

Call Specifications

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About

This document specifies the process, criteria, and instrument of this call. It is aimed at applicants wishing to submit a proposal in the ME/CFS Call 2026 - Fellowships call. For further information regarding the funding and submission guidelines, as well as references to WWTF policies, please consider the following documents:

<u>Submission Guideline</u>	Guide to creating, editing and submitting a proposal
<u>WWTF Funding Guideline</u>	General guideline for WWTF funding activities (<i>German only</i>)
<u>Guideline for Good Scientific Practice</u>	Guidelines by the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity
<u>Open Science Policy</u>	Open Science Policy of WWTF
<u>Gender Equality Strategy & Plan</u>	Gender Equality Strategy & Plan of WWTF
<u>Accounting Guideline</u>	Specifies accounting for funded projects (<i>German only</i>)

Scope of the call

This call is issued within the WWTF "Additional Measures" ("Ergänzende Instrumente") specified in the [WWTF Funding Guideline](#).

This call is open to early-career ME/CFS researchers seeking to undertake a six-month research stay in Vienna, Lower Austria or abroad. The ME/CFS Fellowship programme aims to strengthen the ME/CFS community by supporting excellent young scientists and promoting the exchange of expertise. The programme provides a stipend for fellows to learn new methods and techniques in renowned laboratories in Vienna or abroad. The fellowship should help young researchers forge and strengthen international connections early in their career.

Why ME/CFS?

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis / Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) is a complex and poorly understood chronic disease. As part of the family of post-acute infectious diseases, it is characterised by a wide range of complex and serious, debilitating conditions with a variety of symptoms. This includes the cardinal symptom post-exertional malaise. Other symptoms like sleep dysfunction, pain, neurological/cognitive manifestations, as well as autonomic, immunological, and neuro-endocrinological symptoms are part of ME/CFS. Individuals with ME/CFS often do not return to pre-disease levels of activity. The cause of ME/CFS is currently unknown. ME/CFS affects individuals of all ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic groups. It is estimated that in Austria up to 80,000 patients suffer from ME/CFS, with women being more likely to be diagnosed than men.

The focus of this fellowship is on learning and exchange of techniques that advance the understanding of post-acute infectious diseases such as ME/CFS. However, grantees investigating other post-acute infectious diseases that show substantial post-exertional malaise in their phenotype are also eligible for funding. Please note that researchers solely addressing observational projects in clinical settings and health service research do not fit the scope of this call.

Phenotypic Characteristics

ME/CFS: The definition of ME/CFS must align with one or more of the following international consensus criteria:

- [Canadian Consensus Criteria \(CCC\) or the revised CCC](#)

- [International Consensus Criteria](#)
- [NICE Guidelines](#) for ME/CFS
- [IOM 2015 Diagnostic Criteria](#)

Post-acute infectious diseases (PAIS): Other post-acute infectious diseases may also be investigated as part of the proposed fellowship. Recent research has shown significant overlap in the biological mechanisms between a wide range of post-acute infectious diseases. Early career researchers investigating other post-acute infectious diseases (e.g., long COVID) are therefore also eligible to apply for this fellowship. To be included in the scope of this call, the disease to be studied must meet the phenotypic criteria of post-exertional malaise as defined by one of the above-mentioned international consensus criteria.

ME/CFS Fellowship: What we expect

Early career researchers who wish to apply in this call must either: 1) be currently based at a university or non-university research institution in Vienna or Lower Austria and seek to conduct a research stay outside of Austria; or 2) be currently based outside of Austria and seek to conduct a research stay at a university or non-university research institution in Vienna or Lower Austria.

The aim of this call is to strengthen the ME/CFS research community globally, with a particular focus on Vienna. Through the fellowships, early career researchers should:

- **Develop core research and technical skills:** Grantees should receive training in and acquire new skills relevant for ME/CFS research. This may include designing, performing, and interpreting experiments, mastering associated experimental techniques, and developing strong foundations in experimental design, statistical methodology, and/or quantitative / qualitative reasoning.
- **Contribute to strengthening of collaborations between research groups:** Grantees should benefit from and contribute to conducting research in different lab groups and cultures. Grantees are encouraged to engage in community activities to promote exchange and collaboration across ME/CFS labs.
- **Career development:** Grantees should continue to develop essential professional skills, such as critical thinking, project management, communication, organization, and the ability to work independently and as part of different teams. Applicants should also demonstrate how their research stay contribute to their career development.
- **Broader Impact and Scientific Engagement:** Grantees are encouraged to think beyond the lab bench and understand the broader impact of their ME/CFS research.

Important Technicalities

- **The overall duration is limited to 6 months.** If applicants must deviate from this timeframe, this must be indicated and strongly justified in the application. A fellowship duration of 6 months is strongly recommended.
- **Fellowships must start at latest in June, 2026.** This timeline for start of fellowships is mandatory.
- **The fellowship contract** will be signed between WWTF and the Viennese research institution of the outgoing/incoming grantee in accordance with WWTF's funding guidelines and role as local funder in Vienna. For more details, [please see here](#). If you are outgoing/incoming from/to an institution based in Lower Austria, the contract will be signed between the State of Lower Austria and the outgoing/incoming grantee. For more details, [please see here](#).
- **All applicants must submit a Letter of Intent (LOI)** from the host lab / working group: All applications must include a letter from the host group, with the following information:
 - The name of the applicant
 - The name of the responsible PI at the Host Institution
 - The timeframe of the research stay
 - The expected role of the applicant within the working group and
 - The Host Lab / Working group's approach to mentorship and guidance for the duration of the fellowship
 - Signature of the responsible PI of the Host Institution

Community Building

Funded fellows will participate in WWTF and [WE&ME](#) public relation activities to promote the outcomes of this call. This includes featuring research projects online, contributing to other multimedia activities and/or presentation of their research work at stakeholder meetings relevant. To strengthen the ME/CFS research community, funded fellows will also be invited to participate in further community-building activities.

Financing of this call

This call is co-financed by four parties:

- The Wiener Philharmoniker generously dedicated their annual Neujahrskonzert philanthropy to [ME/CFS activities](#)
- The [WE&ME Foundation](#) which, was established in 2020 by the Ströck family and is situated in Vienna, Austria, where the family is renowned for their "[Ströck](#)" bakeries. The Ströck family and the dedicated WE&ME team are committed to funding groundbreaking research that elucidates the complexities of ME/CFS, and moving closer to effective treatments and a cure.
- In addition, up to two fellowships will be financed by the State of Lower Austria.
- And WWTF.

Up to two additional fellowships can be financed by the State of Lower Austria on top of the regular WWTF budget, if recommended by the international jury.

Submission

All applications must be written in English.

For the submission of the application, please go to the [WWTF Funding Portal](#).

Important information for your submission

Application deadline: February 2nd, 2026, 2 pm CET

The following are mandatory for submission of the application:

- The **Letter of Intent (LOI)** from the future host research group
- **Signatures** of the authorised person at the research institution located in Vienna, either the current home institution of outgoing fellows from Vienna or the future host institution of incoming fellows to Vienna

Eligibility of applicants

The general eligibility of applicants is specified in the [WWTF Funding Guideline \(German only\)](#).

- Early career applicants may be based in Vienna or Lower Austria (Austria) or be based outside of Austria
- Only one application per applicant may be submitted in this call
- Applicants must be early career researchers (i.e., PhD level or above)
 - Exceptions may be made for outstanding researchers in earlier career stages who show academic potential
- Applicants must not have been awarded their PhD more than eight years previous to the submission date
 - Exceptions may be made (e.g.: Career breaks will be considered, care-taking duties, illness, etc)
- Every applicant must submit a CV, which will form part of the evaluation
- Applicants must submit a [LOI from the host institution](#)
- Applicants must submit an authorising [signature](#) from a research institution located in Vienna
- WWTF especially encourages young and female scientists to apply in this call

We do not allow for local fellowships. Our fellows need to make a international movement: if you are located at a research institution in Vienna or Austria you have to go abroad. If you are located outside of Austria, you have to come to a Vienna research institution

Eligible costs

The total budget for the fellowship is €40,000, which will be paid to the home/host institution in Vienna. All costs that are directly attributable to the fellow's activity and are regarded as commonly required in the respective scientific field are eligible for funding. Please also consider the internal guidelines of the home/host institution in Vienna for eligible expenses/costs.

Personnel costs

WWTF is dedicated to funding researchers. Hence, the larger share of the fellowship's budget should be allocated to personnel costs.

- Eligible forms of employment contracts are full-time and part-time contracts as well as marginal employments (“Arbeitsvertrag”).
- Fellows should receive a fair employment contract with at least a minimum wage according to the “Kollektivvertrag” (collective agreement) of the Austrian Universities / non-university research institutions. For staff employed at institutions without a collective agreement, the minimum wage should adhere to the standards of the Austrian Science Fund ([FWF salary scheme](#)).
- Salaries higher than those stipulated in the collective agreement are possible, subject to the agreement from the host institution and justification based on qualifications of the researcher.

Non-personnel costs

Running costs for basic infrastructure (telephone costs, rent) as well as costs for the acquisition of infrastructure and basic equipment are **not** eligible for funding. The following categories of non-personnel costs are eligible for funding:

- **Equipment:** In this call, WWTF funds cannot be used for equipment.
- **Consumables:** Costs for fellowship-related expenses like consumables are permitted. WWTF does not fund consumables that are general and not project-specific (e.g., paper, printer toner).
- **Travel and accommodation costs:** Costs for travel to the host institution and back can be covered if either host/home institution does not provide funding for this. Costs for travel and accommodation for additional scientific meetings and conferences, field work, expeditions, etc. during the fellowship can be funded. Please also consider the regulations of your home and host organizations for travel costs.
- **Publication costs:** Costs incurred for publication activities, e.g., printing costs, article processing charges (for open science), etc. are allowed. This also includes costs for

archiving research data in open repositories. Please also consider [WWTF's Open Science Policy](#).

- **Workshop/conferences:** Costs for organizing events, workshops, and conferences as well as for hosting invited speakers are eligible. Other costs: Third-party costs, namely, for external collaboration, consulting, studies, and software development may be funded to a limited extent.

Non-personnel costs should not exceed 30% of the overall budget.

Indirect costs (overheads)

WWTF does not pay overhead costs in this call

Content and structure of the proposal

Proposal (For more details, please see [Submission Guideline](#))

Lay description of your Fellowship activities

Detailed description of your Fellowship activities (Goal, Contribution to your academic career, etc) and LOI upload

Budget overview

Signatures: required from the institutions (research institution located in Vienna (either Host or Home Institution))

Funding and evaluation criteria

The following criteria are used in the evaluation.

- **Scope:** Is the fellowship proposal within the scope of the call as described in the Call Specifications?

The key criteria in the evaluation of proposals are the applicant's **academic potential**, the **additionality** and strategic value for their individual research trajectory, and the quality of the **applicant-host complementarity**.

- The **academic potential** of the applicant is assessed by their accomplishments relative to academic age and their demonstrated research potential to successfully conduct the proposed work.
- **Additionality** evaluates the strategic value of the planned research stay for the applicant in acquiring otherwise unavailable expertise and enriching their career.
- **Applicant and host complementarity** evaluates the match between the applicant's profile, the expertise of the host group, and the suitability of the available resources and feasibility of the proposed fellowship plan

Please note that **career breaks** such as for parental leave, care duty and prolonged illness will be taken into account in the evaluation of the proposals. In order for these to be considered, please provide the relevant time periods.

Gender aspects in the application phase

WWTF's [Gender Strategy and Gender Equality Plan](#) must be considered throughout the application. Please note, that WWTF requests jury members to take into account both gender and specific roles in research team composition, as well as gender in research content during evaluation processes. Besides taking the academic age and atypical career paths into consideration.

Guidelines for good scientific practice and ethics

Compliance with the **rules for good scientific practice**, including the observance of ethical aspects in research, is mandatory. This pertains to the application process and, in case of funding, the actual research work. WWTF is member of the OeAWI and processes apply accordingly.

Your research may include **ethical aspects** that require the approval from an ethics committee/institutional review board.

- If the approval from the ethics committee/institutional review board is required for the planned research, this must be clearly stated.
- Already existing approvals from an ethics committee/institutional review board are eligible for the planned tasks. These need to be submitted with the proposal
- If a new approval from the ethics committee/institutional review board is required for the planned tasks:
 - An acknowledgement of receipt from the ethics committee/institutional review board must be submitted with the proposal
 - The final approval (“Votum”) must be submitted to WWTF the latest before the fellowship starts
- Should it not be possible to obtain a final ethical approval before the jury meeting due to reasons which are beyond the control of the applicant, the applicant must explain the reasons in the application and send the preliminary approval to the responsible call manager once received.
- The approval by the ethics committee should be specific for the planned WWTF project.
- Non-compliance will result in the rejection of the proposal on formal grounds.

Open Science

WWTF requires compliance with its [Open Science Policy](#). This document outlines the rights, roles and responsibilities of WWTF, researchers, and research organizations.

Use of generative AI in the application process

WWTF recognizes that the use of genAI tools is pervasive and can facilitate proposal writing, for example in relation to improving written language. However, substantial use of genAI must be declared as such for the sake of transparency.

“Substantial use” is defined in line with the European Commission’s definition: “[...] using generative AI as a basic author support tool is not a substantial use. However, interpreting data analysis, carrying out a literature review, identifying research gaps, formulating research aims, developing hypotheses, etc. could have a substantial impact.” (EC 2024: Living Guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research.)

This mainly concerns critical parts of scientific relevance, such as hypothesis formulation and the scientific project plan. Applicants will be required to provide statements on the use of generative AIs at both the short and full proposal stages. WWTF emphasizes the importance of human responsibility for the content submitted at all stages of the application process.

WWTF does not allow the use of genAI in the evaluation process.

Selection and decision process

The core element of WWTF's decision-making processes is an **international jury** mandated to make a funding recommendation to the WWTF boards.

- The jury is comprised of international experts selected by WWTF that have no current affiliation to an Austrian institution
- Applications will be evaluated by a jury panel with expertise covering a range of proposals.
- Please note that there is no opportunity for rebuttals to either recommendations by the jury panel or decisions by the WWTF Board of Directors.

Formal eligibility check by WWTF

WWTF office conducts a formal eligibility check of the application based on the criteria outlined in the [WWTF Funding Guideline](#). Substantial deficiencies and missing sections in the application will lead to the exclusion of the application from further evaluation and rejection on formal grounds. The strict timeline of the call does not allow for applications to be sent back to the applicants for amendments.

Evaluation of applications

- Each application is independently assessed by at least two jury members based on the evaluation criteria.
- The jury decides in a meeting (online) if a proposal should be recommended for funding. The result is a recommendation for each project: "to be funded" or "not to be funded".

Formal funding decision

The jury recommendation will be **formally confirmed** first by the WWTF Advisory Board and then approved by the WWTF Board of Directors.

- The decision may include budget cuts as well as additional conditions and recommendations.
- Unsuccessful applicants will also receive a short statement by the jury explaining the main reasons why the project was not selected for funding.

Funding contract

In case of funding, WWTF office will contact the applicants to draw up the funding contract.

- Projects may start immediately and should start no later than 3 months after the formal funding decision by the WWTF Board of Directors (March 2026).
- The formal funding contract will be signed between WWTF and the Viennese host or home institution of the applicants.
- For universities, this is a project according to §27 of the Universities Act 2002. The institution then authorizes the respective fellow to sign for the full scientific and financial responsibility of the project.
- For grantees at an institution based in Lower Austria or incoming to an institution to Lower Austria, the funding contract will be signed between the Lower Austrian institution and the State of Lower Austria, grant administration will be handled by the State of Lower Austria (not WWTF)

Public relations and community activities

Funded fellows will participate in WWTF and WE&ME public relation activities to promote the outcomes of this call. This includes featuring research projects online, contributing to other multimedia activities and/or presentation of their research work at stakeholder meetings relevant. To strengthen the ME/CFS research community, funded fellows will also be invited to participate in further community-building activities.

Monitoring and reporting

Funded fellows are committed to delivering one final report and participating in evaluation and monitoring. The Fellowships must conclude the latest by December 2026 (no extensions will be granted).

Details: [Accounting Guideline](#) and [Reporting Guideline](#).