Austrian Science Fund

Interdisciplinarity

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Outline

- Background & rationale
- 1st call on Interdisciplinarity – key points
- Preliminary outcome
- Learnings
- Observation at FWF: Trend towards team-oriented research & increasing interdisciplinarity (ID >= 15 %* according to discipline classification)
- Approval rate of interdisciplinary project applications (slightly) lower

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stand-alone projects</td>
<td>Single PI, open disciplinarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research groups</td>
<td>3-5 res., multi-/interdisciplinarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special research programmes</td>
<td>5-15 res., multi-/interdisciplinarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young independent researcher groups (YIRG)</td>
<td>3-5 res., interdisciplinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned: Pioneer change labs</td>
<td>Team #?, transdisciplinarity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(not shown: career development, international programmes, …)
YIRG: a Postdoc-Programme for Innovative, Interdisciplinary Teams*

Programme objectives

- Promotion of young postdocs (0–4 years after doctorate).
- Medium-term research cooperation (4 years) on a complex, current topic in mixed teams of at least 3 to max. 5 researchers#.
- Research cooperation should be interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary on innovative subjects.
- The research question is to be deepened or newly consolidated at least two research institutions or two organisational units of a research institution.

#: considering gender equality

*jointly created with the Austrian Academy of Sciences
Description of interdisciplinarity, thematic coherence and the expected value of innovation through cooperation in YIRG:

a. by using a coherent and consistent terminology
b. by identifying the relevant characteristics of the problem
c. by presenting the aspects to be examined
d. by integrating the various disciplinary theories into a common theoretical approach
e. through the description of how the synthesis is formed – common language, theoretical basis, individual contributions

In addition to: description of state-of-the-art in research, shared goals, questions and concepts, novelty, gender, ethics aspects.
Decision-making process

- First stage: Expression of interest
  - Formal check on eligibility of applicants
  - Getting an idea about the range of research topic
- Second stage: Full proposal
  - Three written reviews on proposal by external reviewers, trying to get the closest fit to the research topic
  - FWF board members provide short summary on 3 reviews
  - Proposed classification into a typical A, B, C scheme
  - Jury decision based on proposal & reviews
  - Formal confirmation by FWF board
Finding the Jury

- One Chair with ample experience in interdisciplinary research
- List of 12 renowned scientists/scholars
- 4 researchers representing each FWF department:
  - Biology and Medicine
  - Natural and Technical Sciences
  - Social Sciences and Humanities
- Specific search for Jury Members according to various scientific/scholarly disciplines in alignment with the topics of the applications received
Response from the community

- Enormous interest of national and international early stage researchers/scholars

- Two events to prepare the community for the call (>100 participants each time)

- High willingness and flexibility observed with early stage scientists: open-minded, creative, flexible, thinking and acting across borders…

- FWF was commended for this programme; the community was enthusiastic about this new opportunity to work in teams, as well as to prepare a research programme with a solely interdisciplinary focus
Distribution of applications

- 58 full proposals (max. 2 Mill € per group plus 25% overhead costs)
  - 33% Social & Cultural Sciences & Humanities
  - 47% Biology & Medicine
  - 20% Natural & Technical Sciences
Distribution of applications

- 50% of the applications interlink 3 researchers
- 50% of the applications interlink 4 or 5 researchers
- Participation of women 47.7%
- In 55% of all cases, coordinator has finished his/her doctorate within the last 2 years
Preliminary results

- Level of interdisciplinarity (based on FoS categories) varied among projects

- Team composition of women and men researchers (30-50% participation of the underrepresented gender)

- Within the excellent evaluated proposals researchers were commended for their highly innovative, truly interdisciplinary research programmes

- Within poorly evaluated proposals we have found many comments on the quality of the projects in terms of overambitious research design, methodology not elaborated enough; integration of the different research disciplines not sufficiently described
Learnings

- Programme design: Interdisciplinarity requires experience – integrate senior researchers as mentors or partners

- Recommendations from the jury & reviewers

- Provide learnings to the community on definition and scope of Interdisciplinarity – and to prepare community for next call

- Offer networking possibilities to facilitate idea complementation and match making across disciplines – more process orientation

- Increase awareness also towards transdisciplinary research
NEUES ENTDECKEN
TALENTE FÖRDERN
IDEEN UMSETZEN

WIR. FÖRDERN. ZUKUNFT.