Guide for writing and submitting applications for the FCT Investigator Grants

Introduction

This guide for writing and submitting an application for the FCT Investigator Grants is intended to guide you through the application process and to help you to prepare, write and submit a good application. You will also find, in this guide, some useful information on the peer-review evaluation of these grants.

The guide is based on, information scattered throughout the FCT website, including legal documents setting the rules and conditions for funding the FCT Investigator Grants. These documents include the Regulations Governing Funding for the FCT Investigator – 2012 (Regulamento Investigador FCT) and the public announcement of the call for the FCT Investigator Grants (Aviso de Abertura do Concurso Investigador FCT).

This guide does not supersede the aforementioned documents, which are legally binding.

Prior to Submission

Who may submit applications

The application must be submitted individually by the candidates to the position of FCT Investigator grant.

The conditions that the applicants must satisfy are set forth in the Regulations and in the FCT Investigator Announcement.

Registration in the FCT Investigator website

Please note that you will have to register in the FCTSIG – Management Information System – in order to submit an application. For detailed information on how to register, or on how to recover your user name and password, please refer to the Instructions. Using the FCTSIG login credentials you can access both the FCT-CV Portal and the FCT Investigator website. On the FCT-CV you will need to create or update your CV. On the FCT Investigator website you will have access to other components of the application form.

What you should know before submitting an application

Official Announcement and Regulations

Before beginning to prepare your applicationmake sure that you are well informed on the regulations governing this call by reading the supporting documents, including the legal documents.

The terms of admissibility of the FCT Investigator, as well as the rules and requirements to be observed in the different phases of the application process, are set forth in:

- Regulations Governing Funding for the FCT Investigator - 2012, which set forth the general terms under which funding may be granted to support the FCT Investigator.

- FCT Investigator Announcement, which sets forth technical and legal stipulations not defined in the regulations or which specifies the general terms set forth in the regulations.

The FCT Investigator application website

In the FCT Investigator application website you will access to the following contents:

- Homepage presenting a brief overview of the program, the anticipated profile of the candidates, and other application requirements.

- Supporting documents for downloading, such as the "Guide for writing and submitting applications for the FCT Investigator Grants" and the "FCT Investigator Guide for Peer Review"

– News

Application to FCT Investigator grant will require your login into the website. After logging in you will access to the Application form with the following sections:

> Application description
> > Executive summary/ synopsis
> > Extended Synopsis / full description
> > Ethical and legal issues
> > Host institution
> Support materials
> Application overview (wich includes validation and lock of the application)

Application form

The application form is organized in such a way as to provide the evaluation panels with sufficient information on your application ensuring a fair review to all applicants.

The various sections can be accessed from the bar that appears on the left side of the pages. Changes are transmitted to the FCT server automatically when you navigate away from a field. This enables you to work on the application form over several sessions until you consider it complete. Once the validation test has been passed, the application is *locked*, which completes the submission process.

During the first few days of the call, some sections may not be available, "Validate and lock application". These sections are unlikely to be used during the first week that the call is open. Should this occur, FCT will likely be fine-tuning some of the details in these sections.

General recommendations

– We recommend a careful and timely preparation of the application to attract the attention of the evaluation panels keeping in mind that this is a highly competitive call.

– Read carefully the instructions for filling in? the form provided in this guide and on the application form itself. You may also want to check the list of FAQs as many of your questions or doubts will be answered here. Please make sure that you have

consulted all documents available at the FCT website in relation to this application, including FAQ, before contacting FCT. Please remember that FCT will endeavor to answer all questions directly and as soon as possible. However resources are limited and we may have to prioritize the questions by firstly addressing those that are more complex and not explained elsewhere.

– Learn about the structure of *the application form before you begin filling it. As an FCT Investigator applicant you will have to gather information from the Host Institution of your choice. You will also need to discuss and negotiate the terms and conditions that the host institution will provide to ensure that you can implement your research program and further develop your career.*
We strongly advise that you prepare *this information as early as possible as you may need to consult with more than one host institution.. If you wish to include a Host Institution which is not accessible via the FCT database* please send an email to info.if@fct.pt requesting its addition. This email should contain the following information:

- Name of the host institution
    - Acronym of the name of the host institution
    - Email / telephone number
    - Institutional address of the host institution (please include the   postal code)
- Name of the legal representative of the host institution
    - *Chave de associação activa[1]*
- Managing institution (if applicable)

The new institution will be added to the list of choices within two working days after the completion of that form.

– Check out all the sections of the form in advance so you will have an idea of what is being asked for and to give yourself time to gather all the information required for submission.

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[1] Association key

- Read the News section on the FCT Investigator website regularly.

- Please bear in mind that the extended CV, on the FCT-CV Portal is integral to your application. Make sure it is updated before you lock your application.

- The FCTSIG/CV system for curricula submission allows applicants to indicate information in the field *Name in Publications* and this data will be used during the evaluation phase to simplify the evaluators' work. This is strongly suggested if your full name does not match the name used in scholarly journals and books.

Previous evaluation panels have noted that the CVs were not sufficiently synthetic, making it difficult to find the relevant information. We recommend applicants to heed this comment, in particular to highlight the most important publications and the most relevant activities in recent years. Please remember that it is your responsibility to provide the evaluation panel with all the information that you want them to know to ensure that your application receives a fair review.

- Special attention is recommended when choosing the *keywords* which best characterize the application given its *importance in the evaluation process*.

- The application *should not* be fully prepared on a word processor and only then copied to the application form. The text should be directly input in the form or, you can copy, paste and save to the form sub-components previously prepared with a word processor. You can always globally visualize the contents of the form, and validate thus reducing the errors during the application.

- *Do not use quotation marks (")* to embrace parts of your text. Some types of quotation marks (") may determine that the text after them is ignored. Please verify if your saved text corresponds to what you have planned.

- Create a document in Notepad or another word processor with the contents that you will later be copied and pasted into the application form text fields. This way you will be able to fill out the form more quickly

- Do not assume that a form or the rules for submission of applications are the same as those used by other funding agencies or those that someone else told you before.

- The system provides an *explanation for each error detected*. Read and interpret this message carefully and proceed accordingly. It is much faster to do this than to contact the FCT to report the error messages.

- There is a *final verification process* before locking. Waiting until the last minute to make corrections can be risky.

- Probably the best advice for any candidate to a major call where applications are submitted online is: *plan and complete your application process as early as possible*. That way you can ensure that, if needed, the FCT can provide you with the best possible assistance.

How to write a good application

Write in such a way as to convince a top expert in your field that your ideas deserve to be funded and your career supported. You will have to provide evidence that you are among the very best in your field by any international standards. It is of crucial importance that you demonstrate that you are a leading independent scientist and/or that you actively strive to pursue an independent career in science. At the same time, you must convince someone who is scientifically literate, but may not have specific background in your area. You can also point out the importance of your research project in terms of specific national interests should this be the case.

You will have to prove that your research project and career plan are worth funding. Be positive and optimistic, but also realistic in terms of your expectations.

A careful reading of the evaluation criteria listed in the FCT Investigator Guide for Peer Review will give you a good idea of how the application will be evaluated. Read these criteria carefully and make sure that your application addresses these critical points.

How to direct questions to the FCT

Information regarding the contents of the application form may be requested by e-mail at the address provided in the FCT Investigator Announcement (info.if@fct.pt).

For questions related to technical aspects of the website, please contact the webmaster by e-mail at webmaster@fct.pt.

Submission of the application

Please note that you cannot create more than one application.

The application form is organized in sections, some of which are obligatory and some optional. This distinction will be determined automatically by the system. The sections that you will need to fill are the following:

Application description
A. Executive summary
   1. Synopsis of CV/ major accomplishments
   2. Synopsis of the research project & career development plan
   3. Number of years after completion of the PhD
   4. Number of years working as an independent scientist
   5. Justification for deviations (optional)
B. Full description of the application
   1. Research project
      Background
      Research plan and methods
      Expected outcomes/ Impact
      Major references (optional)
   2. Career development plan
      Career objectives
      Development / Consolidation of an independent career
      Internationalization / networking plan
C. Statement on ethical and legal Issues
D. The host institution
   1. Select institution
   2. Description of the host conditions
E. Support materials (optional)

Reminder: The extended CV, as featured on the FCT-CV Portal is an integral component of your application. After locking your application please wait 24hours for your CV to be visible in your application form. Please make sure that your CV is updated before locking your application and do not change it before it is available in your application form.

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The entire application must be written in English.

In the following subsections of this guide you will find a more detailed description of the contents requested in each section of the application form, particularly of Sections A and B – Executive Summary and Full description of the application. You will also find some tips and suggestions for writing a good application.

Many of the fields on the form have character limits. Try to be concise, as you will not be able to save text with more characters than allowed.

Application description

When you access this menu for the first time after registering your application:

– The reference code for the application is automatically generated. This will be the *FCT's unique identification code for the application* until all activities are completed.

In this phase you will have to fill in:

– Position level to which you are applying

– Title of the application

– Scientific Area – choose the main and secondary areas among the options available

– Up to 5 Keywords

– Are you eligible for a exploratory research project?

– Justification (If applicable)

Position level to which you are applying

From the drop-down menu indicate which of the 3 levels you are applying for:

– *"starting grants"* aimed at PhD holders with less than 6 years after the award of the degree, with no need for previous scientific independence;

Please note that although scientific independence is not a requirement for "starting grants" it will be strongly valued by the evaluations panels.

- *"development grants"* aimed at PhD holders with more than 6 years and less than 12 years after the award of the degree, being independent researchers for less than 6 years.

- *"advanced grants"* aimed at PhD holders who are independent researchers for more than 6 years.

Scientific independence is defined by criteria such as:

- being a PI or group leader of a research team,

- having obtained funding as principal investigator in competitive calls launched by national and/or international funding agencies.

- Publications as senior/corresponding author and/or publications where the PhD supervisor is not a co-author.

Please note that there are a number of circumstances that may affect the actual time that can be inferred from the information on your CV. This includes maternity, paternity leave, illness, etc. If this is the case please indicate the circumstance in *Justification for deviations (??)*

In addition, in the 2012 call a tolerance of 11 months is accepted for the time after completing the PhD and for the time of work dedicated as an independent investigator. For example, six years after the PhD completion can mean six years and 11 months, and 6 years as an independent investigator can mean five years and 1 month.

Title of the project

The title should be brief, informative, understandable to a reader with a general scientific background and suitable for public dissemination.

Scientific Area

The scientific area must be chosen from the OECD´s adopted Field of Science and Technology (FOS) classification, available in two levels of detail in drop-down menus: the main scientific area and the secondary scientific area.

Keywords

You can choose up to 5 keywords. The key words are likely to be used in the peer-review evaluation of your application and should reflect accurately the scientific content of your application. This is particularly important for interdisciplinary applications where more than one scientific field is likely to be contemplated (considered?)

Are you eligible for a exploratory research project?

In this section you will also have to inform FCT if you are eligible for an "Exploratory Research Project". Should your application be recommended for funding you will be asked to submit your research project in a form that complies with the regulations of FCT applicable to the "Exploratory Research Project".

A. Executive summary

Writing a clear and informative executive summary is critical in preparing a good application as it will be used in the first level of evaluation to assess whether your application reaches high enough priority to pass to the second level of evaluation (please refer to the evaluation guide). Typically, no more than 30% of all applications will be subjected to further international peer-review (second level of evaluation).

The executive summary comprises two major fields: *A synopsis of your CV and a synopsis that combines your research project and career development plan.*

Information that is not specifically provided in the executive summary section will not be considered for the first evaluation level. In fairness to all applicants the first level evaluation panels will be instructed to ignore the information not contained in these two fields. Therefore, do not assume that the reviewers will have access to information that is not provided in your CV synopsis even if it is available elsewhere.

Note that it is your responsibility to provide all the information necessary to ensure that your application receives a fair review.

A.1. Synopsis of CV/major accomplishments (Maximum 2500 characters)

In preparing your executive summary take the following into consideration:

List your major achievements in a narrative form but using objective indicators and substantive arguments. Indicators include your main academic and professional degrees, publications in major multidisciplinary international peer-reviewed journals or in top specialty peerreviewed journals. Equivalent contributions/indicators from areas

where international peer-reviewed publications are not available or are not common practice should be provided and explained (for example peer-reviewed conference proceedings and/or monographs on specific research fields). Other relevant achievements may include competitive funding from national and international funding agencies, granted patents, supervision of post-graduate students and prizes, honors and awards.

You should also provide objective information that helps the panel to assess if and for how long you have been working as an independent investigator.

For example[2]: J Smith graduated in Physics by the University College of London in 1990 and completed a PhD degree in Cell Biology by the Max Planck Institute in Dresden in 1995. Since obtaining the PhD degree J Smith published 39 papers in international peer review journals with an accumulated impact factor of 180 and with over 3600 citations. 25 of the 39 papers were published independently from the PhD supervisor and 20 were published as a senior (corresponding) author. Of these, 5 were published in major multidisciplinary scientific journals including Cell, Nature and Science. Eight papers were published in the highest impact factor journal in the area of Neurosciences. In 2005 J Smith established his own group comprising 9 investigators including PhD students and Post-Docs. Since his graduation J Smith completed the supervision of 4 PhD students and 3 Post-Docs.

In rare instances some or all of the above criteria may not apply. The applicants are advised to clearly explain unconventional paths, gaps in the research career and any other exceptional circumstances so that the applications can be fairly assessed by the evaluation panels.

The executive summary of your CV should clearly refer to the indicators of scientific independence and to the time since completion of the PhD degree.

A.2. Synopsis of the research project & career development plan
(Maximum 2500 characters)

In this section you should identify the "big scientific question" that you want to address with your research project. You should also provide sufficient information that convinces the evaluation panel that you have the skills, know-how and, as appropriate, a research

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2 The achievements listed here are to illustrate a fictional application and should not be regarded as formal requirements or major achievements, specifically endorsed by FCT.

team and funding required to pursue your major goals. It is important that you refer to the host conditions made available for your project and to provide evidence that you did seek to ensure that there is appropriate institutional support to carry out your research project and career development plan.

Please note that in addition to the objective information provided in the synopsis of your CV you may need to explain your career stage and to justify that your application meets the requirements of the position/ level that you are applying for.

In preparing your *career development plan* the following guidelines should be considered:

– Clearly state where you are in your career and state your short-term (next 3 years) and long-term (over 5 years) career objectives. Please clearly identify what further research activities or training are needed to attain these goals.

– Briefly describe how the research project together with other development activities will provide the experience that you need to launch and carry out an independent career.

– Explain how the research project relates to your goals and its integration in the scientific/ research strategy of the host institution.

A.3. Number of years after completion of the PhD

A.4. Number of years working as an independent scientist

A.5. Justification for deviations (If applicable, maximum 500 characters)

Provide any valid explanation for the difference between the number of years indicated in A.3 and A.4 and the ones that can be inferred from your CV (for example maternity or paternity leave).

B. Full description of the application

There is no pre-established structure to describe the research projects and career development plans, which can be different for different career paths and research profiles. To facilitate the application process you will find in the application form text boxes that you may find useful to describe the key points of your application. However, if

you wish, you can ignore the titles indicated in the text boxes and provide a title that more appropriately describes the contents on the text boxes.

B.1. Research project (maximum of 12000 characters)

Use the 4 text boxes in this section to present your research project. The following points should be addressed when appropriate:

You may start by presenting a *background* (maximum of 3000 characters) overview of the research field. Here you can make reference to your previous work, show your knowledge of the state of the art, and explain the innovative nature of your application.

Describe the *research plan and methods* (maximum of 3000 characters); start by identifying the major scientific question you wish to address and the objectives of your application. Include hypothesis, and list specific aims and objectives that will be used to address the hypothesis. Provide a general description of the approach to be used in each aim. Consider possible limitations and alternative approaches.

Refer to the *expected outcomes* (maximum of 3000 characters) of your project and how this will impact on your career development and on the scientific strategy of the host institution. If you expect your research to be a demonstrable example of excellent research contributing to the society and the economy do not forget to mention this. If actions of scientific dissemination are adequate to your research project, and you consider organizing them, do not forget to describe your plans.

List major references (maximum of 3000 characters), including your own work.

B.2. Career development plan (maximum of 7500 characters)

Use the 3 text boxes in this section to present your career development plan. The following points should be addressed:

Clearly state where you are in your career and state your short-term (next 3 years) and long-term (over 5 years) *career objectives* (maximum 3000 characters).

Clearly identify what further research activities or training are needed towards the development/consolidation of an independent career (maximum 3000 characters). Explain how the research project relates to your goals and its integration in the scientific/research strategy of the host institution.

Present your internationalization/networking plans (maximum 1500 characters).

C. Statement on ethical and legal issues

As required but no longer than 500 characters; supporting documents should be referred to and uploaded in this section.

D. The host institution

It is your responsibility to choose the institution where you wish to develop your research project and your career.

The evaluation panels will determine whether the research project and the conditions specified by the host institution allow for an adequate career development plan that will either consolidate your position as an independent scientist or facilitate the transition to independence.

Please note that in the "Portal de Ciência e Tecnologia" there is a designated area where the host institution must confirm its association with and its support to the applicant's research project and career development plan.

The host institution must provide a binding statement that the conditions of independence already exist or will be made available to the candidate should the application be funded.

Applications that do not include this institutional statement will not be considered for evaluation.

Host institutions should be aware that recruitment policies that allow attracting and retaining the best scientists, including the FCT Investigator during and beyond the initial support from FCT, will be valued by all possible means.

D.1. Selecting Institutions

This section identifies the institution involved in the project from an administrative and a scientific standpoint.

To add a host institution you begin to write the first few letters of the name of the institution then choose the desired institution from the pull-down list of those available. If the institution meets the requirements but is not on the list, you must send an email to

info.if@fct.pt requesting the addition of the institution to the FCT database. This email should contain the following information:

– Name of the host institution

- Acronym of the name of the host institution

- Email / telephone number

- Institutional address of the host institution (please include the postal code)

– Name of the legal representative of the host institution

- Chave de associação activa[3]

- Managing institution (if applicable)

 The institution will be added to the list of choices within two working days. In this case, you will need to come back to this section of the form to add the institution to the application.

D.2. Description of the host conditions (maximum 1500 characters)

You should also *specify the conditions that are available or/and that will be made available* ensuring that you can successfully complete your research project and further develop your career during and beyond the time that you are funded as an FCT Investigator. This information will be made available to the host institution that will need to confirm it and possible add to it.

E. Support Materials

The support materials are documents or other information that is likely to be used in the administrative processing of your application. This may include certificates of honors and degrees or any other documents that are required to validate the information that you provided in this application. For example, if you evoked maternity/paternity leave to justify a lapse of time after completing the degree you will need to provide legal documents that support your claim.

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[3] Association key

No other documents besides those mentioned above will be considered in this section. The maximum disk space reserved for each application is 10 MB. However, each file cannot exceed 1 MB. Acceptable formats are:

– GIF (Graphics Interchange Format)

– JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group)

– PDF (Portable Document Format)

Extended CV

Your CV should be submitted using the model FCTSIG available at the FCT-CV Portal. Please make sure that you update your CV before submitting your application. The CVs will be locked within 24 hours after you lock the application and no further changes will be considered for this application.

Overview and locking

The Application overview link gives you access to the following options:

– Overview of the application

– Validate and lock the application

Overview of the application

The overview of the application displays the contents of the application fields in a single window, which includes a link to the CV only after the application is locked. You can view the details of a single section of the form or a group of sections.

Validate and lock the application

Locking the application is preceded by an automatic procedure that validates the application and checks for errors.

After the application is completed, click on "Validate" to validate the entire application. When no errors are detected, the program will ask the applicant to confirm that he/she indeed wishes to lock the application.

If there are errors, a list of the problems detected is generated on the application form showing the section and field where the error occurred, along with a brief description of the problem that led to the error. *The existence of errors prevents locking*.

The *alerts* issued during the validation do not *prevent locking*.

Reread the General Recommendations and *do not wait until the deadline for the call draws near to do the validation*.

Once an application is locked, or after deadline, you will no longer have access to the application form, but you may view its contents in the Overview of the Application.

The locked application will generate two automatic e-mails, one to the individual candidate that submitted the application and a second one to the legal representative of the host institution, confirming the submission of the application.