



Securing Research Funding for PhD Students and Post Docs

IEEE SSCI 2021

Students and Young Professionals Activity Panel

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Reasons to apply for funding



1. Conference travels
2. Short research visit to a different team
3. Long research visit (>3 months)
4. Research Positions
 1. PhD position
 2. PostDoc position
 3. First permanent position/First research group

Rule of Thumb: The more money you ask for, the more complex the application process and the documents that need to be submitted



My experience with grant writing



Own grant applications:

- PhD scholarship from Google
- PostDoc scholarship offers from Alexander von Humboldt foundation, DAAD, Qualcomm
- several French national and regional grants
- ERC starting grants (2017 and 2021)
- bi-national grants

As an evaluator:

- National funding agencies (A, NL)
- European Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Networks and Postdoctoral Fellowships
- EU COFUND grants



Supporting role:

- Potential host for PostDocs: Alexander von Humboldt foundation, DAAD, EU grants,...
- Potential collaborator in national grants
- Short-term visits

Practice makes perfect

- If given a chance to write your first proposal, use it!
 - Practice matters!
- Sometimes it is also possible to help colleagues and senior researchers, e.g., by providing feedback on their application documents



Writing Grant Applications Can be Rewarding!



- Researchers like to complain (a lot...) about grant writing

- **Focus on the positive aspects:**

- Proposal writing is a good opportunity to focus on “the big picture” and to “sell”/communicate your ideas!
- You get to challenge your own ideas:
Why is my research important? What impact do I expect?
Is my proposal feasible? Do I know how to implement it?
- In many cases you will receive **feedback from experts**
- Writing proposals can also **generate new ideas**, e.g., during literature research or when breaking down your idea into sub-objectives or work packages

Think positive !



Best Mood for Grant Writing:



Do not write important parts when you are not in the right mood!

Pro tip: leave “boring” parts for such moments, e.g., cleaning references, administrative parts, CV, etc.

(most application processes offer enough boring parts ;-))

Before Getting Started



- Check the **different funding options**
Which one best corresponds to your need and to your profile?

- Check your **eligibility!**



- Carefully (!!) check **which documents are needed**
For which documents do you need external input (reference letters, administrative information, ...)
→ make sure to request this input early enough!

- Check with your colleagues if the lab/the university/some other institutions can help you with your application, e.g., some universities have **professional funding officers** who can support you throughout the process
- Ask colleagues for their proposal documents and/or the feedback that they have received



Be Prepared for Feedback and Revisions and Feedback and Revisions and Feedback and ...

- Ask colleagues for feedback!
 - Share your main ideas early on,
to receive valuable feedback on the overall idea
→ yes, before starting to write down your ideas!
 - Share a first draft of your proposal early on,
even if you are not yet happy with it (that's normal!)
 - Be prepared for critical feedback!

It's perfectly normal to redo several parts of the proposal as your ideas sharpen! Critical feedback will help you identify weak spots of your proposal. If you do not fix them, your reviewers are likely to find them!



Final Feedback

- A rejection notification **can hit you hard**
- Sometimes the feedback is **unfair**
- Sometimes reviewers have **overlooked something** or are **factually wrong**
- Keep in mind: nobody is perfectly unbiased, and we all have **personal preferences** that impact our evaluations. The best evaluation tool cannot compensate for this!
- But: **most of the time reviews are constructive and useful.**
 - take a few days/weeks/months/years to recover and read the reviews again
 - what exactly are the reviewers criticizing? How can you best address their concerns in a future application
- Winning a grant is ambitious. Percentage of funded proposals can be $<10\%$. Sometimes, even 3 strong accept recommendations do not suffice
 - take a moment to mourn
 - the moment will come that you feel again in the right mood:
 - then, start it all over again 😊
 - practice matters!



EC/CIS-specific Funding Options

- **IEEE CIS Conference Participation and Travel Grants**

Participation Grants: Registration fee waiver

Travel Grants: fixed amount of traveling reimbursement

<https://cis.ieee.org/conferences/travel-grants>



- **ACM-W for women in Computer Science:**

Travel grants for SIG-sponsored conferences, e.g., GECCO, FOGA, and other SIGEVO-sponsored conferences

<https://women.acm.org/>



- **SPECIES scholarships**

research visits of up to 3 months

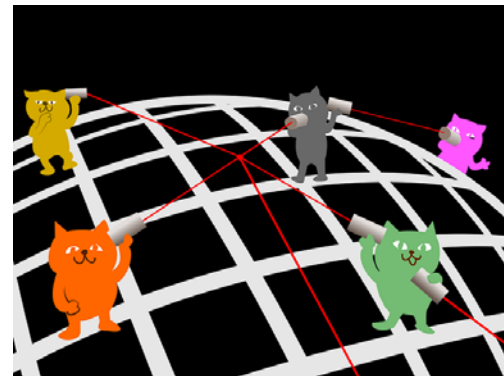
900 Euros per month

<http://species-society.org/scholarships/>



How to learn about such opportunities?

- Conference websites
- Relevant networks and societies (webpages, newsletters,...)
- Subscribe to mailing lists and newsletters such as
 - CIS newsletter
 - SIGEVO mailing lists, SIGEVOLution newsletter
 - country-specific mailing lists and newsletters
- Social media!
 - Twitter
 - LinkedIn, ResearchGate,...
 - Facebook groups, e.g., on Evolutionary Computation
- The probably most relevant source of information:
Colleagues, potential hosts, funding officers at your research institution, ...



Contacting a Potential Host



- Best way:
 - meet them in person, e.g., at conferences
 - have someone introduce you to them (e.g., ask your supervisor or colleagues)
- Otherwise: E-Mail
 - have a [clear subject](#)
 - do not send “mass mails”, but [personalize your message](#): Why do you want to visit or work with the potential host?
 - [present yourself](#) and explain why you are interested in working with the host, where do you see overlap, which research topics interest you, which skills do you bring
 - add your CV (in PDF) or provide a [link to your homepage](#) (yes, it is strongly advisable that you create a homepage to present yourself!)
 - if you do not receive a reply, [send a reminder](#)
(we are sometimes just snowed under, a reminder can help!)

Writing a Proposal

A background image showing a quill pen, an ink bottle, and a scroll on a wooden surface. The quill is positioned diagonally across the frame. The ink bottle is small and dark, with a piece of twine tied around its neck. The scroll is partially unrolled, showing its texture. The wooden surface has a prominent grain.

1. Why is **your topic** cool?

2. Why are **you** cool?

Vision

Think Big

Your Topic

Vision

What does your work contribute to?

Motivation

Introduction

Related Work

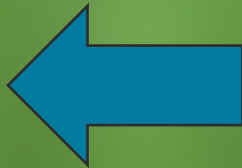
Contribution

What will you contribute?

How will you achieve it?

Your Qualification

Highlight
your **skills**



Highlight
your **growth**



Dealing With Rejection

Keep competitive nature in mind

Follow your **vision**!

Try **again**!

Happy Writing!

