Deutsche Stiftung Friedensforschung
german foundation for peace research

Funding Area 1: Research Projects

PROFILE PROJECTS | PILOT PROJECTS

Pilot project – Guidelines for Applications

These guidelines are intended as a guide for preparing an application for funding a pilot project. They provide information on the different ways of interpreting the funding format, and explain the basic requirements to be met when submitting an application. These guidelines are based on the DSF funding objectives and criteria, which are set out in the Funding Concept "*Research Innovation, Network Formation and Knowledge Transfer. Bringing new impetus to peace and conflict research*"[1] and are the determining factors for the evaluation and decision-making process.

PILOT PROJECT

Funding amount:	€75,000
Standard duration:	12 months
Application deadline:	2 May and 1 November

The aim of the funding is to initiate research projects addressing original disciplinary or interdisciplinary topics in the field of peace and conflict research. The special feature of the pilot project is an exploratory research design that is intended to open up a new research topic or test an original methodological approach. The concept should be geared towards producing initial scientific results during the funding period. These should be made accessible in a (specialist) publication. Furthermore, in the event of successful implementation, the Foundation expects the pilot project to be further developed into a larger research project. The call is thematically open, and is aimed at researchers from different stages of their career, and from different disciplines and specialisations. Pilot projects offer design flexibility.

[1] The DSF Funding Concept is available at https://bundesstiftung-friedensforschung.de/foerderkonzept/.

Application requirements

Applications for funding can only be submitted by researchers who belong to or are directly affiliated with a higher education institution, a non-university research institution or a scientific institution recognised as a non-profit organisation[2]. It is not possible to provide direct financial funding to private individuals.

The minimum requirement for submitting an application is having completed a doctorate. Exceptions can only be made for researchers who can demonstrate that they have been engaged in scientific activities for many years and have published relevant articles in the field of research.

The Foundation only accepts applications for project funding submitted by scientific institutions within Germany. It generally only approves funding to domestic institutions. However, this does not exclude the possibility of using funding for international scientific cooperation.

Institutions that receive DSF funding are required to ensure that the funding is administered professionally.

The Foundation supports research activities for a limited funding period. The results of a funded project can also be used to prepare theses and dissertations. The Foundation does not accept project funding applications that focus solely on a doctoral or habilitation project. The Foundation does not award scholarships for thesis and dissertation projects in the context of project funding.

Basic requirements

DSF only funds scientific projects that are thematically related to the research field of peace and conflict research. Relevance shall be adequately substantiated in the application for project funding.

To be considered as a promising application, a structured and comprehensible research concept must be submitted to the Foundation, providing a clear and adequate basis for the reviewers to expertly assess the *explorative* project. Care should be taken to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to the explanation of the research question, the theoretical and methodological foundation and the operationalisation of the research design.

Applications for funding pilot projects must always include a research ethics assessment of the project.

In the case of funding, the Foundation assumes that the organisation receiving funding will provide the infrastructure and basic equipment required to implement the proposed project. Programme allowances and overhead costs may not be claimed. The organisation receiving funding assumes the role of employer for the duration of the project; it is therefore responsible for the proper management of labour costs.

[2] Where applicable, relevant supporting documents shall be enclosed with the application.

Funding criteria

When assessing applications for project funding, the Foundation distinguishes between four core criteria and four additional criteria[3]:

Adequate consideration must be given to the *core criteria* – scientific relevance, quality of the research design, specialist qualifications of the project team, and potential for knowledge transfer – in all project proposals. Their fulfilment is a prerequisite for a positive funding decision.

Not all of the four *additional criteria* – promotion of early career researchers, national and international research collaboration, interdisciplinary orientation, and diversity – have to be met, depending on the research design. However, the applicant should assess how significant the additional criteria may be to the project when preparing the research project. The Foundation expects applications to contain statements on the relevance or non-relevance of each criteria. The fulfilment of additional criteria has an impact on the overall assessment of applications for funding.

Costs eligible for funding

Funding for project-related labour and material costs can be requested from DSF. Such funding must be used within the specified funding period.

The standard duration of funding is calculated based on the financing of a 75% staff position, TVöD/TVL 13, over a period of 12 months. The staff position can be flexibly adjusted to the duration of the project. Part-time positions exceeding or below 75 per cent may shorten or lengthen the funding period. Positions with less than 50 per cent of a full-time equivalent will only be approved in duly substantiated exceptional cases.

Labour costs include expenses for research assistants and student assistants, contracts for work and services with third parties, and other work (e.g. translations).

Applications should justify the appropriateness of awarding contracts for work and services to third parties. The remuneration paid for contracts for work and services is subject to proportionality in relation to the task profile and the place of work.

Material costs include expenses for travel as well as for working materials and technical equipment that are not part of the basic equipment provided by the organisations receiving funding. It is also possible to apply for funding for a scientific workshop (maximum of €5,000) that is justifiably related to the research work.

Travel expenses include expenses for field research stays and other research trips. In addition, funding for participation in symposia[4] relevant to the project can be requested in order to develop the careers of early career researchers.

The current rates set out in the Federal Travel Expenses Act (BRKG) apply when calculating travel expenses. In the case of longer research stays, different accommodation options should be eplored.

DSF also finances working materials required for the successful implementation of the research project. These include, for example, the acquisition of specialist literature that is not available in

[3] See the conceptual definitions in the Funding Concept.

[4] Major international conferences such as ISA, EPCR, etc. are excluded from funding.

libraries or online, fees for software licences and databases, and the costs of consumables and communication, provided they exceed a reasonable own contribution.

In justified cases, the Foundation also subsidises the purchase of computer equipment and other technical devices. It makes a one-off contribution to no more than 50 per cent of the purchase costs, provided that these are proportionate. This equipment becomes the property of the organisation receiving funding. Running costs (maintenance, repairs, etc.) are not covered.

€1,000 in funding can be included in the project budget for the production of project publications and materials[5] for knowledge transfer. This amount is available exclusively for editorial work, and not for printing allowances paid to publishers.

The budget items must be adequately justified in the application's accompanying text. Funding requirements shall be calculated according to the principle of proportionality. The Foundation reserves the right to adjust cost estimates.

The overviews in *Appendices 1a/b* provide information on possible uses and the underlying cost estimates.

Application documents

The Foundation requires Texts and documents in German or English. These are either entered directly into the DSF digital funding portal or uploaded as attachments. Please note that the system does NOT have a footnote function. Therefore, the Harvard citation style must be used. The bibliography can be added at the end in the text field:

Application documents that are entered directly into the system include:

- SUMMARY/ABSTRACT| A separate one-page summary of the project
- LONG VERSION | A presentation of the research project (research question, theoretical and methodological foundation, operationalisation, cost plan, list of references[6]) with approx. 10 pages (approx. 20,000 characters)
- COST PLAN | An additional cost breakdown

Supplementary attachments to be uploaded to the system as PDF files:

- If available, graphics, tables, or similar elements to supplement the project description
- CVs of the applicants and project team members (max. 2 pages each)[7]
- List of project-related publications by the applicant (max. 2 pages)[8]
- Cost estimates for third-party services, cooperation agreements, and similar documents

Please do not upload the entire application as an attachment.

A suggested list of possible bullet points is attached to these guidelines as Appendix 2

[5] In print or digital versions.
[6] The reference list of research literature can also optionally be added as an appendix (maximum of 2 pages).
[7] The two-page CV should contain only information directly relevant to the application regarding professional expertise. A list of presentations, memberships, etc., is not required.
[8] A complete list of the applicant's publications must not be attached to the application.

Applications must be submitted to the foundation exclusively through the DSF grant portal

The evaluation and decision-making process

Applications for funding pilot projects are assessed on the basis of at least two external expert opinions. If assessments differ widely, the Foundation may seek a third expert opinion.

The decision on the funding of requested research projects is made by the DSF Executive Board.

In the event of a positive decision on the award of funding, the Foundation reserves the right to issue a final approval only after a written statement has been submitted on the points of criticism and follow-up questions in the expert opinions.

Post-qualification of a pilot project in the current application process is not possible.

A rejected application for project funding may be resubmitted once in a revised version as a new application.

As a matter of principle, the Foundation only makes the expert opinions available in anonymised form.

DSF approves funding to the applicant's research institution. This entails the compulsory recognition of the Foundation's approval regulations by the management of the institution and the project owner. Further details can be found in the approval regulations for funded research projects.

Osnabrück, March 2026

APPENDIX 1A | Pilot project: Information on drawing up a cost plan

When drawing up the cost plan, the following points must be observed:

- DSF does not assume any overhead costs of the organisation receiving funding. It assumes that the infrastructure (e.g. work rooms, office and computer equipment, access to software licences, libraries and databases) is provided by the organisation receiving funding as its own contribution. For this reason, any material costs listed that count as part of a research institution's basic equipment require special justification.

- If labour and material costs have been calculated incorrectly, the Foundation will not allocate additional funding. It is recommended to add a 5% safety margin to the labour costs in order to compensate for progressive collectively agreed wage rises.

- Lump sums with no mention of a specific intended use will not be granted.

- Individual cost items should be rounded up to the nearest €10.

- Please note that a cost plan with the necessary explanations must be included in the long version of the application.

APPENDIX 1B | Pilot project: Information on drawing up a cost plan

COST ITEM	INFORMATION	REMARKS
LABOUR COSTS		
Staff positions for project execution	Total employer costs (Arbeitgeberbrutto) TVÖD/TVL group, normally pay grade 13 Duration of employment Full-time equivalent as a percentage Safety margin (5%)	Employees who have not completed a doctorate, up to group 13 at the most
Student or research assistants	Duration of employment Monthly working hours Hourly rate, including ancillary wage costs	Wages rate of the organisations receiving funding
Contracts for work and services with third parties	Scope, performance, remuneration	Remuneration taking into account local conditions
Fee contracts	E.g. translations, transcriptions	
MATERIAL COSTS		
Project-related field research stays and other research trips		
Flight and travel expenses	Ticket and feeder costs Local transport costs	Provisions of the Federal Travel Expenses Act (BRKG)
Subsistence costs	Number of overnight stays Number of days and daily rates (see BRKG)	Review of the type of accommodation in the case of longer research stays
Incidental travel expenses	Visas, vaccinations	
Participation in project-related or topic-related scientific conferences		
Travel and participation costs	Ticket and feeder costs Number of overnight stays Number of days and daily rates (see BRKG) Additional costs such as visas and fees	Applies only to early career researchers employed within the project. Association conventions and major international conferences (e.g. ISA, ECPR) are excluded
WORKING MATERIALS		
Computers, standard software, mobile devices	Grants up to a maximum of 50 per cent of the purchase costs	Justification why they are not part of the basic equipment provided by the organisation receiving funding
Specialist literature	No specific information	Not available in libraries
Special database fees and application software	Name of the database and application software	The applicant should check whether licences are available at the organisation receiving funding
Consumables and communication	Examples of intended use	
PROJECT-RELATED WORKSHOP (maximum of €5,000)		
Conference expenses	Duration and number of participants Flight/travel expenses, subsistence costs Organisational costs	Provisions of the Federal Travel Expenses Act (BRKG)
PROJECT PUBLICATIONS (subsidy, maximum of €1,500)		
Editorial work on print and digital publications Foreign language proofreading	Costs for editing, proofreading, layout, printing (knowledge transfer), etc.	Applies to specialist publications and knowledge transfer publications. Subsidies for publishing costs are excluded.

APPENDIX 2 | Pilot project: List of possible bullet points in the long and short version of the application[9]

Short version (summary of the project), a separate 1-page file

- Problem definition and scientific relevance of the project
- Originality and expected research results
- Methodological foundation
- Significance for scientific policy and social consulting
- Project duration
- Application volume

Long version of the application for project funding
(maximum 10 pages; approx. 20,000 characters including spaces, at least 11 point font size)

a. General information (in tabular form[10])

- Funding format
- Name of the applicant
- Institution/organisation/department
- Topic of the project
- Total expected duration
- Application volume
- Business address and contact details (phone, email address)

b. Detailed presentation of the research project

- Research questions, objectives and expected outcomes
- Originality and integration in the international state of research
- Theoretical foundation and methodological
- Implementation of the research design and validation of the findings (where applicable, remarks on access to the field and on security questions), comments on the selected research methodologies and techniques
- Project-related research ethics assessment

[9] This list is a non-binding outline suggestion. The order and choice of points may vary depending on the application.
[10] You can find an example of a tabular list in our download area under “Example of a cover sheet”.

- Expertise of the project team and own preparatory work
- Relevance or non-relevance of the additional criteria (promotion of early career researchers, national and international research collaboration, interdisciplinary orientation, and diversity)
- Utilisation of results and publication strategy
- Potential for scientific policy and social consulting (options for knowledge transfer), potential target groups and transfer formats
- Work plan and schedule
- List of relevant research literature
- Detailed cost plan stating information about the institution's own contribution / justification of individual
- Declaration that the application, or a similar application, has not been submitted to any other funding body (date and signature)

c. Appendices

- Information on the applicants in the form of a CV and a list of own publications relevant to the project (maximum 4 pages)
- Designated employees – CV / own publications relevant to the project (maximum 4 pages)
- Other documents such as cost estimates for third-party services, supporting documents for research collaboration, etc. (please keep to the essentials)