Frequently asked questions concerning „large“ and medium project applications (30 Oct 2019)

1. How many positions can be funded by a large or medium sized project grant?

A „large“ project grant basically covers either a 2-year PostDoc position or a 3-year PhD position plus some additional research costs if submitted by a single independent researcher. However, proposals by several applicants can be pooled and submitted as a „joint large“ project covering different aspects within one coherent, comprehensive and interdisciplinary scientific concept. In that case, a „joint large“ project grant could include up to 3 PhD/PostDoc positions.

2. Do I have to be a principal investigator in order to apply?

No. Essential for your eligibility is that you have employee status at the University of Konstanz or at the Max Planck Institute for Animal Behaviour. Furthermore, you should be an independent researcher in order to apply, meaning you have completed your PhD and got your own research group or grant. If in doubt or if you have a direct superior, you might want to inform them about your planned application to avoid potential conflict.

3. I am a principal investigator already involved in a currently funded cluster project. I have a great idea for another project - how are my chances applying for cluster money?

You are certainly welcome to apply. However, to support a fair and widespread distribution of funding within the cluster, the cluster executive board will give priority to applicants who have not yet received funding by the cluster.

4. I know a talented person at another university and would like to bring them in with a direct hire if my project proposal is successful. Is that possible?

If your project proposal excels in all the favorable aspects like scientific quality, novelty, interdisciplinarity and cluster-compatibility, and you suggest bringing in a specific person for their unique expertise, a direct hire is generally possible. However, be careful not to solely construct your project idea around the possibility of a desirable outside hire.

5. Can I use the medium size project grant for financing a 1-year postdoc position even if I don’t have other sources of funding yet to extend the position?

If you’d like to hire someone with money from a medium sized grant (which covers roughly one year of PostDoc salary), we strongly advise that you outline a plan for continuing funding. After all, we want to ensure reasonable working and career prospects, e.g. a minimum of 2 years for PostDocs, for all early-career researchers at the cluster.

6. Can I expect help from the cluster with applying for additional funding?

You can get helpful information and practical support for alternative funding from the university’s Research Support team: https://www.uni-konstanz.de/en/research-support/

7. The guidelines mention interdisciplinarity as a selection criteria. How is interdisciplinarity defined and how can I account for it in my proposal?

Interdisciplinarity in a large sense means that different disciplines – and preferably not only several areas within the same discipline - are involved in the research question and
methodological approach of the project proposal. However, we do not require that an individual project involves researchers from different disciplines but that the researchers of a project are in exchange with other disciplines. This means that members of a project should not just pursue their own field-specific aspect and methodological approach, but actively and measurably expand beyond their own scientific scope and expertise. Helpful indicators for interdisciplinarity in your proposal could be: a list of previous cross-disciplinary publications, an overview of the literature outside your own area that inspired the proposed research question, or a description of previous collaborations exploring an interdisciplinary approach to the topic.

8. **My project idea/study organism appears to be not yet represented within the current research areas of the cluster. How are my chances applying for a cluster project?**

Your chances will depend on how well your proposal is rated according to the selection criteria (see the project guidelines for those).

9. **Can I first apply for a medium project as a pilot, and if that turns out successful, re-apply to extend the project with a „large“ cluster grant?**

That can’t be promised and might depend on how your project develops. Ideally, medium sized projects use cluster money to explore a new idea and are then, if successful, continued with other sources of funding (as priority in future calls will be given to entirely „new“ projects). However, a successful medium sized project’s original idea might indeed evolve into something new that could qualify as a novel „large“ project involving completely new aspects, people and approaches. In any case, please be aware that medium projects should not be mistaken as an easily extendable source for starting PostDoc salaries (also see questions 4. and 5.) and that priority will be given to people who have not yet received cluster money (see question 3).

10. **I’m unsure if I should apply for a medium or a large project grant. Should I apply for both?**

No. Better choose one proposal category that you consider most suitable for your project idea at the moment. You can state why you could see your project also fitting the other category and outline the changes you’d then have to make. If the reviewers agree with your alternative viewpoint, they can suggest to the board – with your consent - that your proposal is re-submitted and reviewed within the other proposal category. Likewise, if the reviewers find that your idea shares strong potential synergies with other proposals that could result in a „joint large“ project (see question 1.), the board might offer to you and the other applicants to re-submit your proposals as a joint project.