scientific quality and pre-select proposals for the third round.</p> <p>Candidates and operational contacts are informed on the results of the second round of applications.</p>
4. Third round of applications	<p>Pre-selected candidates are invited to submit a full application, which must include (as separate pdf):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An updated detailed CV including participation to colloquia (2 pages max) - An extended list of most relevant publications (2 pages max) - Detailed description of the research project (6 pages max): long term objective and specific aims, rationale, methodology, work plan, budget - Other documents linked to applicant's research work e.g. abstracts from publications, articles, etc (strictly limited to 5 pages) (Excluded: additional information on the research proposal itself) <p>In addition they will be asked to submit on-line:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Referents' names and Institutions (Future supervisor and Host Institution, other referent –former/current supervisor)* <p>*The 2 Reference letters (1page/letter) will be submitted separately by their authors.</p>
5. Review process, Interview of candidates and Final selection	<p>Full proposal applications are peer-reviewed by 2 to 3 independent experts in their field to assess their academic quality.</p> <p>Candidates will have access to the anonymised external evaluation reports and have the opportunity to provide a one-page answer to the evaluation performed, to correct factual errors or misunderstandings. This answer will be submitted online and taken into account for the final review.</p> <p>Pre-selected candidates will be interviewed by AXA Experts in order to evaluate candidate's ability to transmit and popularize their research. While not eliminatory, the assessment of this interview helps the Scientific Board ultimately choose between two candidates with equal level of academic excellence.</p> <p>A final review is done by the Fund's Scientific Board, who oversees the whole selection process.</p>
6. Communication of results	<p>We inform all applicants as well as their operational contact about the results of the campaign, which are also online at: http://researchfund.axa.com/publicationofresults</p> <p>Once selected, candidates have up to 12 months after the announcement of the campaign results to start their Post Doc research (i.e., to administratively register within their Host Institution)</p>
7. Contracting and follow up	<p>Contracts are set up between the AXA Research Fund and the host institution of each selected grantee.</p>

	<p>After the announcement of the results, the ARF team gets in touch with each operational contact to start the contracting process. Each grantee is kept updated by their operational contact throughout the negotiation.</p> <p>The host institution then draws up an employment contract with the Post-Doctoral researcher directly. Please note that AXA is not in direct legal connection with the grantee.</p> <p>For a detailed breakdown of an ARF Post-Doc grant, see p. 12 of this MO.</p> <p>One year after the launch of a Post-Doctoral research project, the grantee's advisor is asked to produce an Executive Summary Report through the operational contact. At the end of the fellowship, she/he's asked to fill out a Final Executive Summary Report to inform the ARF on the results of the grantee's project.</p>
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3.2 Selection criteria

Our Post-Doc campaign is organized in three rounds, and aims at assessing two key actors: the institution in the first round, and the Post-Doctoral candidate in the second and third round.

3.2.1 First round

The selection of institutions allowed to present candidates for a given campaign is primarily based on academic excellence of the Institution in the fields where it wishes to apply, as assessed by the Scientific Board.

We also pay attention to the following dimensions:

- the balance between the three clusters of risks defined by the AXA Research Fund.
- the record of applications submitted in the past by the institution (dynamism in previous campaigns is an asset).
- the AXA Research Fund also wishes to give a chance to newly registered institutions.

3.2.2 Second round

The selection of the Post-Doc candidates is based on the following criteria:

- Academic excellence of the candidate
- International exposure of the candidate
- Relevance of the host laboratory for the research project
- Innovative nature and originality of the project
- Feasibility of the project (management, organization, budget)
- By International exposure, we mean (a) Change of institution and/or country between current institution of applicant and targeted post-doc position or (b) Minimum of 1 semester spent abroad since Master's thesis or planned in the course of upcoming postdoc studies. It is expected that most of selected candidates move to another country between current and targeted post-doc position. Such international mobility is more valued than national mobility. Where a candidate remains in the same institution for the

Post-Doc fellowship, it is required a clear justification of such a decision. Ability to transmit his/her work and popularize his/her research. While not eliminatory, this criterion may differentiate between two candidates with equal level of academic excellence

3.2.3 Third round: focus on recommendation letters

Our online application requires two letters of recommendation to be submitted for each Post-Doc candidate. In order to ensure the robustness of the application process, recommendation letters are uploaded onto the online platform by both referents directly, and are never available to applicants.

The first letter is written by the applicant's Post-Doctoral advisor, and must include:

- A commitment from the advisor to supervise the candidate in their Post-Doc project
- Information on the excellence of the research environment offered by the candidate's host institution, e.g. international reach, academic networks, description of research facilities and equipment, IT support.
- The number of students supervised by the Post-Doc advisor during the candidate's fellowship.

The second letter is necessarily written by a different referent, preferably by the applicant's previous advisor. It is up to candidates to make the most strategic choice of referent in order to highlight the strong points of their applications.

NB₁: Both letters cannot be written by the same referent. If the candidate's Post-Doc advisor was also his/her PhD advisor for instance, the second letter must be written by a different professor.

NB₂: Candidates should remind their referents that recommendation letters must be uploaded before the closing date of the campaign. When filling out their online application form, candidates should indicate their referents' names and contact details as soon as possible, so as to leave them ample time to write and upload their letters before the deadline. It is up to the candidates to make sure their referents upload their letters on time.

4. Funding budget and duration of the grant

The AXA Research Fund is a philanthropic organization: grantees therefore remain fully independent to conduct their research projects, and keep full ownership of their results.

While funded by the AXA Research Fund, the Post-Doctoral researcher should not occupy another position and should work full time on the research project selected by the Scientific Board.

Post-Doctoral Fellowships: Breakdown of the 120K€ grant for the full length of the project.

	Year 1	Year 2
Total amount	60K€	60K€
► Annual gross salary of the grantee*	35K€ min	35K€ min
► Other expenses connected to the project* Amount allocated at the discretion of the grantee	5K€ min	5K€ min
Amount allocated at the discretion of the institution (1)	20K€ max	20K€ max

*not subject to VAT

All other expenses are eligible as long as they are directly connected to the grantee's research project.

Any adjustment on the grantee's salary is deducted from the 20K€ allocated to institutions.
E.g.: if the grantee's salary goes up to 40 K€ (35 + 5), the amount allocated to their institution goes down to 15K€ (20 – 5).

Remaining funds at the end of year 1 are transferable to year 2. At the end of year 1, these remaining funds must imperatively amount to less than 25K€.

Remaining funds at the end of year 2 are transferable to research in the same field as the original project. At the end of year 2, these remaining funds must imperatively amount to less than the 70K€ gross salary of the grantee for the full length of their fellowship.

NB: Incidental expenses must be directly related to the research project the AXA Research Fund has selected. All overheads must be motivated.

(1): The following indirect costs are **not eligible**:

- Costs related to general administration and management - costs of office or laboratory space including rent or depreciation of buildings and equipment's and related expenditure such as water, heating...

- Maintenance, insurance and safety costs
- Communication expenses, network connection charges, postal charges and office supplies
- Common office equipment such as PCs, laptops, office software
- Miscellaneous recurring consumables.

5 Contracting and follow-up

5.1. Contracting with the host institutions of selected applicants

Once the applications have been reviewed and fellowships have been granted, the AXA Research Fund will liaise with the Institution Representatives of the host institutions of the selected applicants to set in motion the contracting process.

Grantees will be kept updated by their Institution Representative throughout the contracting process.

5.2. Follow-up

One progress report will be asked to the Institution/Laboratory, one year after the launch of the Post Doctoral research project. At the end of the fellowship, the Institution/Laboratory will also be requested to fill in an Executive Summary Report to inform the ARF of the results of the grantee's research.

➔ Should any additional questions regarding our application and selection processes arise, please go to our FAQ webpage: <http://www.axa-research.org/faq-post-doctoral-fellowship>