



FRONTEX RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAMME

Info Day on the 2024 Frontex Research Grants



Date:	16 May 2024
Venue	Physical meeting, Frontex Headquarters
Frontex Contacts	Email: researchgrants@frontex.europa.eu
Participants/Attendees	From Frontex: Research and Innovation Unit (INNOVATE) From the Beneficiary: non-profit Research Organisations and Academies from 11 EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries

Agenda	
10:00 - 10:15	Welcome
10:15 - 10:30	General information about the Frontex Research Grants Programme
10:30 - 11:00	Overview of the past call launched in 2022 - lessons learned
11:00 - 11:30	Coffee break
11:30 - 12:15	Overview of the upcoming call to be launched in 2024
12:15 - 12:45	Specific call-related Q&A
12:45 - 13:00	Wrap-up of the info session



1. Welcome address

All Frontex representatives took the opportunity to introduce themselves to the participants of the event. Following this initial interaction, Head of Research and Innovation Unit introduced the participants to the agenda.

2. General information about the Frontex Research Grants Programme

Valuable information regarding the Frontex Research Grants Programme have been provided by Frontex followed by a detailed presentation. The presentation started with introducing to the participants the main objectives of the Programme, highlighting the importance of supporting EU Member States authorities involved in border management and maximising the impact of non-profit small-scale research and innovation to satisfy the needs and capabilities of the EBCG (European Border and Coastguard Community).

Following the description of the general objectives, Frontex representatives presented general information about the call for proposal:

- objectives
- themes
- priorities
- expected outputs

In terms of objectives, two main general objectives were highlighted. In relation to the direct recipients to whom the program is addressed Frontex focuses on:

- research organisations and academia with aim to support non-profit research in providing innovation in border security;
- EBCG community, where in this case Frontex would like to advance scientific knowledge and increase the technological level of border security solutions by exploring the potential use of the outcomes from the research projects.

This is to be achieved by: scouting (discovering research and innovation on cutting edge technologies that could be addressed to current border management operational challenges), guidance (to encourage non-profit EU research & innovation scientist to shape their small-scale technological research products to fit the operational requirements of the EBCG community), finally by scaling-up (supporting the transition of small-scale research & innovation to increased TRLs by the realisation of proof-of-concept and prototypes).

In terms of themes, the Programme has an open research theme, which means that there are no restrictions on the research themes that can be proposed by the applicants, or on narrowly defined subject matter requirements, as long as the following priorities of the Call are met:

Priority 1 - Focus on applied research

Priority 2 - Present innovation potential

Priority 3 - Realise a viable technological solution

Priority 4 - Contribute to the thematic categories

The Programme is based on a lump sum funding scheme model which is a simplified model which focuses on the technical implementation of the project (rather than focusing on accounting) monitoring two crucial stages of the project: the interim and the final stage followed by a report composed of two pieces: Technical Report and Financial Statement.

The reporting periods and payment procedure were detailed, pointing out the importance of the timely submission of the Interim and Final Technical Reports. In the Financial Statement the beneficiary is required to estimate the cost based on its usual cost accounting practices. Each project has to be structured in multiple work packages and, after the end of the project, the reimbursement of the costs incurred in each work package will only be possible if the

work package has been properly implemented technically and financially (with the required quality, fully and on time)..

Payments are based on the financial statement which must be consistent with the estimated budget. Frontex may carry out technical and financial checks as well as audits to confirm the correct implementation of the grant agreement during the implementation of the action or afterwards (during a period of three years from payment of balance). Then, the beneficiaries are required to provide sufficient records.

Frontex clarified that the grant may cover up to 90% of the total eligible costs of the project. The remaining part of the eligible costs (and any other costs of the project) must be covered by the beneficiary. In the application form, each applicant will have to estimate the total cost of the project using their in-house usual cost accounting practices. At the end of the project, a beneficiary may claim the reimbursement of the eligible costs incurred during the implementation period. The eligible costs consist of costs of personnel, travel and related subsistence, equipment, consumables and supplies, costs arising directly from requirements imposed by grant agreement (for example translation or proof-reading), duties, taxes, and charges. Frontex does not cover indirect costs (e.g. electricity, utilities, use of office spaces, etc). Each grant is up to 60 000 EUR per project with a duration from 6 to 12 months.

As for eligible applicants, Frontex targets two groups:

- Research organisations with a focus on scientific and technological research
- Academic institutions conducting scientific and technological research

What has been highlighted is that a beneficiary is strictly forbidden to outsource the work related to the project externally to any third parties.

The program is open to single applicants and consortia with maximum 4 entities. It is obligatory for each entity to possess full operational capacity to conduct the proposed research. Operational capacity is understood as the combination of scientific achievements during the last 5 years in the area of the proposed project, qualification and experience of researchers (demonstrated through with CVs), research infrastructures including facilities (e.g. offices, laboratories, testing spaces), assets and resources (e.g. equipment, software) to be used for the project.

3. Overview of the past call launched in December 2022. Lessons learned

The first call for proposals was launched in December 2022. A total of 13 admissible project proposals were received in response to the call. The applicants pool featured diverse non-profit entities such as universities, polytechnic institutes, a law enforcement agency (LEA), an academy of security sciences, as well as both public and private research centres.

Among the submitted proposals, four projects have been selected for funding. The highest-ranked project, titled "TUTELARY: Coastal Surveillance System Exploiting Photonics-Based Radar Security," was proposed by Consorzio Nazionale Interuniversitario per le Telecomunicazioni - Italy. Three other promising projects have been selected for funding as follows:

- "SWEETIDS: Sweet spot ID Documentation System", proposed by CAMPUS 02 Fachhochschule der Wirtschaft GmbH - Austria;
- "DMDLBVEC: Developing of the collecting and digitalising methodology of the data from the land border violation places using unmanned aircraft systems which is suitable as evidence in court", proposed by Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS) - Estonia;
- "SEMS4USV: Smart energy management system for sustainable extended-range marine unmanned surface vehicles", proposed by Escola Superior Náutica Infante D. Henrique - Portugal and Instituto Superior Técnico, University of Lisbon - Portugal.

The overall quality of the proposals was considered as high. The projects were kicked-off on 1 September 2023 and the first reporting period has been concluded with a technical review at the end of February, entering the second

reporting period. It was emphasized that the current intention is to run the Research Grants Programme following a bi-annual cycle (1 call every 2 years), which seems ideal in regard to the nature of the programme.

Then, Frontex asked the project leaders of the co-funded project for sharing their experiences. Representative from CAMPUS O2 Fachhochschule der Wirtschaft GmbH briefly summarised their experience in taking part in the Programme. Also, a representative from the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS) familiarised the prospective participants with the project itself as well as the relevance of the funded action for their institutional procedures and needs. Both confirmed that the application process was easy and straightforward. Ending the first session of the meeting, the Head of Research and Innovation Unit, summarised the overall success of the first call for proposals, confirming the continuity of the Programme.

4. Overview of the upcoming call to be launched in 2024

After the coffee break, Frontex continued with the second session of the meeting highlighting that the upcoming call for 2024 has not yet been launched. The call will be opened once it is published on Frontex website, likely in the second semester this year, with a 2-month period for submitting the proposals and evaluation to be completed in Q2 2025. Following the given timeline, the kick-off of the projects is planned for May 2025, and implementation phase to end towards April 2026.

Typical documental application sets are different for single applicants and for multiple co-applicants. The difference is that the grant application form and the estimated budget are tailored to allow multiple entities to apply; furthermore, for multiple applicants it contains an additional document - the Letter of Mandate. Once the call is published, the two packages of documents will be accessible on the Frontex website.

The applicants are required to fill in the application package. A grant agreement package is also uploaded for reference, to make sure the applicants are aware of all the grants legally-binding conditions already at the application stage. However, this package shall be used only by the successful applicants once they enter the grant agreement phase.

The application form has multiple sections: the first three are considered to be quite easy while the section requiring most effort is the “description of the action”, which consists of three main parts - excellence, scope of research and implementation. The “estimated budget” template includes six cost categories for each of the work packages. Once uploading all the data, the tool calculates the budget automatically.

Typical mistakes discovered during the previous call are as follows:

- beneficiary indicated as natural person (and it should be an entity)
- missing or non-conformal signatures
- wrong/inconsistent (with application form) data in the
 - Legal Entity Form
 - Financial Identification Form
 - Declaration on Honour
- budget not in balance
- including more than one single milestone per work package

Evaluation of the proposals is implemented in 3 phases.

- assessment against administrative criteria
- assessment against Award Criteria
- ranking of proposals and recommendations to the RAO of proposals for funding, reserve list, rejection

As for the monitoring and reporting tools, Frontex described number of ways in which the monitoring and reporting is provided:

- kick-off meetings;
- regular contact with the beneficiaries (via emails, online meetings);
- analyses of mandatory reports;
- desk reviews of technical deliverables;
- meetings with beneficiaries;
- monitoring visits.

The general objective of the monitoring visits is to check the performance of project. Such visits are planned for a period of 2 days. Regarding the ownership of the results of the project, the beneficiary retains this, including industrial and intellectual property rights, and the ownership of the reports and other documents relating to it, unless stipulated otherwise in the grant agreement. Still Frontex has the right to use the results of the project and promote it internally and externally; all the provisions regarding this matter are included in the grant agreement signed before the project is started. Frontex is keen to publicise and promote the projects through multiple media channels. Before any kind of publication (e.g. leaflets, factsheets, videos), Frontex always seeks approval from the beneficiaries.

5. Specific call related Q&A

During this session, inquiries were raised by the prospective participants. Replies were based on the conditions of the call published in 2022 and have to be considered only indicative, as also stated in the disclaimer below.

Question 1: What is the maximum funding that a beneficiary may receive?

Answer: The maximum funding that can be requested to Frontex (by either a single applicant or multiple co-applicants) is 60 000 EUR. The total budget of the Call (i.e. for funding all the projects selected for awarding) has been planned to be 360 000 EUR in the next call. The exact amount will be specified in the Call once it is published. The number of funded projects will depend on the grant amounts requested by the projects selected for awarding (with the highest scores in the ranking list) as the total funding must stay within the limits of the budget for the entire Call.

Remember that a beneficiary can request a maximum co-financing rate of 90 % for the eligible project costs. Any co-financing rate of less than, or equal to, 90 % is possible. For example, a beneficiary may submit a project proposal where eligible costs amount to 500 000 EUR, requesting Frontex a contribution of 10% (50 000 EUR, which is within the 60 000 EUR financial ceiling).

Question 2: Could Frontex provide the contact details of the national border security agencies that could provide feedback on the ideas for project proposals (for example in case an applicant has multiple ideas and wants to select one for the application)?

Answer: Pre-screening of applications by Frontex is not possible, as this would infringe some of the overarching criteria under which EU co-funding is granted, e.g. transparency, equal treatment and non-discrimination. However, applicants are free to submit multiple (different) proposals in case they have more ideas to propose. There is no limit to the number of proposals that an applicant can submit in response to the call. Also, Frontex does not provide contact details of the agencies that could provide feedback on possible applications for the Research Grants.

Question 3: Could Frontex provide support for the demonstration phases of a funded project?

Answer: In an application, if the applicant sees that the involvement of Frontex (or other entities, for example national authority) is needed in certain phases of the project (for example, as end-user or for the definition of technical requirements), this must be clearly indicated in the project workplan and will be subject to the assessment of the Evaluation Committee (as any other activity in the workplan). If then the project is selected for funding, and Frontex involvement is needed, Frontex will do its utmost to satisfy the required involvement; however, Frontex cannot guarantee that these requests will be always fulfilled, as it depends on the availability and workload of the internal operational entities to be involved.

Question 4: 90% is the maximum contribution obtainable from Frontex, with 10% to be covered by the beneficiary; but what if a beneficiary wants Frontex contribution for a large project with a different split of costs for example, 40% from Frontex and 60% from the beneficiary?

Answer: As already clarified in Question 1, 90% is the maximum co-financing rate that an applicant may request for the eligible project costs. An applicant may request any co-financing rate of less than, or equal to 90 %, always considering the limit of the financial contribution by Frontex of 60 000 EUR per project.

Taking the previous example, a beneficiary may submit a project proposal where eligible costs amount to 500 000 EUR, requesting to Frontex a contribution of 10% (50 000 EUR). This is possible as the requested percentage of contribution is 10% (therefore less than 90%) and the requested contribution is 50 000 EUR (i.e. less than the 60 000 EUR financial ceiling). This represents a split of the eligible costs of 90% (from the beneficiary or third parties) and 10% from Frontex. In this case, if the project is properly implemented, after the closure of the project, Frontex will reimburse 50 000 EUR of the project's eligible costs, while the beneficiary (or a third party providing a financial contribution) will have to cover all the remaining 450 000 EUR of eligible costs, plus any other costs (e.g. non-eligible costs, like indirect costs, if there are).

Question 5: Is it possible to request funding from different sources (for example Horizon and Frontex Research Grants) for the same project?

Answer: For a given project, an applicant may receive funding from different sources, but these cannot be other EU funds. But let's explain the concept better. Based on the provisions of the Financial Regulation¹:

- Frontex Research Grants shall involve co-financing. As a result, the resources necessary to carry out the action or the work programme shall not be provided entirely by EU grants. This applies to all types of EU grant schemes, including Frontex Research Grants and others like Horizon. It's important to note that the sole source of EU funding is the European Commission.

Co-financing may only be provided in the form of:

- of the beneficiary's own resources
- financial contributions from third parties
- in-kind contributions from third parties.

Clearly, co-financing cannot be provided by any other EU funding schemes.

- Each project may give rise to the award of only one grant from the EU budget to any one beneficiary.
- In no circumstances shall the same costs be financed twice by the EU budget.

In practical terms, these means that:

- If a beneficiary requests Frontex to reimburse a certain percentage (e.g. 70 %) of the direct eligible costs of the project, all the remaining costs of the project, i.e.:
 - the remaining part of the direct eligible costs (30% in this example)
 - and all the other costs of the action (for example non-eligible costs, like indirect costs)
 - in-kind contributions

cannot be covered through any other EU grants (e.g. Horizon Europe). These remaining costs of the project can only be covered through the beneficiary's own resources, financial contributions from third parties or in-kind contributions from third parties.

A third party providing financial contribution to the project can be any public or private entity (for example it could be the National Research Council of the beneficiary's country, always making sure that those are not EU granting schemes administered by the National Research Council). However, the applicants have to declare in the Grant Application Form who are the third-parties providing financial contribution to the project; applicants have also to keep always in mind that any third parties² are not eligible to receive funding from Frontex; also, these cannot be delegated by the applicants to conduct the tasks indicated in the proposal.

In particular, remember that in-kind contribution cannot correspond to performing any research activities of the project by a third party for free. A third party may, for example, lend a tool for free, provide access to

¹ See Article 190 (Co-financing) and Article 191 (Principle of non-cumulative award and prohibition of double funding)

² Including but not limited to affiliated entities to the applicants, subcontractors, third parties receiving financial support from the applicants, as well as third parties giving in-kind contributions to the applicants.

a facility/laboratory, offer the assistance of a technician that calibrates an instrument (if this calibration is not a research task), but cannot provide, for example the assistance of a researcher that conducts research tasks.

- For the same project, an applicant cannot be awarded more than one grant from EU institutions. This means that the applicant, if wishes, may submit the same project proposal in reply to other calls for proposals of other EU granting schemes; but once the project is awarded an EU grant, the applicant (that now became a beneficiary) cannot be awarded any other EU grants for the same project, and must immediately inform the institutions to which the grant applications were submitted. As will also be indicated in the Grant Application Form, the applicant shall immediately inform Frontex (already at the application stage) of any multiple applications and multiple grants relating to the same project.
- If a beneficiary received funding to cover a certain cost of the project (whatever the cost refers to), for this same cost the beneficiary cannot receive any other funding from the EU budget.

Question 6: Could a project be based on implementation of processes, improvements or optimisations of processes or of a system in the operational environment for the border guards for border checks?

On a similar topic, a project for devising a methodology for the implementation of a technology, or to achieve systematic knowledge about the implementation of a technology, would be eligible?

Answer: The proposed projects must focus on technological research for the realisation of a new or improved technological solution. Improvements of processes, implementation of technologies, or the setup of a novel methodology can be part of the project activities (e.g. the by-product of the technological research can be used for improving a certain process or methodology), but surely not the sole purpose of them. There must be a tangible technological development core concept behind the project. Also, research on software is within the scope of the call, being a technological solution.

A core concept of Frontex Research Grant is to fund projects that have the ambition to realise a viable technological solution (which is feasible, cost-effective and suitable to be operationalised) improving its TRL. The eligible research activities under each TRL (from TRL 2 to TRL 7) will be listed in a specific table in the Call for Proposals.

Question 7: Have you conducted a needs analysis on what kind of technologies you would prioritise?

Answer: Yes, indeed. In the Call for Proposals there will be an appendix where the seven Thematic Categories and the multiple Key Areas of Research will be listed, which are the result of a needs assessment and research activities. One of the eligibility requirements will be that the proposed project contributes to at least one of the seven Thematic Categories. However, the awarding criteria do not foresee prioritising the proposals on the basis of the tackled Thematic Category.

Question 8: Does the TRL that a project aims to reach influence the score that a project may get during the evaluation?

Answer: No, it does not. The evaluators do not take into account which TRL is targeted per se, but it is mandatory that the project aims to improve the TRL (no matter how many levels, but at least one), through research activities consistent with the TRLs as per the description in the TRL table included in the Call for Proposal document.

Obviously, the final intent is to support the EBCG community; therefore, in order to rank proposals with the same scores (if any), the Evaluation Committee might decide to prioritise the proposals by considering additional factors related to the objectives of the call, like the potential of the project to deliver a technological solution with effective and practical operational applications in border management. Higher TRL might increase this potential of course.

Question 9: In regard to intellectual property rights, could you please elaborate on the rights of use of the results by Frontex, especially on “reproduction”? What does it mean? How would this be defined in the Grant Agreement?

Answer: “Reproduction” relates mostly to the reproduction of the documents of the project (for example, the Research Report), although in certain cases it may refer to the reproduction of the actual technological solution. However, in general, Frontex has no intention to “industrialise” the results of research, and any such activities would be preliminarily discussed with the beneficiaries. All the conditions about the “Ownership and Use of the Results” are properly detailed in the Model Grant Agreement that will be published with the Call for Proposals, in order to make

sure that applicants already know all the legal conditions (to which they would be subject in case their project is awarded the grant) even before they apply.

Question 10: Is there any legal obligation in case national law enforcement agencies are involved in trials or end-user tests, for example for giving them or Frontex prior notice?

Answer: In general, Frontex does not impose any obligation on this, as it depends on the project's workplan. For example, if the applicant envisages in the workplan a demonstration to be done in a certain country in collaboration with a law enforcement agency, this will have to be properly described in the workplan and then, during the implementation, the beneficiary will be free to engage with the stakeholders as per its own procedures.

Question 11: Could the call consider projects with 2-year implementation period?

Answer: No, the duration of a project proposed under these calls must be between 6 months and 12 months, with no possibility of extension.

Question 12: If a project is funded, when does Frontex pay out the grant?

Answer: The beneficiary must submit a request (accompanied supporting documents as indicated in the Grant Agreement) for payment within 60 calendar days following the end of the project. Frontex will pay within 60 calendar days from when it receives the request and supporting documents. In the previous call there was the possibility of an interim payment, but in the next call, we are thinking not to include this option. If the supporting documents need to be revised, the payment request will be suspended by Frontex, the beneficiary will be notified of this and requested to perform revision. Once the revision is completed, the payment will be unsuspending and the process continues.

Question 13: Is pre-payment possible under this granting scheme, for example to buy an equipment at the beginning of the project, which is needed to conduct the research activities?

Answer: No, pre-payments are not possible. The grant offered by Frontex under these Calls for Proposals is an action grant for the reimbursement of eligible costs and one of the eligibility criteria is that the costs must be incurred during the implementation period of the Action.

Question 14: Are the costs of scholarships or fellowships for researchers eligible?

Answer: In the Call for Proposals and in the Model Grant Agreement there will be a section where the conditions for the eligibility of direct costs of personnel are detailed. In order for the costs of scholarships/fellowships to be eligible, these must be finalised through a contract between the beneficiary and the scholarship/fellowship holder that fulfils all the requirements for the eligibility of direct costs of personnel specified in the Call for Proposals and the Model Grant Agreement. Be aware that the "costs of financial support to third parties" (for example using Frontex Research Grants to provide grants to a third-party) are not eligible.

Question 15: In regard to costs of equipment, are these eligible and how are they calculated?

Answer: The depreciation costs of equipment and costs of renting or leasing equipment or other assets are eligible. In general, only the portion of the equipment's depreciation, rental or lease costs corresponding to the implementation period and the rate of actual use for the purposes of the action may be taken into account when determining the eligible costs. However, by way of exception, the full cost of purchase of equipment may be eligible, if this is justified by the nature of the action and the context of the use of the equipment or assets.

Question 15: Let's suppose that a beneficiary has an on-going project (project A), and applies for Frontex Research Grant to fund another project (project B); can project A provide in-kind contribution to carry-out research in project B?; also, could the cost of a certain equipment acquired under project A and lent as in-kind contribution to project B be declared as eligible cost under project B?

Answer: No. In-kind contribution from a third party is possible in a project funded under the Frontex Research Grants but as also indicated in Question 5, third parties³:

- a) are not eligible to receive funding from Frontex;
- b) cannot be delegated by the applicants to conduct any of the tasks indicated in the proposal.

Also, in-kind contributions from third parties are not eligible costs.

³ Including but not limited to affiliated entities to the applicants, subcontractors, third parties receiving financial support from the applicants, as well as third parties giving in-kind contributions to the applicants.

6. Wrap up of the info session

The meeting concluded on a positive note, successfully wrapping up all the discussions and encouraging the participants to apply once the call for proposals is published.

7. Disclaimer

The information contained in this document and the slides has to be intended only as generic and indicative. It is not legally binding in any sense and does not constitute a formal commitment to launch a call for proposals or to funding from Frontex. The Call for Proposals under the Frontex Research Grants Programme are published on Frontex website and the related documents are the only source of official information that applicants need to take into consideration to participate in the call.