

ANNOUNCEMENT

2024 Call for Exploratory Research Projects under the UT Austin Portugal Program

NOVEMBER 2024



The present **Announcement for a Call for Proposals** (ACP) is intended for R&D exploratory research projects, submitted through a competitive procedure, as announced at <https://www.fct.pt/>, in specific research areas of the UT Austin Portugal Program. The Call is subject to the rules laid out in the Regulation for Projects Exclusively funded by National Funds, hereinafter designated by [FCT Project Regulations](#) and published in Regulation No. 999/2016, in its current wording, i.e., amended and republished by Regulation No. 5/2024 and corrected by the Declaration of Rectification no. 366/2024/2, published in the Diário da República, 2nd series, no. 100, of May 23, 2024.

CONTENTS

1. AIMS AND PRIORITIES.....	4
2. SUPPORTED ENTITIES	5
3. CRITERIA FOR SUPPORTING PROJECTS.....	5
4. FUNDING.....	6
5. BUDGET ALLOCATION	6
6. PROJECTS AND BENEFICIARIES' ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA.....	6
6.1 PROJECT	7
6.2 PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR IN PORTUGAL.....	7
6.3 MEMBERS OF THE RESEARCH TEAM IN PORTUGAL.....	7
6.4 UT AUSTIN TEAM	8
6.5 PRINCIPAL CONTRACTOR IN PORTUGAL.....	8
7. SELECTION METHODOLOGY.....	8
8. SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS	9
9. NON-DISCRIMINATION AND EQUAL ACCESS POLICY	9
10. APPLICABLE LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS.....	10
11. PROTECTION OF PERSONAL DATA	10
12. CONTACT POINT.....	10

1. Aims and Priorities

The consolidation and reinforcement of the National System of Science and Technology (NSST) constitute a priority of the national policy for science and technology. It aims to increase the national and international competitiveness of science and technology and its contribution to innovation and transfer of knowledge and at complying to the global aspirations defined in the *Agenda 2030: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. In this context, it is particularly relevant the promotion and strengthening of the scientific and technological institutions through the participation of research teams in Projects.

The **2024 Call for Exploratory Research Projects (ERPs) under the UT Austin Portugal Program** has been designed to help teams of researchers from non-corporate entities of the NSST and The University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) come together to conduct joint exploratory research activities in the leading scientific areas of the UT Austin Portugal Program.

Proposed projects must aim to stimulate and promote Portugal's international competitiveness through Science and Technology (S&T), focusing on the opportunities provided by the data economy as a driver of growth and change.

Submitted proposals must configure groundbreaking, high-risk/high-reward projects with a potential for further expansion. Although exploratory research projects (ERPs) are not expected to achieve, during their standard time frame, the sort of results typical of longer projects, submitted proposals must be able to clearly frame the outcomes they should deliver in 12 months and link them to long-term goals for full value realization.

The ERPs should value impact, i.e., propose potential solutions to real-world problems, thereby going beyond the production of scientific papers.

Considering the above-mentioned goals, FCT is launching the **Exploratory Research Call** to fund applications in the following areas:

- a) **Advanced Computing;**
- b) **Nano Materials for New Markets;**
- c) **Space-Earth Interactions.**

A detailed description of the challenges and subtopics related to each scientific area is provided in the [Terms of Reference for the 2024 Call for Exploratory Research Projects under the UT Austin Portugal Program](#).

Project proposals addressing **Advanced Computing-related topics** are encouraged to foster synergies with the Minho Advanced Computing Center (MACC). Additionally, proposals addressing the **Space-Earth Interactions** area should, desirably, demonstrate their contribution to the Atlantic International Research Center's scientific agenda (AIR Center), as laid down in the document "[Towards a Science and Technology agenda for an integrative approach to the Atlantic: Climate Change and Energy Systems, Space and Ocean Sciences, through North-South cooperation](#)", available on FCT's website.

Project proposals under the areas of Advanced Computing, Nanotechnologies and Space-Earth Interactions addressing Clean Energy-related topics will be deemed of strategic interest to this Call.

All applications must fully comply with the terms of reference set out in the [Terms of Reference for the 2024 Call for Exploratory Research Projects under the UT Austin Portugal Program](#).

2. Supported Entities

The following Portuguese organizations can be beneficiaries of the funding provided through this Call:

- Higher Education Institutions, their institutes and R&D units;
- State, international or associated Laboratories with head office in Portugal;
- Non-profit private institutions whose main objective is R&D activities, including Collaborative Laboratories (CoLab) and Centres for Technology and Innovation (CTI);
- Other non-profit private and public institutions developing or participating in scientific research activities.

This Call will only fund resources and activities attributable to research teams of eligible Portuguese beneficiaries (supported entities). Under the UT Austin Portugal Program, UT Austin will grant funding to UT Austin Principal Investigators partnering with eligible Portuguese beneficiaries.

3. Criteria for Supporting Projects

The call aims to support R&D projects known as Exploratory Research Projects (ERPs). These are scientific or technological research projects that explore ideas or concepts with significant originality and/or innovative potential. ERPs should value impact, i.e., propose potential solutions to real-world problems, going beyond scientific production.

On the Portuguese side, projects may be presented “individually” (by one eligible beneficiary only) or in “co-promotion” (by two or more eligible beneficiaries). Projects in co-promotion must be led by an entity listed in no. 2 of this Announcement.

The project should have a maximum duration of **12 months**, renewable for a maximum of 3 months, in duly justified cases.

The maximum funding per project is € 50,000 (fifty thousand euros) for the Portuguese research team. The funding amount for the U.S. counterpart is laid out in number 5 of this Call Announcement.

The submitted proposals must include:

- One or more Portuguese research institutions as identified in No. 2 of this Call Announcement.
- At least one partner at UT Austin. Also, under this Call, proposals in the area of Advanced Computing may be led by a Principal Investigator (PI) affiliated with the Texas Advanced Computing Center (TACC), provided that they meet the eligibility status set forth in No 6.4 of this Announcement.

The project consortium may include, on the Portuguese side, collaborative institutions, i.e., companies and other similar entities, that may wish to invest in the exploratory research project and whose participation is likely to bring relevant expertise to the project. However, such entities will not be funded under this call.

4. Funding

Projects will be funded by National funds through the FCT budget.

Supports to be granted are non-refundable, applying the option of simplified costs in the form of a lump sum. The contribution is paid upon presentation of evidence and results that demonstrate the effective completion of the project as contractually agreed.

The initial advance payment for the project is 75% of the approved funding. The remaining amount, up to the approved funding for each project, is paid upon project completion, through a final reimbursement payment method.

For budget definition purposes, refer to the terms defined in the "[Methodology for Applying Simplified Costs – Lump Sums](#)," as well as to Articles 8 and 9 of the [FCT Projects Regulation](#).

In the scope of this call, a fixed rate of 25% is applied to the estimated direct eligible costs, and the expenses for the adaptation of buildings and facilities are limited to a maximum of 10% of the project's total eligible expenses.

5. Budget Allocation

The budget allocation for this call is € 400,000 (four hundred thousand euros) for eligible Portuguese institutions.

Selected projects will receive up to € 50,000 (fifty thousand euros) to fund activities carried out by the Portuguese teams.

Considering the maximum amount of eligible funding per project, the Program expects to support up to 8 (eight) exploratory research projects through this Call. However, the actual number of exploratory projects funded will depend on the quality of the submitted proposals and the funding available.

Project funding at UT Austin - The UT Austin Portugal Program's budget at UT Austin will fund its teams with between \$50K (fifty-thousand US dollars) and \$100K (one hundred thousand US dollars) per project to make possible for PIs to hire full-time PhD students who may spend some time in Portugal as exchange students during the projects. UT Austin teams will be officially notified of their selection for funding by the Program's office at UT, not by FCT.

6. Projects and Beneficiaries' Eligibility Criteria

The eligibility conditions for projects and beneficiaries are those indicated in the [FCT Project Regulations](#), articles no. 5 and 6:

6.1 Project

- Applications which have been submitted in previous editions of the same call with an ongoing decision process are not allowed to apply.
- Multiple applications for the same project will not be accepted:
 - In the present call;
 - In different calls for proposals that overlap in the period for receiving applications;
 - In the case of applications to calls with different thematic scopes and which take place during different application periods, the recommendation for funding in one of them implies the exclusion from the decision process for the others.
- Related applications, from the same team, submitted to FCT or other funding agencies must be declared in the application.
- Applications must be submitted in English.
- Applicants providing false declarations or committing plagiarism in the application will be excluded from the Call.

Multiple applications are considered to be applications that fully or partially share the work plan.

6.2 Principal Investigator in Portugal

- Must have a physical allocation to the project;
- Can only submit one proposal as PI in this call;
- Must have a Doctoral degree by the closing date of the call, the document certifying the doctoral degree must be presented at the time of the Acceptance Document;
- Should also have an employment contract or grant contract with the Principal Contractor. In the absence of such a link, at the time of the Acceptance Document, a written agreement between the parties must be submitted, according to point c) of item 1 of Article 6 of FCT's of [FCT's Project Regulations](#);
- If a PI has had a final scientific report rejected in the two years before the opening of the call for reasons attributable to them, they are not allowed to submit an application;
- The PI cannot be in a situation of unjustified non-fulfilment of the regulatory requirements regarding the presentation of reports on scientific execution, of projects concluded and financed through FCT, and in which acted as PI.

6.3 Members of the Research Team in Portugal

- The remaining members of the research team in Portugal shall be dedicated to the project according to their participation.

6.4 UT Austin Team

- The proposal must be led by a tenured or tenure-track faculty member, who will be responsible for the project at the American counterpart. A confirmation statement should be attached to the application.
 - In the area of **Advanced Computing**, full-time senior researchers from the Texas Advanced Computing Center (TACC) may also lead projects, as long as they have a PI status, which should be indicated in the confirmation statement.

6.5 Principal Contractor in Portugal

- Must be one of the national entities of the R&D system listed in No. 2;
- Can not be associated with an application if standing in an unjustified situation regarding the return of funding transferred to the Principal Contractor in previous projects with the same Principal Investigator.

The members of the UT Austin Portugal Program governance structure (Governing Board, External Review Committee, Board of Directors and Executive Team) are not allowed to participate as PI, team members or consultants.

7. Selection Methodology

An international panel of independent reviewers, affiliated with foreign institutions, will carry out the evaluation.

The selection and ranking of projects are based on a Project Merit Indicator (MP) using the following criteria, which are described in greater detail in the [Guide for Peer Reviewers](#) and in the [Terms of Reference](#) for the 2024 Call for Exploratory Research Projects under the UT Austin Portugal Program:

- A. Scientific merit (A1) and innovative nature (A2) of the project from an international standpoint and alignment with the objectives of the UT Austin Portugal Program and the scientific area where it falls under – 40%;
- B. Scientific merit of the PI and the research team (B1), including the impact of project execution in developing the PI's career and/or research (B2) – 35%;
- C. Feasibility of the workplan and the expected indicators (C1), as well as the budget adequacy (C2) – 25%.

The **Merit of the Project** (MP) is given by:

$$MP = 0,40 (0,50 \cdot A1 + 0,50 \cdot A2) + 0,35 (0,60 \cdot B1 + 0,40 \cdot B2) + 0,25 (0,50 \cdot C1 + 0,50 \cdot C2)$$

Each sub-criterion is scored using a 9-point scale system (1- minimum; 9-maximum) with decimal

numbers. The final score of MP is rounded to two-decimal places.

If information made available in the application does not allow for evaluating a given sub-criterion, then the respective sub-criterion will receive a score of 1.0 (one).

For a proposal to be eligible for funding, a minimum score of MP equal or higher than 5.00 points is required.

For the purpose of selection and decision-making regarding funding, projects will be ranked by MP in decreasing order. In case of ties (projects with the same MP score), the ratings assigned to sub-criteria A2, B1, A1, B2, C1 and C2 will be used sequentially and by decreasing order to provide the final ranking of the projects.

8. Submission of Applications

Applications must be presented to FCT, in English, from December 2, 2024 to January 22 2025, 5 p.m. **Lisbon time**, using a specific on-line form and submitted through myFCT platform.

The PI and the Portuguese project research team members must have their curriculum vitae completed on the CIÊNCIAVITAE platform.

The Declaration of Commitment from the Proposing Institution will be available on the myFCT platform for agreement by the head of the Proposing Institution, or by someone delegated by them, after the application submission deadline and until February 5, 2025, 5 p.m. **Lisbon time**.

Applications are composed of the on-line form and the following documents, also submitted electronically:

- "Technical Annex" (according to No. 2.6 of ["Terms of Reference for the 2024 Call for Exploratory Research Projects under the UT Austin Portugal Program"](#))
- **A statement from the PI at UT Austin** confirming that he/she will be the PI at the American counterpart and that he/she holds a tenure-track faculty appointment at the same university;
 - In the case of proposals in the area of **Advanced Computing**, led by PIs at the Texas Advanced Computing Center (TACC), the statement must indicate the PI is a full-time senior researcher with PI status;
- File with the project timeline and main tasks.

9. Non-Discrimination and Equal Access Policy

FCT promotes a policy of non-discrimination and equal access, thus no applicant may be privileged, benefited, damaged, or deprived of any right or exempted from any duty. This includes ancestry, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family situation, economic situation, education, origin or social condition, genetic heritage, reduced work capacity, disability, chronic disease, nationality, ethnicity or race, land of origin, language, religion, political or ideological beliefs or trade union affiliation.

10. Applicable Legislation and Regulations

The call is governed by this Announcement, by the Regulation for Projects Exclusively funded by National Funds, designated by [FCT Project Regulations](#) and published in Regulation No. 999/2016, in its current wording, i.e., amended and republished by Regulation No. 5/2024 and corrected by the Declaration of Rectification No. 366/2024/2, published in the Diário da República, 2nd series, No. 100, of May 23, 2024, and by other applicable national and community legislation.

FCT recommends a timely reading of all the documentation supporting the application, namely the [FCT Projects Regulation](#), the Application Guide, the Terms of Reference for the 2024 Exploratory Research Projects under the UT Austin Portugal Program, the Guide for Peer Reviewers, CIÊNCIAVITAE Guide and the Ethics Self-Assessment Guide.

11. Protection of Personal Data

In the context of the call, personal data is collected. Information to be provided to data subjects, in compliance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 (GDPR) and Law 58/2019 of 8 August, is provided in the Application Form Filling Support Guide.

12. Contact Point

For inquiries of a **scientific nature**, please contact the UT Austin Portugal program at research@utaustinportugal.org.

For specific information related to the **application submission**, please contact concursoprojetos@fct.pt.

Madalena Alves

President of the Board of Directors, Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia



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