



Call for proposals, NWO Open Competition Domain Science – XS, Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek

Pilot 2019-2020

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

NWO stimulates excellent, curiosity-driven, disciplinary, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research. In doing this, NWO focuses on all scientific disciplines and the entire knowledge chain with an emphasis on fundamental research. Fundamental scientific research forms the foundation for understanding the world around us, for understanding the natural and human past, and for making important new discoveries. Non-programmed fundamental research is necessary for innovations that makes society economically successful and socially resilient. Conversely questions from society can give rise to new fundamental questions.

The Open Competition of the NWO Domain Science welcomes research proposals for curiosity-driven, fundamental research in the fields of earth sciences, astronomy, chemistry, information science, life sciences, physics and mathematics. The proposals may concern monodisciplinary, multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary research. The NWO Domain Science has two regular sources of funding available to participants in the Open Competition in the form of KLEIN and GROOT grants. Please see the relevant calls for proposals for more detailed information about these grants: NWO Open Competition Domain Science – KLEIN and NWO Open Competition Domain Science – GROOT.

A new addition to the Open Competition of the NWO Domain Science is the XS category. New ideas are the mainstay of all research and form a starting point for promising new research strategies. The NWO Domain Science has established a new category in the Open Competition with the aim of encouraging curiosity and new ideas in research as part of promising, high-risk projects: XS proposals. These are proposals for ground-breaking research with a real risk of failure. The XS category emphatically strives to encourage curiosity-driven and bold research involving a relatively quick analysis of a promising idea. Research proposals aimed at confronting social challenges will not be considered for XS grants in the Open Competition of the NWO Domain Science; these proposals can be submitted to the NWA Idea Generator Call.

At the end of the XS project, researchers can decide for themselves whether and how to continue their line of research, for example by applying for one of the regular funding programmes of the Open Competition of the NWO Domain Science.

NWO has announced through various channels that it is seeking innovative research assessment methods. XS is emphatically a pilot project and does not fall under a regular NWO procedure. NWO



will evaluate the Open Competition Domain Science – XS and decide whether to continue with this instrument in early 2020.

1.2 Available budget

The Open Competition Domain Science – XS will begin as a pilot project with a term of one year starting on 1 June 2019. A budget of € 2.5 million has been made available in the form of XS grants. Each project can apply for a maximum of € 50,000.

Five separate application procedures will be held as explained in paragraph 3.3. The available budget will be proportionally distributed between these five sets of applications and there is € 0.5 million available per set. The budget will be evenly distributed between groups A and B of each set of applications (€ 0.25 million per group; see also paragraph 4.1 for details on the distribution procedure). If a part of the budget of any group remains unused it will be passed on to the next set and not to the other group within the same set.

NWO reserves the right to increase the subsidy limit in case additional sources of funding become available, whereby it will inform the applicants of this increase in good time. Third parties may derive no rights from this condition.

The NWO Domain Science Board has not established a formula for distributing grants between the disciplines and subdisciplines. Applications will be assessed and accepted in accordance with the assessment procedure described in paragraph 4.1.

1.3 Validity of the call for proposals

This call for proposals is valid from 1 June 2019. Applications must meet the conditions described in paragraph 3.1.

The call for proposals will close after the last deadline. Applications submitted after this date will not be considered, unless it is decided to continue the NWO Open Competition Domain Science-XS. Such a decision will be made known in good time.

2 Aim

The Open Competition Domain Science – XS offers researchers an opportunity to conduct innovative and high-risk research projects. Research proposals are expected to be groundbreaking and all results, positive or negative, must contribute to the advancement of science.

By investing in high-risk high-gain research, Science-XS will help to fulfil the requirements of the NWO 2019–2022 Strategy.

XS grants are available for small projects whereby the budget can be spent entirely at the researcher's discretion. XS grants are available to researchers who hold a doctorate and have an appointment period with one of the institutions specified in paragraph 3.1 for the entire term of the project. XS explicitly welcomes applications from postdocs.

Due to the emphasis on high-risk research, the NWO Domain Science will be devoting extra attention to the publication of the results of all XS projects; not only those that open up potential new lines of research, but expressly also those that do not achieve the expected results.

3 Guidelines for applicants

3.1 Who can apply

Researchers¹ can submit an application if they:

- hold a doctorate and/or are professor
- also are employed (i.e. hold a salaried position; personnel with a zero-hour appointment is excluded from applying) at one of the following organisations:
 - Universities located in the Kingdom of the Netherlands;
 - University medical centres;
 - NWO and KNAW institutes;
 - the Netherlands Cancer Institute;
 - the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen;
 - researchers from the DUBBLE Beamline at the ESRF in Grenoble;
 - NCB Naturalis;
 - Advanced Research Centre for NanoLithography (ARCNL);
 - Princess Máxima Center;



- Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute;
 - IHE Delft Institute for Water Education.
- also have an appointment period for at least the duration of the application procedure and the entire duration of the research for which the grant is being applied for.

Additional conditions:

- there is one applicant per proposal; co-applicants are not permitted.
- There are five deadlines for submitting proposals for the pilot round. Each applicant may submit one application per deadline and two applications in total.

3.2 What can be applied for

An XS grant has a maximum budget of € 50,000. There are no requirements on the type of research and no restrictions on what the grant is to be used for. Applicants are required to draw up a realistic budget and explain why the spending choices are relevant to the project.

Examples could be the appointment of temporary staff, material costs and travel expenses for commuting to other locations to conduct experiments. Salary costs will depend on the nature of the appointment and will be reimbursed in accordance with the agreements reached with the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) in the document entitled 'Approval of funding for scientific research', which agreements are based on the collective labour agreement with the Dutch universities. The agreements and the maximum amounts for staff costs can be found at <http://www.nwo.nl/akkoordbekostiging> and <http://www.nwo.nl/salaristabellen> respectively.

XS projects must start no later than six months after the grant has been allocated and last for a maximum of one year. The grant will be provided in the form of a lump sum.

¹ In this Call for Proposals, the word 'researcher' covers both men and women.

3.3 When can applications be submitted

There are five deadlines for submitting a proposal for an XS project:

- 5 September 2019, 14.00 h (decision anticipated by 10 October 2019)
- 7 November 2019, 14.00 h (decision anticipated by 12 December 2019)
- February 2020; exact date will be announced later
- April 2020; exact date will be announced later
- June 2020; exact date will be announced later

Submitted applications will be collected for each deadline and treated as a set. Applications that are submitted after each of the first four deadlines has passed will be considered as part of the following deadline and set. Applications submitted after the last deadline will not be taken into consideration.

3.4 Preparing an application

Applications must be drawn up in English using the application form. Application forms can be downloaded from the online application system (ISAAC) or the NWO website (at the bottom of the funding scheme webpage). You can save the completed form as a PDF and upload it to ISAAC.

Please consider the following starting points when submitting your application:

- Applicants for an XS grant agree to assess applications from other applicants in the same set. If NWO does not receive the assessment reports before the set deadline, the assessor's own proposal will be excluded from the procedure. See paragraph 4.1 for the procedure.
- The application must be anonymous; please do not include your name or an obvious reference to your research group.
- Applicants/assessors should be aware of the fact that they will be assessed by and conduct assessments for the entire NWO Domain Science, so it is important to write the proposal with a wide audience in mind.

NWO assumes that the applicant's institution has been informed of the grant application and that the university or institution accepts the grant conditions of this programme.



3.5 Conditions on granting

Open Access

All scientific publications resulting from research that is funded by grants derived from this call for proposals are to be immediately (at the time of publication) freely accessible worldwide (Open Access). There are several ways for researchers to publish Open Access. A detailed explanation regarding Open Access can be found on www.nwo.nl/openscience-en.

Sharing results

It is important that the results of all XS projects are shared, including those projects that do not produce the anticipated results. All accepted projects will publish an online public summary and the NWO Domain Science will request a short report at the end of the project.

Data management

Responsible data management is part of good research. NWO wants research data that emerge from publicly funded research to become freely and sustainably available, as much as possible, for reuse by other researchers. Researchers whose proposals have been awarded must submit a data management plan to NWO.

In the plan the researcher describes whether use will be made of existing data or a new data collection and how the data collection will be made FAIR: Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable. Further information about the data management protocol of NWO can be found at www.nwo.nl/datamanagement.

The data management requirement in the application form does not apply to XS proposals due to their short length.

Nagoya Protocol

The Nagoya Protocol became effective on 12 October 2014 and ensures an honest and reasonable distribution of benefits emerging from the use of genetic resources (Access and Benefit Sharing; ABS). Researchers who make use of genetic sources from the Netherlands or abroad for their research should familiarise themselves with the Nagoya Protocol (www.absfocalpoint.nl). NWO assumes that researchers will take all necessary actions with respect to the Nagoya Protocol.

The NWO Grant Rules 2017 and the Agreement on the Payment of Costs for Scientific Research apply to all applications.

3.6 Submitting an application

An application can only be submitted to NWO via the online application system ISAAC. Applications not submitted via ISAAC will not be taken into consideration. An applicant must submit his/her application via his/her own ISAAC account. If the applicant does not have an ISAAC account yet, then this should be created at least one day before the application is submitted to ensure that any registration problems can be resolved on time. If the applicant already has an NWO-account, then he/she does not need to create a new account to submit an application.

For technical questions please contact the ISAAC helpdesk, see Section 5.1.2.

4 Assessment procedure

4.1 Procedure

Eligibility

The first step in the assessment procedure is to test whether the application is eligible for consideration. The NWO office will assess the application for completeness and suitability on behalf of the NWO Domain Science Board. Only applications that meet the conditions described in Chapter 3 and fall under one of the NWO Domain Science's research fields will be considered.

If the application needs to be corrected to meet the conditions, the applicant will be given the opportunity to do so within 48 hours. Applications that are not corrected within the 48-hour deadline will not be processed. If approved, the corrected application will be included in the procedure.



One set per deadline

There are five application deadlines within a period of one year (see paragraph 3.3). All applications submitted for one of the deadlines are treated as a set.

Per set the applications are separated into two groups: group A and group B. Applications are allocated to a group in the order they are received by NWO, so the first application is allocated to group A, the second to group B, the third to A, the fourth to B and so forth.

If less than twenty applications are submitted for any given deadline, these applications will all be carried over to the next deadline and the assessment will be postponed.

Assessments by applicants

The applications in group A are assessed by the applicants in group B and the applications in group B are assessed by the applicants in group A. To this end, the applications in group A are randomly assigned to the applicants in group B and the applications in group B are randomly assigned to the applicants in group A. This means that every assessing applicant (hereinafter 'assessor') will receive a number of applications from that part of the set that does not include his/her own application. The applications are distributed over the assessors randomly, i.e. the subject matter of the applications and expertise of the assessors are not taken into account. In principle, all applications will be assessed by the same number of assessors (8-10).

All assessors will be asked in advance to indicate if they are involved in any way with any of the applications: before the applications are distributed, the assessors indicate their possible involvement on the basis of a list of applicants. Assessors who are involved in another application will not be asked to assess this application.

All applications are prepared anonymously. Thus, the applicant's name is not mentioned in the proposal to ensure the assessor can make an unbiased assessment of the quality of the research proposal.

The assessment report

Each assessor will rank the applications he/she needs to assess based on the assessment aspects described in paragraph 4.2, whereby the applications must all be allocated a different rank. The assessor writes a report for each application, giving the rank and a short written explanation. Assessors must submit their reports within two and a half weeks. If an assessor fails to do so, the assessor's own application will be withdrawn from the procedure and will not be processed further.

Decision-making

The assessors/applicants within a particular set will not meet to discuss their findings. The NWO office will decide the final ranks of the applications based on the ranks submitted by the assessors. Two rankings will be established per set; one for group A and one for group B. There will be no opportunity for a rebuttal.

The NWO Domain Science Board will decide whether to grant or refuse an application based on the results of the two rankings and the available financial means.

Applicants will be informed of the results once the NWO Domain Science Board has completed the decision-making process. In addition to the final ranking, the applicants will also receive the assessment reports of their proposal: this includes the rank and the explanation provided by each assessor.

General

NWO Personal Interest Code

Up to and including 30 June 2019, the NWO Code of Conduct on Conflicts of Interest applies to all persons and NWO employees involved in the handling, assessment and/or decision-taking process. On 1 July 2019, this Code of Conduct will be replaced by the new Personal Interest Code. From 1 July 2019, the assessment and/or decision-taking process for this funding round will therefore be carried out according to the Personal Interest Code. More information concerning the Personal Interest Code can be found on the NWO website.

Integrity

All research funded by NWO must be carried out in accordance with nationally and internationally accepted standards of scientific practice as laid down in the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2018). More information on NWO policy on research integrity is available on the NWO website.



Tied rankings

In case of a tied ranking of two or more applications, the following principles will apply in this order:

- an application by a female applicant will have preference
- the application with the most highest rankings will have preference

Data management

Researchers whose proposals have been awarded must submit a data management plan. The project can start as soon as the data management plan has been approved by NWO.

4.1.1 Timetable

Indication of timetable with respect to first deadline:

Deadline for applications	5 September 2019	week 0
Eligibility check	6-11 September	week 1
Identification of possible conflicts of interest	12-19 September	week 2
Send applications to assessors	20 September	week 2
NWO receives assessment reports	7 October	week 5
Decision by the NWO Domain Science Board	10 October 2019	week 5
Project start date	no later than 6 months after decision date	
Project end date	maximum 1 year after start date	

The deadlines for the second to fifth application rounds are the same as those for the first application round, whereby the application deadline is in week 0 and the Executive Board decision to grant or reject the application is expected around week 5. The deadlines will also be published on the website.

4.2 Assessment aspects

The results of innovative, high-risk research cannot be guaranteed and so there is a risk that the intended research objective will not be achieved. Initiatives of this kind do not always fit in the existing boxes and this is precisely the type of research that NWO is seeking within the XS category. XS research projects must be groundbreaking, high-risk and promise exciting results; they are 'wild ideas'.

The assessors who rank the applications will focus on the innovativeness of the research proposal. Is the proposed research innovative, high-risk and groundbreaking? Will the proposed research take the applicant down a new path? Could the proposal have a high scientific impact? In addition, the feasibility of the research plan is also important. For example, the objective, justification and work plan must be clearly described and the project must be carried out within the maximum period of one year and within the requested budget. All applications are prepared anonymously, which will ensure that the assessments are based purely on the ideas in the research proposal.

5. Contact details and other information

5.1 Contact

5.1.1 Specific questions

For specific questions about NWO Open Competition Domain Science – XS and this call for proposals please contact:

Dr Kirsten de Bruijn-Spoorendonk
Phone: +31 (0)70-344 07 76
Email: enw-xs@nwo.nl

5.1.2 Technical questions about the electronic application system ISAAC

For technical questions about the use of ISAAC please contact the ISAAC helpdesk. Please read the manual first before consulting the helpdesk. The ISAAC helpdesk can be contacted from Monday to Friday between 10:00 and 17:00 hours CE(S)T on +31 (0)20 346 71 79. However, you can also submit your question by e-mail to isaac.helpdesk@nwo.nl. You will then receive an answer within two working days.



5.2 Other information

The Dutch version of the Call for Proposals supersedes the English translation. No rights can be derived from the English translation.