



**Manual Strategic Basic Research (SBO)
Call for project proposals within the Flemish Innovation and Industry
Strategy for Security and Defence**

Version 2026

**Preparation and submission of a project application: see
SBO website**

and [e-portal](#)



PROJECT DATA SHEET

Key characteristics of strategic basic research

1. The focus is on inventive and innovative research
2. The strategic importance and scope of long-term utilisation prospects in Flanders within the Security and Defense industry.

Important dates and documents: *See website*

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1. POSITIONING

1.1. Key characteristics of the SBO support channel

The SBO (strategic basic research) financing channel aims at turning science-based ideas into innovations and thus funds innovative research, which, if scientifically successful, opens up prospects for later economic or societal applications.

The name of the programme can be broken down in two parts: “*strategic*” and “*basic research*”. The term “*strategic*” refers to the problem-driven and application-oriented focus of the programme. This implies that in order to fit the SBO programme, a proposal should address a specific economic or societal need or problem.

The term “*basic research*” refers to the requirement of the SBO programme to gain knowledge regarding the topic of interest, whereby the scientific risk involved in this knowledge creation is significantly higher than is usual in industrial research. An SBO proposal should consist of research that, if successful, results in an important contribution to the international scientific state-of-the-art.

The SBO programme thus distinguishes itself from applied research (or experimental development) because of the need for additional basic research on the topic of interest to come to the intended application. The difference of the research intended in the SBO programme with curiosity-driven fundamental research lies in the fact that knowledge generation as such (knowing to know, i.e., acquiring new knowledge without any concrete practical application or use in view) is not the objective of this funding programme.

Within the Flemish Innovation and Industry Strategy for Security and Defence (FISD)¹ a dedicated budget is foreseen within the SBO channel to stimulate research within predefined orientation roadmaps. An annual research fund will be used from 2026 to boost defence research within the SBO call. A good SBO research project fits in the research organisation's own research agenda while clearly related to practice. It starts from the needs of the relevant stakeholders and is aimed at a sustainable implementation of the results. Consequently, the targeted research results should contribute to an increased flow of novel ideas and concepts that, at a later stage, could form the basis for a new generation of sustainable products, processes, solutions or services in the Flemish security and defence industry and/or could solve issues that hamper innovation. By tailoring academic research with the needs of industry the innovation gap will reduce. In order to achieve this goal, applicants should embark in a joint project definition with stakeholders, whereby the latter indicate their needs and strategic interests, and knowledge centres then respond by formulating a research project that they will execute in all independency. SBO is thus not aimed at pure and one-directional knowledge dissemination, but at the acquisition and deployment of new knowledge in a dialogue between one or more research centres that carry out the research and the companies that will subsequently translate the results into concrete applications. From the conceptual phase onwards, the implementers of an SBO project are expected to develop a clear vision on the potential for utilisation and to make efforts to ensure the effective use of the results.

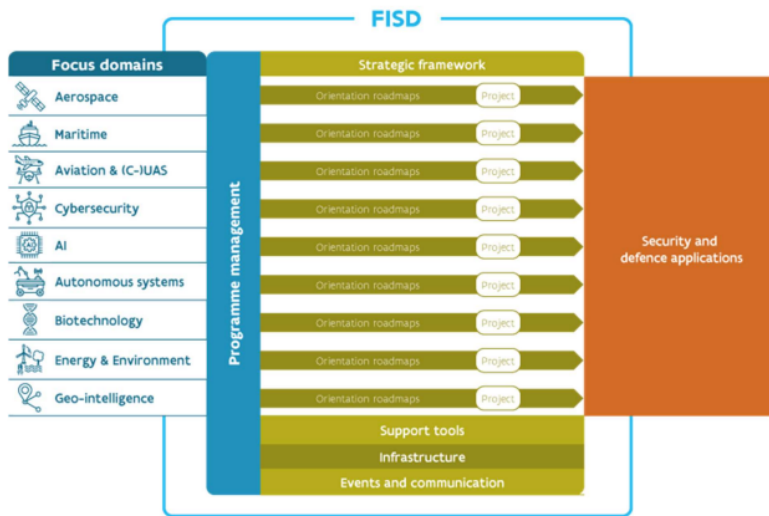
Because the basic research is carried out far away from the market and the application potential resulting from the obtained scientific insights is ideally broader than the intended utilisation of the results by the gathered companies, a successful SBO project will initially result in follow-up R&D and implementation activities, which may (partly) qualify for financial

¹ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/publicaties/flemish-innovation-and-industry-strategy-for-security-and-defence-fisd>
Manual Strategic Basic Research - RESEARCH FOUNDATION - FLANDERS | HOEK 38 - LEUVENSEWEG 38, 1000 BRUSSELS

support through, e.g., the industrial research programmes of the Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

The 2026 call is open for all projects within the orientation roadmaps:

Met opmerkingen [SH1]: Beschikbaar budget invoeren



The roadmaps itself can be consulted at the FISD ² Within the application applicants have to indicate how the research proposal fits in one of the orientation roadmaps.

1.1.1. Advisory committee

An advisory committee (including potential users from the security and defence industry) has to be set up during the project implementation (this will be a very important aspect in the project evaluation). This advisory committee will serve as a critical sounding board from the user field and is to assist in preparing translation of results into sustainable applications. It should ideally cover the whole value chain.

- The advisory committee is open to all interested companies in the Flemish region as well as companies established outside the Flemish region. The only limitation is companies represented in the advisory committee are limited to EU, EFTA, or NATO countries The advisory committees must also include security and defence representation in order to ensure valorisation.
- For a company that wishes to join the advisory committee, the following requirements apply during the project implementation:
 - A limited financial contribution: for the duration of the contract with FWO (2 to 4 year project period. all commercial members of the advisory committee are required to make a monetary contribution of minimum € 250/year in the case of an SME or minimum € 1,000/year in the case of a large enterprise or another organisation. A demonstrable equivalent deployment of person power and resources for the project implementation may

² <https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-innovatie-en-industriestrategie-voor-veiligheid-en-defensie/orientatieroadmapsnsie/orientatieroadmaps>

also be taken into consideration, if clearly substantiated and valued. A significantly higher contribution than the minimal required amounts may be positively assessed during the evaluation of the proposal. There is no hard requirement for a financial contribution by scientific institutions, governments, and societal actors within such advisory committee. However, a financial contribution is strongly recommended, considering it a sign of commitment and support by the organisation.

- A commitment to a substantive contribution and a time investment to participate in bilateral consultations with the project executors and/or meetings of the advisory committee.
- The SBO project proposal must explicitly specify the companies that have committed to participate in the committee.
- Companies that wish to participate in the advisory committee of an SBO project must back up their commitments by substantiated letters of intent (addressed to the SBO project supervisor). These letters are an integral part of an SBO project proposal. As these documents will be provided to the external referees, to the respective SBO expert panel and to the SBO-E steering committee, the letters of intent are to be written in English.
- It is essential that the letters of intent are concrete and properly substantiated and not limited to a general non-binding expression of interest. It should be explicitly specified, in as much detail as possible, what the specific added value of the expected project results is for the respective company and what further concrete development and implementation projects are foreseen after the SBO project period. In addition, the letter should include a commitment to the mandatory financial contribution. The letter of intent confirming membership of the advisory board should be signed by a legal representative of the company to demonstrate internal support for the company's involvement in the advisory committee.
- The composition of the advisory committee, including substantiated letters of intent with commitment to financial contribution by the members, should be finalized at the time of submission of the project and submitted together with the SBO application. Letters of intent that arrive after the deadline or arrive at the premises of FWO are not eligible.
- The SBO project executors have full authority over the execution of the research. They remain the owners of the results and are in the driver's seat for utilisation. The members of an advisory committee are not automatically entitled to the exploitation of the results. The knowledge transfer of results of research centres is open to all companies in the European Union at the end of the project, including those companies that are not a member of the advisory committee (see 2.4). All transfers (exclusive and non-exclusive) should be made at prevailing market conditions.
- Please note that in the context of SBO funding, pre-agreed (exclusive or non-exclusive) licensing arrangements or disproportionate clauses are in conflict with the exemption from EU state aid rules granted to non-economic activities of research organisations. Negotiating a licence or transfer a priori is not acceptable. Companies can, at most, negotiate with the research centres a right of first negotiation. It is important to plan and manage the members' expectations regarding a potential intellectual assets partition and IP transfer model before submitting the project proposal.
- During the project assessment, the reviewers will pay special attention to the feasibility of implementation of the possible applications, which depends, among other factors, on a good understanding between the companies. For this reason, it is appropriate to detail this vision already in the project proposal, especially for companies that are active in overlapping areas of application with possible exclusivity.

If the applicants opt for the creation of a spin-off, an advisory committee is optional. In case an advisory committee is installed, a financial contribution by the members is not mandatory.

1.1.2. *Interactions with users before, during and after the SBO project*

It is important to pursue sufficient interaction between the research centres and the potential users of the project results, both during the SBO pre-project phase, the SBO project implementation phase, and the SBO post-project phase (see also manual for participation of users on the [SBO website](#)).

- *SBO pre-project phase*

During the drafting of an SBO project proposal, researchers are urged to contact companies for bilateral consultation or for a preparatory brainstorming together with other companies. Conversely, companies may contact researchers to discuss needs, bottlenecks or opportunities for which strategic research could provide an added value.

During the assessment of SBO project proposals, great emphasis is placed on the active participation of companies from the early phase of drafting a project proposal. Interaction with interested companies in an early phase allows to tailor the project proposal to the actual needs of the companies and thereby maximise the likelihood of future utilisation of the results. The applicants of an SBO project and the members of the advisory committee must provide evidence of such preparative activities as well as substantiate their impact on the project proposal.

- *SBO project execution phase*

During the project execution, a two-way dialogue between the researchers and the user field involved remains essential to achieve the targeted transfer from scientific research to concrete applications. Hereto, companies may participate as members of the advisory committee.

Companies cannot participate as a funded co-applicant in the research consortium.

In the assessment of the project proposals, good R&D interactions between researchers and companies may result in a selection advantage. An example is the situation where the company (as a member of the advisory committee) carries out R&D activities that are substantively linked to the SBO project. This R&D cooperation must be verifiable and should overlap with the planned implementation phase of the SBO project. The presence of such collaboration does not suffice for granting a selection advantage. It is up to the SBO expert panels and the steering committee to give an appreciation about the meaningfulness, relevance and added value of such collaborations.

It is essential that the SBO project implementers duly inform all other members of the advisory committee about such ongoing cooperation(s).

Also, in situations where companies cooperate through parallel R&D activities, the SBO project remains strategic basic research with an innovative strategic character over a longer-term and broad horizon. The idea is never to bring the SBO projects more into line with the horizon of industrial R&D projects in terms of ownership, challenge and innovative character. Furthermore, the research centres remain the owners of the results obtained during the SBO project, and transfers must conform to accepted market practices (see 2.4). The interactions with the advisory committee of the SBO project should not be impeded by utilisation

agreements under existing R&D cooperation with one or more companies. These companies have the same rights and obligations as all other members of the advisory committee.

In addition to the above-mentioned situation, other forms of interaction with companies are positively evaluated, such as:

- cooperation in a broader framework;
- a (financial or in kind) contribution that significantly exceeds the required minimum requirement;
- short corporate internships for researchers on the basis of bilateral agreements;
- exchange of equipment, etc.

- *SBO post-project phase*

A successful SBO project gives rise to subsequent research, development and implementation projects and activities. The focus thereby shifts to the companies. These follow-on projects cannot be supported through the SBO financing channel, but could qualify for support through the financing channels with the Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (industrial R&D projects, innovation mandate, Baekeland fellowships, etc.).

It is important that possible follow-up projects to be carried out by companies are specified already in the project proposal and the letters of intent.

2. PROGRAMME CHARACTERISTICS

2.1. Project applicants (consortium) and users

2.1.1. Project applicants

The same characteristics and eligibility conditions as for SBO apply; however, applicants are expected to form a consortium (two or more applying legal entities), as the emphasis of the [VISO](#) (Vlaamse Innovatie- en Industriestrategie voor Veiligheid & Defensie) lies on ecosystem collaboration. Based on their mission, this includes e.g., Flemish universities and their university hospitals, Flemish university colleges (in Dutch: *hogescholen*)³ and the Flemish strategic research centres. Otherwise, all other organisations that meet the definition of a research centre and that are located in the Flemish region⁴ may act as applicants of an SBO project. A research centre is defined as an entity (such as universities or research institutes, technology transfer agencies, innovation intermediaries, research-oriented physical or virtual collaborative entities), irrespective of its legal status (organised under public or private law) or way of financing, whose primary goal is to independently conduct fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development or to widely disseminate the results of such activities by way of teaching, publication or knowledge transfer. Where such entity also pursues economic activities, the financing, the costs and the revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately. Undertakings that can exert a decisive influence upon such an entity, for example in the quality of shareholders or members, may not enjoy a preferential access to the results generated *as stated in* Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation [2022/C 414/01](#).

If there could be any doubts whether a particular applying organisation meets the definition of a research centre (e.g., if the organisation concerned has never applied for an SBO proposal

³ See article II.2 en II.3 in: <https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=14650>.

⁴ Or in the Brussels region if they resort under the authority of the “Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie”.

before), you should support compliance to this definition, possibly through an independent legal advice. Please contact the FWO administration for further instructions via sbo@fwo.be.

Two or more research centres together may also form a consortium. In this case, one of the Flemish research centres is appointed as the main host institution.

Furthermore, the following specific basic conditions apply:

- The Interuniversity Micro-Electronics Centre, the Flemish Institute for Technological Research, Flanders Interuniversity Institute for Biotechnology, Flanders Marine Institute, Flanders' Make and the Flemish scientific institutions receiving an allocation from the Flemish government must submit an SBO project proposal in collaboration with at least one other Flemish research centre.
- A Flemish university college (*hogeschool*) must always submit an SBO project proposal in collaboration with or at least after a positive advice of the university with which it is associated. This takes the form of a document in which the university agrees to the submission of the project proposal by the university college.

All applicants (on the level of their legal entity) must subscribe to the principles of the SBO programme in the form of a declaration of intent. This declaration includes a formal statement in which the applicant declares that the organisation fulfils the definition of a research centre (see above). For applicants that regularly submit SBO project proposals⁵, the research coordination or TTO offices have (or will receive upon request) an account in the FWO e-portal, allowing them to submit this declaration online. For others, including sporadic applicants (such as non-Flemish research institutes, ...), the declarations (signed by a legal representative of the organisation) have to be uploaded as attachments to the project application at the time of submitting the proposal via the e-portal. A [template](#) is available on the website.

The main applicant appoints a supervisor. The supervisor must be employed by the main applicant and is responsible for the proper execution of the project. The supervisor is the first contact person for FWO. The main applicant ensures that the supervisor has sufficient time and experience to carry out this assignment properly. If the project is submitted by a project consortium, the main applicant represents the applicants towards FWO and, when the grant is awarded, ensures the coordination of the activities of the awarded project grant.

In each call for proposals, a researcher may only act as promoter-spokesperson or co-promoter for one single SBO project, regardless of whether the project is submitted under the regular call or the thematic call "Innovation in the agri-food sector". This condition applies whether or not a budget is requested.

The total number of SBO projects - including submitted proposals and ongoing projects - in which the same researcher is involved as promoter-spokesperson or co-promoter must not exceed two. For compliance purposes, the contractual start date of the project proposal will be taken as the reference point. Projects for which no budget is requested by the proposer nor any other representative of its host institution are exempted from this limit.

The Flemish, national and international university supervisors and co-supervisors applying for a budget must have a ZAP appointment and thus comply with the provisions of Art. 10 of the Fundamental Research Project Regulations. For non-university applicants, an equivalent

⁵ Catholic University of Leuven (incl. University Hospital Leuven), Ghent University, University Hospital Ghent, University of Antwerp, University Hospital Antwerp, Free University of Brussels (incl. University Hospital Brussels), University of Hasselt, Flanders Institute for Biotechnology, Flemish Institute for Technological Research, Interuniversity Micro-Electronics Centre, Flanders Make, Prince Leopold Institute of Tropical Medicine.

functional role with a doctoral title is expected, e.g., at the level of Principal Investigator, Research Director, Senior Fellow, Chief Scientist (non-exhaustive list).

2.1.2. Non-Flemish partners

A Flemish research centre can submit a project proposal together with one or more non-Flemish research centre. In this case, it must be demonstrated in the project proposal that the input of this partner is necessary to carry out the research and to achieve the objectives for utilisation in Flanders. The aggregated sub-budgets of non-Flemish research centres being part of the consortium as project partner or intended to carry out specific sub-tasks as preferred subcontractor, may not exceed 20% of the proposed project budget. An additional restriction applies that non-Flemish partners must be based in EU, EFTA, or NATO countries.

Applicants who intend to collaborate scientifically with partners outside Belgium or who have non-Belgian members of the advisory committee will have to answer a series of questions concerning unwanted knowledge transfer, misuse of research results and/or interference, depending on the topic of their research proposal, the countries involved and the foreign partners. If, as a result, your project proposal requires a [research security](#) approval, please contact the relevant [contact person at your host institution](#) as soon as possible and definitely before submitting your proposal.

Excluded from international collaboration are all Russian and Belarusian research centres. In the light of the growing attention towards foreign interference, applicants that wish to team up with a Chinese university that belongs to the “Seven Sons of Defence”, public research universities who collaborate closely with the People’s Liberation Army of the People’s Republic of China (in particular: Northwestern Polytechnical University; Harbin Engineering University; Harbin Institute of Technology; Beihang University; Beijing Institute of Technology; the Nanjing University of Science and Technology and Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics) are strongly requested to contact FWO well before the submission deadline.

2.2. Supported activities

The supported activities for research centres include the implementation of the strategic basic research as such and also activities linked with the planned utilisation approach (meetings with the advisory committee, preparation of patent applications, surveys of bilateral follow-up projects with companies, etc.). This implies that the deployment of people with a task related to utilisation of the project results during the project period can also be incorporated into an SBO project⁶.

Although typically belonging to the post-project phase, case studies with industrial relevance/ownership are not a priori excluded from the SBO program but care should be taken to guarantee ownership, and ensure freedom to operate and generic applicability to make it eligible for government-funding for non-economic activities support within the context of research organisations.

⁶ This applies to people who are directly integrated into the relevant research groups of the SBO project consortium, and therefore not to individuals who are employed in interface services or research coordination services and for whom another form of funding is already available (cf. interface decree: decision of the Flemish Government of 29 May 2009 concerning the support of Industrial Research Funds and interface activities of the associations in the Flemish Community).

2.3. Project budget and support

2.3.1. Project duration and project budget

In principle, an SBO project has a duration of four years. With proper justification, the project may also have a shorter duration.

Budget and financial reports are prepared for each applicant/contractor at the level of the legal entity.

Each applicant can receive up to € 425,000 per year (excluding overheads). However, if the project involves a consortium of different legal entities, the total project budget can be increased by € 425,000 per year for each additional legal entity in the consortium that contributes more than 15% to the total project budget. It is important to note that not every legal entity in the consortium is required to commit at least 15% of the project budget. The “minimum 15%” rule only applies to raising the overall budget ceiling by an additional €425,000 per year (excluding overheads).

Overhead costs are set at a fixed percentage and paid separately. Overhead costs are not included within the budget which is to be provided to FWO.

This does not mean that each applicant within a consortium must at least commit to 15% of the project budget. The ‘minimum 15%’ rule refers only to the consortiums’ budget advantage, according to which the overall project budget can be increased by up to € 425,000/year (excluding overhead) when this minimum is reached.

The combined sub-budgets of non-Flemish research centres being part of the consortium and non-Flemish third parties intended to carry out specific sub-tasks as preferred subcontractor, may not exceed 20% of the total project budget.

As a guideline, an SBO project budget for the whole consortium of approximately 1,7-2,0 million euros (excluding 17% overhead) is suggested. Larger budgets are possible if duly substantiated.

2.3.2. Support

The support percentage amounts to 100% of the acceptable costs provided the research centres meet the definition of a research centre (see 2.1.1).

2.3.3. Cost model

The project budget structure and the acceptable costs are described in detail in the [cost model](#). Only the main aspects are described here. An Excel template for preparation of the budget is available on the FWO e-portal. This file makes use of macros to facilitate its completion by the applicant. Its use is mandatory and the version that corresponds to the requested project budget has to be uploaded in the FWO e-portal when submitting the project proposal. *Please note: Before uploading this file to the FWO e-portal, you need to save this document as an Excel file without macros (due to the FWO server’s security measures against uploading malicious files).*

Personnel costs

The acceptable personnel costs are calculated for personnel directly involved in the execution of the project. Only staff executing research activities or preparing activities related to the utilisation of the project results can thus be taken into account in the project budget. Staffing costs of 'ZAP' members or other personnel that are charged to the general operating resources of the research institutions and governments, cannot be allowed any remuneration or cumulation with their remuneration from the project resources. Likewise, a grant cannot be used to pay civil servant's salaries, unless they are exempted from their usual duties [with (temporary) suspension of salary] to carry out the work in the context of the project proposal. The employer is obliged to ensure that the government does not finance these persons twice for the same work.

Consumables

This section also includes large subcontracting and fees for using core facilities services (if any).

The application must include a realistic estimate of the costs. The level of detail that is required for the justification of the consumables for an SBO project is limited to a list of large categories and their related cost (e.g., materials/commodities, IT costs, travel/accommodation expenses, depreciation of research equipment, preferred subcontractors, etc.). The share of small subcontracting (< € 8,500) in the listing must be clearly specified.

From a cost of € 8,500 onwards, an anticipated/preferred subcontracting needs to be specified separately from the other consumable costs and the necessity of the subcontracting needs to be justified (large subcontracting). The outsourced tasks and cost drivers must be documented. When awarding the actual contract to a subcontractor during the project execution, the applicants should comply with the law on public procurement. The total cost of the tasks proposed to be carried out by subcontractors may not exceed 30% of the proposed SBO project budget.

Equipment

Only equipment that is needed for the project and that is specified in the application, can be charged to this category at its depreciation cost over the life of the project and in proportion to its use in the project. The maximum amount for this category is limited to € 150,000 for the entire project. All equipment acquired with a grant of the FWO shall become the property of the research centre.

Cumulation with other government support

For the calculation of the acceptable support, possible parallel subsidy flows from other services of the Flemish or other governments are taken into account, as well as any other non-governmental support (sponsorship, patronage, ...) in so far it covers the same costs. Cumulation or potential cumulation with other (pending) subsidies has to be declared in the application.

2.4. Use of the results - ownership issues

Ownership of the results

The project applicants/executors are the owners of the project results. In the case of a consortium, each partner is the owner of its own share of the results and is not entitled to the

results of the partners. For a research group belonging to a university or a university college, the provisions of art. IV 48 of the Higher Education Code apply.⁷

Transfer of the results to existing companies

When intellectual assets or user rights arising out of research results obtained by a research centre are transferred to a company for the purpose of further utilising the results, the following provisions that guarantee a level playing field in the European single market apply (EU framework for state aid):

- The research results are available for licensing/knowledge transfer on an equal and non-discriminatory basis to all companies within the EU. Pre-agreed (i.e., any time before the end of the project) licensing agreements or disproportional clauses are in conflict with the exemption from EU state aid rules granted to non-economic activities of research organizations. The research centres and interested companies may agree on a right of first negotiation, provided such agreements are based on a commitment to transfer at market conditions. Therefore, always foresee the possibility of a more advantageous offer from a third party with an adjustment of the bid.
- A compensation in accordance with normal market conditions is payable, which is equal for all companies within the EU, including members of the advisory committee and companies taking part in the project execution (as non-funded partners or subcontractors). Any contributions made by the companies to the costs of the research centres in relation to the transferred results may be deducted. Licensing and transfer of commercially valuable knowledge generated in a publicly funded project to a commercial actor cannot take place during the lifetime of the project. In order to exclude indirect funding to commercial entities, this will result in the immediate termination of project funding by the FWO.
- The revenues from the licensing or granted access to knowledge are to be reinvested in the primary activities of the research centre.

Cooperation agreement

When there are several legal entities in the consortium, good mutual arrangements are to be in place between the participating consortium partners concerning what has been agreed on joint working agreements, project management and the allocation of the intellectual property rights (IPR).

As part of the project proposal, the applicants have the choice to indicate to

- 1) accept the model cooperation agreement ([nl/en](#)) as agreed on by the Tech Transfer Offices Flanders ([Home | TTO Flanders - Technology Transfer Offices](#)) which is made available on the FWO-SBO website
- 2) The consortium partners do not agree with the standard template used by universities and most research organisations.
- 3) have not yet settled an agreement on the main principles of the consortium agreement.

In case the members of the consortium have not yet come to an agreement on the way they will collaborate, applicants should provide a short description of the alternative regulation they envision and give their motivation for the specific adaptation(s) and/or indicate the remaining bottlenecks to be solved in order come to a collaboration agreement.

⁷ Coordinated decrees on higher education ("Higher Education Code") of 11 October 2013.

FWO does not need to receive a signed term sheet between the partners of the consortium in the course of the evaluation procedure. Irrespective the choice made in the application, a full cooperation agreement is requested after granting the project proposal. This cooperation agreement, as well as any changes to it during the execution of the agreement is subject to approval by the FWO.

2.5. Technology readiness level (TRL)

Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) serve as a measurement of the maturity level of particular technologies. This measurement system provides a common understanding of technology status and addresses the entire innovation chain. By evaluating a technology project against the parameters for each Technology Readiness Level (see below), one can assign a TRL rating to the project based on its stage of progress. There are nine technology readiness levels; TRL 1 being the lowest and TRL 9 the highest. The following definitions of TRL applies:

- TRL 1 – basic principles observed
- TRL 2 – technology concept formulated
- TRL 3 – experimental proof of concept
- TRL 4 – technology validated in lab
- TRL 5 – technology validated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)
- TRL 6 – technology demonstrated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)
- TRL 7 – system prototype demonstration in operational environment
- TRL 8 – system complete and qualified
- TRL 9 – actual system proven in operational environment (competitive manufacturing in the case of key enabling technologies; or in space)

Applicants are requested to indicate the technology readiness level of the intended application at the onset of the research project as well as the TRL they intent to reach at the end of the project period. The primary purpose of requesting the TRLs is to give the evaluation panels a reference concerning the development status and the intended progress of application during the project phase. The intended progress in TRL level during an SBO project might be different for applications in various domains. A priori, there is no desired start of end TRL level imposed within the SBO call.

2.6. Data management

Research data management covers the way research data are managed, from their date of creation or collection, to the moment they are published or used and possibly preserved for the long term.

Research data management is therefore an integral part of sound scientific research and thus FWO has made data management a key element of its policy. It covers procedures on the description of research data and metadata, their storage and long-term preservation, the discoverability, the designation of responsible persons, the handling of highly sensitive data, and the open access to and sharing of research data. The FWO expects researchers to pay due attention to this dimension before, during and for at least five years following their research.

The application form in the FWO e-portal contains several issues that need to be addressed concerning data management:

- the data types that the research will use and/or generate
- the provisions that are in place in order to preserve the data for at least 5 years after the end of the research

- possible reasons to deviate from the principle of preservation of data, sharing and of the minimum preservation term of 5 years
- specific security measures for research data due to ethical issues
- other relevant issues related to data management

The abovementioned issues regarding data management will also be taken into account during the evaluation procedure. If a proposal receives funding, a data management plan will be requested by FWO. More information on data management can be found [Research Foundation - Flanders - Data Management Plan \(fwo.be\)](#).

Applicants are explicitly required to include a risk analysis for technology transfer.

2.7. Open Science and contribution to the research design

The application form includes a question inviting applicants to describe their own and, where relevant, others' intellectual and conceptual contributions to this proposal, its research design and, if applicable, the data collection, analysis and interpretation that underpin it. This information helps evaluators understand how the proposal was developed, including the origin of ideas, data and methodological decisions, and acknowledges all individuals who contributed in any capacity.

This clarification fits within the broader context of Open Science, that is transparency, reproducibility, responsible data handling and the sharing of research data when appropriate. Applicants are asked to outline briefly how they will ensure transparency and reproducibility, how they will manage data sustainably and how their data might be valuable beyond the project. They should also indicate how such data could be shared, taking into account any constraints.

This section emphasises transparency regarding how the proposal was conceived and the data practices involved. It is not used as a scoring criterion.

3. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT PROPOSAL

3.1. Important deadlines and project assessment timeline

The deadline for mandatory registration and submission of an SBO project proposal is indicated on the SBO website: <https://www.fwo.be/nl/ondersteuningsprogramma-s/alle-oproepen/gevestigde-onderzoekers-onderzoeksteams/sbo-strategisch-basis-onderzoek-projecten/>

Project proposals must be submitted via the FWO e-portal. Any other form of submission will be considered ineligible. The original project proposal remains the basic document throughout the selection process.

Ethical assessment and screening with regard to knowledge security by the host institutions is mandatory for each submitted proposal, in order to mitigate the risks of undesirable technology transfer and misuse. The FWO must have received this analysis at the time of the rebuttal, by analogy with the procedure for animal experiments on non-human primates.

3.2. Description of the assessment procedure

The SBO evaluation procedure consists of a single selection round. It is a multi-stage process comprising a written peer review, a rebuttal phase and two expert panel meetings:

- **Written external peer review by remote referees:** Proposals are reviewed by a group of peers - experts in the same field as the proposed research. For each SBO project proposal, the FWO administration provides at least four international experts who have agreed to evaluate the project. For a multidisciplinary project proposal, the number of experts may be increased. Amongst the reviewers is a scientifically qualified expert who is professionally active in the intended field of application. Each reviewer will independently assess the proposal on the basis of the evaluation framework set out in point 3.4.2, which includes the scientific quality of the proposal, the potential exploitation of the research results within the security and defence industry and the qualifications of the researchers. The reviewers will be asked to write detailed reports containing their assessment and to confidentially propose a score for consideration by the panel.

In order to avoid conflicts of interest, applicants may submit to the FWO a shortlist of no more than 3 experts to be avoided. Such a shortlist must be submitted at the time of pre-submission (i.e., the first submission of the project proposal to the coordinating office of the main applicant). The shortlist must be specific, i.e., contain specific names of experts to be challenged. A brief justification for the exclusion of an expert should also be provided. Projects will only be evaluated by experts holding the nationality of an EU, EFTA, or NATO country. This applies to both external referees and panel members.

- **Rebuttal phase:** Following the external peer review, applicants have the opportunity to respond to the reviewers' comments in a rebuttal. The peer reviewers' written recommendations are hereto sent to the applicants anonymously and in full. Applicants will have the opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings or factual errors and as such respond to any criticisms raised by the peer reviewers. The maximum length of the rebuttal is 3 A4 pages and the date and time of the rebuttal will be published on the SBO website. The sole purpose of the rebuttal is the clarification of misunderstandings and/or factual errors which have arisen during the external peer review process. If necessary for interpretation and evaluation, (part of) the applicant's response to the reviewer's comments may be shared with the external reviewers concerned for additional feedback. Disparaging the reviewers, accusing them of bias or incompetence and/or using the arguments of one assessor to invalidate the arguments of another assessor is typically not considered as helpful by the panel and will not help your case. Please do not contact FWO with your complaints about one review or another. Use the rebuttal to factually refute such criticism to the panel.
- **Panel meetings:** The project application, the peer reviewers' assessment and the applicants' rebuttal will then be assessed in a two-stage internal peer review process:
 - First, experts from academia, industry and/or societal organisations act as generalists for the set of proposals to be evaluated. Based on the peer review, rebuttal, panel discussion and any additional insights, they assign a consensus score to each criterion. Throughout this evaluation process, they are supported by staff from Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (vlaio.be) or knowledge valorisation experts from other national or international organisations.

Next, a steering committee review, amend, modify and ratify the preliminary evaluation reports of the thematic expert panels and then rank the proposals. Project submitted within

the SBO call for defence and security will have its own steering committee, which will be responsible for the final ranking of projects and will oversee strategic relevance, alignment with the orientation roadmaps, and security aspects.

- o This ranking forms the funding proposal approved by the FWO Board of Trustees.

Additional insights: This procedure intends to ensure a thorough and fair evaluation of all aspects of each proposal. It allows multiple perspectives to be considered and gives researchers the opportunity to respond to criticism. However, it also recognises that the peer review process is limited in covering all relevant scientific and socio-economic aspects and therefore allows for additional insights to be brought forward during the panel meeting while not covered in the external peer review. These insights could be based on the experts' own knowledge and experience, recent developments in the field, in-depth knowledge of the intended (Flemish) value chain, or other relevant factors. These elements cannot be rebutted by the researchers, but can be decisive for the final funding decision.

3.3. Choice of the thematic SBO expert panel

The applicants have to assign their proposal to an SBO expert panel that will perform the intermediary internal peer review of their application. This choice is based on the broad scientific field in which the proposed research is primarily situated. An overview of the panels that can be selected during the submission of a proposal can be found in the table below. If necessitated by the number of submissions per scientific theme, the FWO reserves the right to split themes into multiple SBO-expert panels or merge related expert-panels. FWO can, if opportune for a proper evaluation, have the application processed by another panel. The latter action is subject to approval by the applicant of the project proposal concerned.

Name expert panel	Panel scope
APPLIED BIOLOGICAL, ENVIRONMENTAL & EARTH SCIENCES	Agronomy & agricultural engineering Bio(techno)logical sciences (non-medical) Earth and spatial sciences Food science Environmental and ecological sciences
(BIO)MEDICAL & HEALTH SCIENCES	Medical sciences Health sciences Biomedical engineering (incl. Biomechanics) Pharmaceutical sciences Clinical & health psychology Veterinary science
CHEMISTRY, PHYSICS AND MATERIAL SCIENCES	Material sciences Nanotechnology Chemistry & Chemical Engineering Applied physics
INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY	Informatics and computing technology Telecommunication technology Data sciences
SOCIAL SCIENCES, HUMANITIES & ARTS	Pedagogy & social psychology Forensic sciences Administration and management Social & political sciences Economics Law

TECHNOLOGICAL SCIENCES

- History
- Language and linguistic science
- Art, architecture and design
- Architectural engineering & building science
- Electronics
- Civil engineering
- Applied mathematics
- Mechanical engineering
- Astronomy and astrophysics
- Energy technology
- Nuclear engineering
- Signal processing

3.4. Assessment framework

3.4.1. Formal eligibility analysis

The following eligibility criteria apply:

<p>E1. The project proposal is submitted by the set deadline and is complete and consistent with the requirements of the application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The preliminary registration of the project proposal is complete and was done by the set deadline, as specified on the SBO website. - The project proposal is submitted by the set deadline as specified on the SBO website. - The project proposal is submitted electronically in accordance with the specifications and formal requirements of the application template. - The parts of the project proposals that are intended for the experts are written in English. The project summary is also provided in Dutch. - The maximum number of pages or characters as specified is not exceeded. The appendices are consistent with the specifications of the application. - An advisory committee is foreseen in the project proposal. - The project application includes a project budget in accordance with the cost model. - The project has not received a C-score in a previous call for strategic basic research (either this type or a thematic call).
<p>E2. The research consortium is made up of stakeholders from the target group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The project proposal is submitted by at least one Flemish research centre. - IMEC, VITO, VIB, Flanders' Make, Flanders Marine Institute, Flemish scientific institutions with a public budget allocation ("dotatie"), and university colleges ("hogescholen") cooperate with at least one other Flemish research centre. - A researcher may act as supervisor-spokesperson or co-supervisor for a maximum of one SBO project per call. - The sum of submitted and ongoing SBO projects by one supervisor-spokesperson or co-supervisor must not exceed two. The start date of a newly awarded SBO project will be used as the reference date for calculating this total number of projects. - The Flemish, national and international university supervisors and co-supervisors must have a ZAP appointment and thus comply with the provisions of Art. 10 of the Fundamental Research Project Regulations. For non-university applicants, an equivalent functional role with a doctoral title is expected, e.g., at the level of Principal Investigator, Research Director, Senior Fellow, Chief Scientist (non-exhaustive list).
<p>E3. All applicants of the consortium have subscribed to the principles and regulation of the SBO programme. The project proposal includes the necessary declarations and/or non-amended letters of intent by the applicant(s) of the consortium.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All applicants of the consortium have subscribed to the principles of the SBO programme and are accepting all the rules and regulations of the FWO SBO-program. Flemish universities, university hospitals and strategic research centres can provide the necessary declaration through the FWO e-portal. Other applicants must copy the statement <u>verbatim</u> from the available model and provide it, signed by a legal representative, to the FWO.

The FWO may take a negative decision on eligibility or set additional conditions in the following cases:

- 1) a project applicant does not fulfil all obligations or authorisations set by the authorities;
- 2) a project applicant has behaved incorrectly on the occasion of previous project proposals, including with regard to the provision of information, substantive or financial obligations, or reporting.

These eligibility criteria remain valid throughout the evaluation procedure. Project proposals that are found ineligible do not qualify for support and will not be considered in the further selection procedure. FWO may contact the applicant during the eligibility analysis to complete the application. FWO may also use information from other financing bodies.

3.4.2. *The assessment*

The assessment framework for an SBO project application is based on the evaluation of the following criteria:

1. Scientific dimension (S)
S1 Innovative value of the basic research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The added value to the international state-of-the-art and to ongoing research - The level of scientific challenges, qualification as basic research with a clear high-risk/high-gain profile - The presence of clear and realistic scientific goals
S2 Quality of the research approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A clear description of the research approach for all scientific goals - A thorough substantiation of the research approach - No gaps, shortcomings or superfluous activities in the research approach
S3 Project planning & resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A clear and appropriate allocation of research tasks within the individual research groups and/or among the consortium partners, with sufficient mutual interaction - A proper justification of all resources suited for the scientific objectives - A suitable project planning, with clear and realistic objectives, performance measures, milestones and deliverables.
2. Utilisation perspectives (U)
U1 Relevance/Strategic importance and applicability amongst which in Flanders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A research approach that is fully aligned with the intended utilisation - The project outcome's utilisation potential, resulting in a major stride forward in the domain of security and defence with well-substantiated socio-economic added value. - A predominant part of the anticipated utilisation value chain located in Flanders
U2 Utilisation approach and knowledge transfer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The relevance of the project to all users and vice versa. No users, important in the value chain, are missing. The impact of early interactions with these users on the project design is fully substantiated - The thoroughness of the utilisation plan, including evidence for intensive involvement of the users during the project and containing plans to assess and validate the effectiveness of the project's outcomes. - In the user's letters of intent, there is clear self-reported commitment by the users to engage in concrete follow-up R&D -
U3 Added value of the project in terms of Sustainable Development Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A project can receive a score of 9 or 10 if the applicants can demonstrate, based on an analysis and on an overall estimate, that the project and the anticipated follow-up R&D&I activities in the post-project phase show a high level of ambition to improve the integration of particular <u>eligible</u> IAEG-Sustainable Development Goals indicators into government's policy, with socio-economic organisations and/or to achieve a sustainability-oriented system innovation or transition in society. The impact of the proposed research on reaching the SDG and/or the necessity of strategic basic research for reaching the SDG is thoroughly elaborated and substantiated in the project

application. For further info on the assessment of this criterium and the eligible sustainable development goals indicators, see https://www.fwo.be/media/1024781/sbo-manual-sustainable-development.pdf .
3. R&D capacity, competence and infrastructure (C)
C1 R&D capacity and competence; infrastructure
- The available research competences and infrastructure, complementarity and synergy within the consortium
C2 Competence and track record with regard to transfer and utilisation
- Utilisation-oriented focus and track record of the consortium with regard to the socio-economic transfer of research results

For more information about the scoring criteria, see the score grid on the SBO website. The decision model for the overall score and the differentiation of the project proposals is as follows:

- For each of the above-mentioned criteria a score between 0 and 10 is given.
- Projects scoring lower than 6 on one or more of the criteria are ineligible for support and will not be considered for funding.
- Projects scoring at least 6 on each of the criteria are ranked based on the sum of the individual scores on each of the criteria. A double weight is granted to criteria S1, S2, U1 and U2. The highest ranked project proposals are supported within the limits of the available budget.
- In addition to a consensus score for each of the criteria, the SBO expert panel also awards a **general appreciation score (A, B, C)** to the project proposal.
 - **A:** The application meets the minimum quality requirements and is eligible for support, provided sufficient budget is available. If ranked below the limits of the available budget, an A-type project can be resubmitted within the subsidy channel concerned in the next call.
 - **B:** The application does not meet the minimum quality requirements and cannot be supported in its current form. Shortcomings in the current application are relatively easy to remediate. A B-type project may be resubmitted in the next call. At that occasion, the applicants must explain how the research and/or utilisation plan has been revised in order to meet the criticism of the previous year, with an emphasis on the criteria on which the score was substandard.
 - **C:** Category C concerns applications that clearly do not meet the minimum quality requirements for support (e.g. proposal does not fit the finality of the program, project (parts) submitted too prematurely; clearly negative appreciation on both assessment axes; particular negative appreciation of the scientific quality; shortcomings that are difficult to remediate and/or applications that are deemed not to fit in the subsidy channel...). This list is not exhaustive. In case an application is classified in category C, it is not allowed to resubmit the next call. In other words, a call year must be skipped before a proposal with the same research questions and utilisation strategy can be submitted. C-scores in an SBO context apply to all Strategic Basic Research channels. Project applications that have received a C-score in a channel focused on strategic basic research (e.g. bottom-up SBO projects including SBO with Security and Defence finality or thematic calls innovation in the agri-food sector, etc.) cannot be submitted in the next call of any of these programmes.
- The general appreciation score is also submitted to the SBO steering committee. The SBO steering committee has the right to change the general appreciation score of the expert panel.
- The individual researcher(s) with a C-project is not prohibited from submitting a project proposal with another research question during the next call. At all times, the evaluation

bodies have the right to not evaluate an application and/or exclude it from the final ranking, if it is too similar in terms of research question, utilisation objective and/or methodology to a project with a C label from the previous call. This assessment is part of the exclusive and discretionary competence of the evaluation body concerned.

3.5. After the decision

The project data sheet with the decision-making process is forwarded to the main applicant when the decision is made public. The applicants can subsequently request a debriefing (a request can be sent to sbo@fwo.be). See further chapter 4 of this manual.

In case of a positive decision, an agreement is drafted between FWO and the project applicants.

3.6. Procedure complaints and appeals

It is at the discretion of the expert panels and steering committees of the FWO to assess, in all autonomy, the submitted applications

If you are not satisfied with the procedure followed during the evaluation process, an appeal for review of the decision can be filed with FWO. An appeal for review must be initiated within a period of 30 working days after notification of the board of trustees' decision and be based on 'clear and verifiable', such as errors committed to the applicable FWO regulations. The words "clear" and "verifiable" mean that the elements on which the request for review is based must be understandable for a third party or layman, enabling an assessment of its truthfulness/well-foundedness.

If dissatisfied with the way FWO has handled the application, a complaint can be filed at any time in writing or electronically. Complaints are handled within 45 days of their receipt. Complaints concerning a negative appraisal of a project application by the FWO board of trustees may, however, only be submitted after an appeal for review of the decision has been filed with and handled by the board of trustees.

3.7. Rights and obligations during project execution

3.7.1. Agreement

The main obligation of the beneficiary is a commitment of resources: with the help of the awarded resources, the beneficiary will make the necessary efforts to reach and apply the described project objectives through research and development activities to ensure utilisation in Flanders. Newly recruited staff members (researchers, technicians, etc.) must be nationals of EU, EFTA, or NATO countries. Newly recruited staff may be subject to verification.

3.7.2. Final cooperation agreement

The final cooperation agreement must include at least the following aspects:

- designation of a main applicant and a supervisor;
- designation of the research activities to be performed;
- joint working agreements and project management
- agreements regarding ownership and user rights to background knowledge and project results for implementation of the utilisation plan;
- procedure for settlement of mutual disputes;
- reporting obligations.

The cooperation agreement must concur with the FWO SBO regulation, and in particular with the provisions regarding the utilisation of the project results. The final legally signed cooperation agreement must be submitted to FWO within 4 months of the date of receipt of the board of directors' decision on the support.

3.7.3. *Follow up, reporting and payment of support*

If the project is approved, the beneficiary will have to report at regular intervals on the proper scientific and utilisation progress of the project.

If an advisory committee is set up, an annual meeting must be held, to be attended by the members of the advisory committee. The FWO must be invited to this meeting and the minutes of the meeting must be sent to the FWO. These minutes are an integral part of the mandatory reporting.

A separate webpage is available with all essential practical and administrative information for the benefit of the beneficiaries of an SBO project grant: [Research Foundation - Flanders - SBO \(Strategic Basic Research\) projects \(fwo.be\)](#).

4. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4.1. Exploratory or feedback meeting

Applicants preparing a proposal or applicants whose application was previously not granted and would like to resubmit in the open call, have the opportunity to request an exploratory meeting or feedback meeting, respectively, with the FWO staff. Such an interview takes about one hour. The information provided during such meeting is based on the FWO staff's own insight and experience with the SBO program and may not necessarily reflect or be in line with the opinion of external referees, expert panel members and members of the steering committee that deal with the evaluation of the proposal concerned. The information that is provided should therefore be interpreted as non-binding advice and no rights can be derived from this information.

Please send an e-mail to sbo@fwo.be including a short abstract and key questions (max. 1 A4 page). The applicants should concurrently provide a number of possible dates when this exploratory interview could take place at the FWO offices.

4.2. Contact

For questions with regard to the modalities of the SBO programme, please contact sbo@fwo.be. In order to guarantee a neutral and independent assessment and equal treatment of all application under evaluation, communication about SBO files under review may only be done in writing.

4.3. Communication from FWO

FWO IT-systems may send emails from no_reply@fwo.be, and the SBO administration may send emails from sbo@fwo.be.

To prevent these emails from disappearing into your spam or junk folders, please add these addresses to your approved senders list.