

BRAINS FOR BRUSSELS 2024 REGULATIONS

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1 OBJECTIVE OF THE ACTION

The objective of the program *Brains for Brussels* (BFB)¹ is to stimulate HRHR research (“high risk high reward”) in the Brussels-Capital Region by attracting and anchoring **bold researchers** who want to conduct **out-of-the-box research** and are currently active abroad or in the RDI sector.

In this program, “**bold researchers**” are understood to be able and willing to push the boundaries of what is considered as acquired knowledge within their field of research, who can both respond to today's challenges and anticipate the unimagined and/or the unthinkable, and who are committed to transforming their science culture through the expected breakthroughs of the project.

In this program, “**out-of-the-box research**” refers to projects that have a mode of operation that does away with the hierarchisation of knowledge, that take the risk of breaking with established frameworks and patterns of thought, and that aim both at the development of groundbreaking theories and practices and at the transfer of new knowledge to potential fields of application and their respective audiences.

2 TYPES OF PROJECTS

The action aims to finance projects that conduct high-risk research with a potential for long-term benefits for the Brussels-Capital Region.

As “Brains for Brussels” research projects are financed by the Brussels-Capital Region, they must be related to matters that explicitly fall within the competence of the Regions². For more information on the Region’s challenges, see the Regional Plan for Innovation (hereafter “RPI”; available in [French](#) or [Dutch](#)).

3 TARGET AUDIENCE

3.1 Beneficiary

The beneficiaries of this program are the research organisations that receive the researchers referred to in § 3.2 and that have at least one establishment in the Brussels Capital Region. They meet the definition of point 15 of the [Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation \(2014/C 198/01\)](#).

3.2 Researcher

Each project is led by a researcher in charge of its implementation within the host research organisation. This person occupies a central position in the execution of the project.

The *Brains for Brussels* program seeks to stimulate “bold” researchers to conduct “out-of-the-box” research (see § 1). At the time of submission of the project, these Belgian or foreign researchers hold a PhD and:

- have been working as an academic researcher abroad for at least the last two years, as of the start date of the project
or
- have held a position related to industrial research, experimental development or innovation within a Belgian or foreign company for at least two of the last three years, starting on the project start date. The researcher is not eligible if they are either currently working within a Belgian research organisation or have done so within the last 12 months.

¹ In terms of its objectives, Innoviris’s BFB program was modeled after FRQ-FNR’s AUDACE program. For more information, see <https://fra.gouv.qc.ca/en/program/international-quebec-luxembourg-audace-program-autumn-2022/>.

² Cf. article 6 of the special law of 8 August 1980 on institutional reforms
https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=fr&la=F&cn=1980080802&table_name=loi

The researcher is expected to rely on their scientific expertise, reputation and network in order to build the project. They must have team and project management skills, and be capable of valorising their research.

Under no circumstance can the researcher be replaced during the project.

3.3 Support Framework

3.3.1 Local supervisor

The researcher is highly qualified and is therefore expected to be capable of managing the project independently. Nevertheless, to facilitate the researcher's integration into the Brussels academic ecosystem and the host research organisation, a local supervisor will be appointed.

The supervisor will be a tenured professor or senior researcher from the host research organisation. More specifically, the local supervisor must hold a sufficiently stable position to ensure the follow-up of the project for at least the maximum duration of the project (i.e., 5 years).

The choice of the local promoter must be meaningful in relation to the researcher's project (see § 8.3).

3.3.2 Authorities of the host research organisation

The authorities of the receiving research organisation are the rector (or counterpart if the organisation is not a university) and the dean of the concerned faculty or any other person who has the authority to stabilise a researcher.

The authorities of the receiving research organisation must explicitly express their interest (1) in the new lines of research that the researcher will be developing as well as (2) in anchoring the said researcher within their organisation. To do so, a “**declaration of commitment**” will be drawn up in which the concerned organisation commits itself to align the term of the researcher's BFB project with the internal procedures leading to the opening of a stable mandate within the said organisation. In case of a positive evaluation of the researcher according to the regulations of the relevant financing source (other than Innoviris), this mandate will be offered to the researcher no later than at the end of the third year of the project.

Please note, that the steps taken by the host research organisation to stabilise the researcher will be a major criterion for renewal of the project (cf. § 5).

3.3.3 Research coordination service ("interface")

Within the beneficiary's administration, the research coordination service (consisting of Technology Transfer Officers or counterparts; hereafter referred to as “interface”) will assist the researcher in (1) the administrative aspects of the funding application, in particular the estimation of personnel costs, and (2) the development of a valorisation trajectory that ensures that the project will make a positive contribution to the Brussels Capital Region (see § 4).

Please note, the interface is responsible for the timely submission of applications to Innoviris. As the interface is responsible for the internal assessment and validation of the submitted projects, it will be setting an internal deadline. Projects must therefore be submitted to the interface before the deadline of the BFB program call.

4 VALORISATION OF THE RESEARCH

Funded projects must make a positive contribution to the development of the Brussels-Capital Region (see the RPI in [French](#) or [Dutch](#) for more information on regional challenges). A project that significantly undermines the social and environmental objectives of the Region is not eligible for funding.

In the application, the researcher will specify the deliverables (“outputs”), changes (“outcomes”) and benefits (“impacts”) that will result from the project during and, if applicable, after the project period (up to 15 years after the start).

In the short term (i.e., from year 1 onwards), the project will produce deliverables (“outputs”) that will be of a scientific nature.

The changes (“outcomes”) that these deliverables will bring about in the medium term (i.e., from year 4 onwards) will be both academic and societal in nature: they will take place both within and outside academia. As such, they will apply the scientific results of the project to the field in question.

The long-term benefits (“impacts”) (i.e., several years after the project) will result from all the changes brought about by the deliverables. They will be of an environmental, social, political and/or economic³ nature: they will take place outside academia, positively contributing to the development of the Brussels-Capital Region.

In other words, the deliverables are the means by which the researcher achieves the actual goal of the project: the benefits resulting from the changes brought about by the deliverables.

Example:

Out-of-the-box research	...
Outputs (year 1 - ...)	Articles, seminars, conferences, creation of a research center, etc.
Outcomes (year 4 - ...)	Integration of the scientific results of the project within the Brussels-Capital Region.
Impacts (long-term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological (e.g. improvement of soil quality in the BCR thanks to the changes caused by the BFB project) • and/or social (e.g. change in the attitude of local communities towards the out-of-the-box topic thanks to the changes brought about by the BFB project) • and/or political (e.g. adaptation of the current regional decrees regarding the out-of-the-box topic thanks to the changes caused by the BFB project) • and/or economic (e.g. creation of a local value chain thanks to the changes brought about by the BFB project)

5 PROJECT DURATION

The financial aid that can be obtained through this program lasts up to 3 years.

This period can be renewed for a maximum of 2 years. The appropriateness of the renewal is assessed based on the researcher's potential for stabilisation within the host organisation.

6 FINANCING

Eligible expenses and disbursement procedures will be specified in a resolution and a grant agreement.

Awarded financing for the first 3 years can cover up to 100% of eligible costs. Specifically, this aid covers:

- the salary of the researcher;
- logistical support for the implementation of the project (cost of equipment, support staff and infrastructure costs);
- operating costs directly related to the implementation of the project;
- if applicable, the researcher's relocation expenses;
- additional overhead and other operating expenses, including those for materials, supplies and similar products, arising directly from the project.

³ See article 22 of the Ordinance with non-economic finality. Available in [French](#) and [Dutch](#).

Please note, all expenses must be approved by Innoviris. They must be substantiated. See <https://innoviris.brussels/documents/general-accounting-directives-2021>.

7 SUBMISSION OF THE FUNDING APPLICATION

Applications must be sent electronically **between December, 2023 and March 4, 2024 at noon** by the interface of the concerned research organisation to Innoviris : funding-request@innoviris.brussels with mpossoz@innoviris.brussels in copy. Projects submitted after this date will not be considered.

Applications must be submitted using the form available [here](#). This form includes:

- a summary sheet (containing the details of the researcher, the host organisation and the local promoter; the start date of the project; the total budget for three years; the title of the project and its acronym; a non-confidential summary of the project; 5 keywords; fields of application);
- a presentation of the “bold” researcher and their “bold” support framework;
- a detailed proposal of the “out-of-the-box” research project;
- a proposal of the valorisation trajectory (which also takes into account the valorisation trajectory that will exceed the maximum project duration, i.e., 5 years);
- a budget for 36 months;
- annexes:
 - 1 Gantt chart;
 - CVs of the researcher and local supervisor, each with a list of recent publications relevant to the project;
 - a detailed estimate of the researcher's salary provided by the beneficiary's administration;
 - a “declaration of commitment” (see § 3.3.2);
 - a list of experts (suggested or advised against) for the jury evaluation (see § 8.3).

8 TREATMENT OF THE FUNDING APPLICATION

8.1 Receipt

Upon receipt of the application, Innoviris staff will send an acknowledgement of receipt within 5 days. If no acknowledgement of receipt is received within 5 days, the concerned interface can send a reminder e-mail to Innoviris in the next 5 working days.

In any case, after **March 11, 2024**, no objection can be lodged.

8.2 Admissibility and initial evaluation

Next, within one month, the researcher will receive a letter regarding whether the application is administratively admissible.

An application is admissible when the file is complete and meets all of the following criteria:

1. The researcher holds a doctorate.
2. The researcher
 - a. has been working as an academic researcher abroad for at least the last two years, as of the start date of the projector
 - b. have held a position related to industrial research, experimental development or innovation within a Belgian or foreign company for at least two of the last three years, starting on the project start date. The researcher is not eligible if they are either currently working within a Belgian research organisation or have done so within the last 12 months.
3. The local supervisor is a tenured professor or senior researcher of the host organisation.
4. The application is accompanied by a "declaration of commitment" from the authorities of the

receiving research organisation (see § 3.3.2).

5. The form is duly completed and allows both the evaluation of the project and the analysis of its consistency with the program's framework, as established in the present regulations.
6. The researcher has complied with all obligations imposed by the Region for previous financing.
7. The project did not start before the application was submitted.
8. The researcher respects all obligations imposed by environmental, social, and labor law.

A resubmission of the project is possible only once. The new version should not be identical to the first and must at least attempt to implement the jury's feedback on the first application.

Depending on the number of projects submitted and in accordance with Article 18 of the [Arrêté du Gouvernement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale portant exécution de l'ordonnance du 27 juillet 2017 à finalité non économique](#) (also available [here](#) in Dutch), Innoviris may carry out an initial evaluation of the applications based on the evaluation criteria described in § 8.3. Only the applications selected at the end of this initial evaluation will be submitted to a panel of experts.

8.3 Evaluation

Each admissible project will be evaluated by a jury that Innoviris will compose, organise and chair on an ad hoc basis. This jury consists of independent scientific experts ("external jury") and Innoviris advisors ("internal jury"). Each expert will sign a confidentiality agreement and a declaration of absence of conflict of interest before receiving a copy of the application.

The evaluation is based on the analysis of the submitted application and an interview by the jury during which the project will be defended by the researcher, accompanied by the local supervisor and the concerned interface.

The researcher and the supervisor are allowed to suggest experts of the research topic at hand to Innoviris when submitting the application. They are also invited to inform Innoviris of possible conflicts of interest with certain experts, in Belgium and abroad (see § 7).

The submitted documents and the interview will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. The innovative nature and scientific quality of the project
 - The proposal is innovative and unique. It distinguishes itself in an outstanding manner from ongoing strategic research efforts at the international level ("pioneering project").
 - The scientific goals build upon and offer substantial added value to the international state-of-the-art and to ongoing research.
 - The research approach is clearly described for all scientific goals.
 - A thorough substantiation of the research approach is provided (i.e., how it will lead to reaching the scientific goals in the best possible way)
 - The approach includes a full identification of research risks and a well-designed prioritisation of "fall back" research options.
2. Feasibility of the project
 - The deliverables ("outputs") produced in the short term are such that they can bring about changes ("outcomes") in the medium term that will lead to benefits ("impacts") – the very goal of the project – for the Region in the long term.
 - The time frame required to achieve these benefits is realistic. The valorisation trajectory includes the time that will exceed the maximum duration of the project (i.e., 5 years).
 - The project adequately anticipates its resource needs, both for the research and for the valorisation of the research results. The project is able to take stock and gradually adjust its needs to its available resources.
3. The relevance and quality of the component linked to activities complementary to scientific research

- The project has a clear vision of its actual goal, namely to generate environmental, social, economic and/or political benefits ("impacts") for the Brussels Capital Region.
 - The project's valorisation trajectory is built on the following premise: the deliverables ("outputs") will generate changes ("outcomes") that will lead to environmental, social, economic and/or political benefits ("impacts") for the Region.
 - The project is at the service of regional challenges and can contribute positively to the long-term development of the Brussels-Capital Region.
4. The researcher's profile
- The researcher is capable of pushing the boundaries of what is generally considered to be acquired knowledge within the concerned research field.
 - The researcher is capable of responding to today's challenges as well as anticipating the unconceived and/or the unthinkable.
 - The researcher commits to transform the concerned scientific culture thanks to the expected breakthroughs of the project.
5. Supervision of the researcher
- The research organisation, the research unit and the local supervisor are willing and able to encourage the researcher to be bold within the framework of the proposed out-of-the-box research.
 - The research organisation, research unit and local supervisor are willing and able to support the researcher in valorising the research even after the maximum duration of the project (i.e., 5 years).
6. The sustainability of the project's results and/or the researcher's prospects for stabilisation
- The researcher's stabilisation prospects in the Brussels academic ecosystem are excellent. The researcher is likely to be anchored within the host organisation by the end of the third year of the project at the latest.
7. The impact in terms of economic and/or social value for the Region
- The project's potential to generate environmental, social, economic and/or political benefits for the Brussels-Capital Region.
 - The project is at the service of regional challenges and can contribute positively to the long-term development of the Brussels-Capital Region.
 - Disruptive potential
 - The project does away with the hierarchisation of knowledge and aims to go significantly beyond the foundations, views, practices, approaches and/or methods that dominate the concerned research field or that usually dominate the study of the chosen problem.
 - The project takes the risk of breaking with established frameworks and patterns of thought and has the potential to go beyond what is known, to challenge inherited standards and norms, and to produce radically new knowledge that will transform the field of study in question.
 - The project develops disruptive lines of research (theories and/or practices) and aims to transfer new knowledge to potential fields of application and their respective audiences.

9 SELECTION OF PROJECTS

Projects will be selected by the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region based on the results of the jury evaluation.

10 SCHEDULE

- Submission of projects to Innoviris → november – March 4, 2024
- Evaluation by an ad hoc jury → April 1 – July 1, 2024

- Government decision regarding project funding → September 1 – October 1, 2024
- Start of the selected projects → October 1, 2024 – December 1, 2024

11 PROTOCOL OF THE PROJECT FOLLOW-UP

Together, the researcher and the local supervisor follow the various steps that are necessary for a successful start-up and follow-up of the project. This is essential to ensure the smooth running of the work program. The researcher is required to make all possible efforts to bring the project to a fruitful conclusion.

The researcher must send an **annual activity report** to Innoviris, i.e., after 12 months, 24 months, 36 months, 48 months, and 60 months. The follow-up schedule is explicitly mentioned in the agreement between the grantee and the Region.

Innoviris will follow up the projects based on the submitted activity reports. The templates for these reports will be provided by Innoviris. The modalities for submitting the reports will be defined in the agreement.

The follow-up will allow Innoviris to assess the quality of the work at 12 months, 24 months, 36 months, 48 months, and 60 months. Each new funding instalment can only be released after a positive evaluation of the project by Innoviris based on the annual reports mentioned above and the elements described below.

In addition to the annual reports, the researcher is required:

- at 24 months to participate in a follow-up committee organised by Innoviris, during which the researcher will give an oral presentation based on the annual report (sent to Innoviris at the latest 1 week before the committee), discussing
 - what research activities have been carried out, what results have been obtained since the beginning of the project, and how the research program has evolved or been updated;
 - the progress of the valorisation of the results since the beginning of the project, and how the valorisation program has evolved or been updated;
 - the researcher's prospects for a stable mandate within the host organisation and/or for additional financial support.
- at 30 months to send the application form (which will be provided in a timely manner) for the renewal of the project to Innoviris.
- at 48 months (i.e., between years 4 and 5) to organise an international colloquium aimed at the kind of audience (both academic and non-academic) that may benefit from the conducted research, with the goal of presenting the work carried out thus far. Innoviris will be invited to this event.
- at 60 months, to deliver a final report that includes (1) a detailed overview of the breakthroughs and results of the project, (2) a brief description of the project's efforts to valorise the research results in the Region, and (3) an overview of the valorisation prospects after the completion of the project.

12 ADDITIONAL FUNDING

To make Brussels more attractive to high-level researchers, it will be possible to apply for additional funding (e.g., ERC) after the funding for a BFB project has been granted.

Please note, the researcher should immediately inform Innoviris of any financial support and/or remuneration (e.g., contracts, procurements) that was applied for and/or granted outside the BFB program during the maximum duration of the project (including renewal). Innoviris will then evaluate the complementarity of the aid or remuneration in question. In the event of a positive evaluation, the researcher will be required to sign a sworn statement certifying that:

1. the obtained funding is complementary to the BFB project;
2. the workload associated with this new funding will not interfere with the objectives and progress of the BFB project;
3. in no case expenses incurred within the framework of this other, complementary project will be submitted to the BFB project (“double funding”) – or vice versa. “Double funding” happens when the same expense or part of the same expense is subsidised by several parties, including Innoviris.

Should, even after the end of a BFB project, Innoviris become aware of double funding, it will proceed to the full recovery of the said funding.

13 TERMINATION OF FUNDING

Among others, the following can result in a termination of the funding:

- cessation of the project before its scheduled completion;
- premature departure of the researcher;
- failure to comply with the protocol described in § 11;
- failure to valorise the results in the interest of the Brussels-Capital Region.

The beneficiary must immediately inform Innoviris if and when the researcher receives a stable mandate within the host organisation during the project. Innoviris may, upon express agreement, continue to fund the project until the planned end by covering the remaining costs, besides the researcher's salary.

14 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

A conflict of interest may arise from, among other things, economic interests, political affinities, family or romantic ties, or other common interests or relationships.

The supervisor and the researcher shall take all necessary measures to avoid situations that could compromise the impartial and objective execution of the project, including situations that could constitute a conflict of interest. Any situation that constitutes or may result in a conflict of interest during the project must be reported to Innoviris in writing without delay.

15 FORM AND INFORMATION

The program’s regulations and application form are available [here](#).