



ANNOUNCEMENT FOR PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS

2025 Call for Exploratory Research Projects under the UT Austin Portugal Program

DECEMBER 2025



Announcement for Proposal Submissions

This Announcement for Proposal Submissions is aimed at Exploratory Research Projects within specific research areas of the UT Austin Portugal Program, submitted under a call for proposals, with terms disseminated at www.fct.pt, prepared under the terms set by the Regulation for Projects Exclusively funded by National Funds, hereinafter designated by [FCT Projects Regulations](#) 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.

1. Aims and Priorities

The consolidation and reinforcement of the National System of Science and Technology (NSST) are key priorities of the national science and technology policy. These efforts aim to enhance national and international competitiveness in science and technology, foster innovation, and facilitate knowledge transfer. They also align with the global aspirations outlined in the United Nations' *Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. In this context, promoting and strengthening scientific and technological institutions through the active participation of research teams in projects is particularly significant.

The 2025 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, at least, one of the four leading scientific areas of the UT Austin Portugal Program in Phase IV (2025-2030).

Submitted proposals must configure groundbreaking, high-risk/high-reward projects with potential for further expansion and intersecting with work areas prioritized by Portuguese research and innovation agendas. The proposals are expected to clearly frame the outcomes they should deliver and link them to long-term goals for full value realization.

The ERPs are scientific or technological research projects that explore ideas or concepts with significant originality and/or innovative potential. These projects should value impact, *i.e.*, aim at potential solutions to real-world problems, thereby going beyond the production of joint scientific papers and the strengthening of transatlantic networks.

FCT is launching the current call to fund applications addressing the following challenges in the four flagship research & innovation areas of the Program:

- **Advanced Computing:** Scaling energy-efficient computing tools, such as greener and more sustainable AI solutions, with a focus on efficiency and applying translational AI across different domains.
- **Clean Energy:** Achieving climate neutrality, with priority on climate-neutral cities, greening industries, and developing future energy systems.
- **Nanotechnologies:** Advancing critical materials, particularly in battery technology, semiconductors, and green hydrogen production.

- **Space-Earth Technologies:** Exploiting Space technology, namely for sensing and related enabling solutions, to develop Earth models and applications resulting in actionable insights for better decision-making, prevention, and mitigation of challenges such as forest fires, coastal erosion, soil moisture monitoring, and ocean ecosystem management.

A detailed description of these challenges and topics related to each scientific area is provided in the **Terms of Reference for the 2025 Call for Exploratory Research Projects under the UT Austin Portugal Program (Phase IV)**. All proposals must adhere to the requirements outlined therein.

2. Supported entities

The following non-business Portuguese entities of the R&I system are individual or co-promotion beneficiaries (supported entities):

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

Under the UT Austin Portugal Program, UT Austin will grant funding to UT Austin Principal Investigators partnering with supported entities in Portugal.

3. Type and modality of Projects to be funded

Applications must be submitted by research consortia involving: at least one Applicant from an eligible Portuguese research institution; and at least one Applicant from The University of Texas at Austin.

On the Portuguese side, projects may be presented “individually” (by one eligible beneficiary only) or in “co-promotion” (by two or more eligible beneficiaries), according to the eligible beneficiaries described in no. 2. The consortium may include 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.

On the UT Austin side, proposals must include at least one applicant affiliated with UT Austin. 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 members of the UT Austin Portugal Program governance structure (Program Board, External

Review Committee, Board of Directors and Executive Team) are not allowed to participate as PI, team members or consultants. This Call will only fund resources and activities attributable to research teams of eligible Portuguese beneficiaries (supported entities).

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The project should have a maximum duration of 12 months, renewable for a maximum of 3 months, in duly justified cases. Project accomplishments will be assessed, once finished, by the Board of Directors of the UT Austin Portugal Program and FCT.

4. Form of support and Funding rate

National funds will finance the projects through the FCT budget.

The funding to be granted under this call, for Portuguese teams, shall be non-reimbursable, 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.

Regardless of the project's approved funding amount, 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 closing of the scientific and financial components of the project, through a final reimbursement.

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.

For budget definition purposes, refer to the terms defined in the "[Methodology for Applying Simplified Costs – Lump Sums](#)," as well as to Articles no. 8 and 9 of the [FCT Projects Regulation](#).

5. Budget allocation

The budget allocation for this call is €400,000 (four hundred thousand euros) for projects starting in 2026.

Considering the maximum amount of eligible funding per project, the Program expects to support up to 8 (eight) exploratory research projects through this Call.

The maximum funding per project € 50,000 (fifty thousand euros) for the Portuguese beneficiaries.

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 Projects Regulation](#), articles no. 5 and 6:

6.1 Project

- a) Applications submitted, whether fully or partially, in any language other than English will not be considered.
- b) Applications which have been selected for funding by FCT or by other funding agencies are not allowed to apply.
- c) Multiple applications of the same project are not accepted:
 - In the present call.
 - In different calls in which there is temporal overlap within the submission of applications.
 - In the case of applications to calls with different thematic areas, and which take place in different periods of application submission, the funding recommendation within one of the calls is a condition for exclusion from the decision process of the remaining ones.

“Multiple applications” are proposals that fully or partially share the work plan.

- d) Related proposals, from the same team, submitted to FCT or to other funding agencies must be declared in the application.

6.2 Principal Investigator (PI) in Portugal

The Principal Investigator must comply with the following rules:

- a) Have physical allocation to the project.
- b) Hold a doctoral degree by the application deadline, with supporting documentation to be submitted during the contractualization phase.
- c) Should 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 no. 6 of FCT Projects Regulation, in which all the institutions must be localized in Portugal.
- d) Can only submit one proposal as PI in this call.
- e) Can only participate in one additional application as team member.
- f) Cannot be the PI of projects with a rejected final scientific report due to reasons attributable to the applicant, within the two years prior to the opening date of this call.

- g) 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 Research Team in Portugal

Each researcher (who is not a PI of an application) may participate as a team member in a **maximum of two applications** submitted under this call.

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

6.4 UT Austin Research Team

The proposal must be led by a tenured or tenure-track faculty member, who will be responsible for the project at UT Austin. A confirmation statement should be attached to the application.

Full-time senior researchers from the Texas Advanced Computing Center (TACC) may also lead projects, as long as they have a PI status, which must be indicated in the confirmation statement.

6.5 Principal Contractor in Portugal

The Principal Contractor of the project must be one of the national entities of the Portuguese R&I system mentioned in no 2.

Applications will not be accepted if the Principal Contractor is in an unjustified situation regarding the return of funding transferred to the Principal Contractor in previous projects with the same PI.

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 2025 Call for Exploratory Research Projects under the UT Austin Portugal Program:

- A. Scientific merit and novelty of the project from an international standpoint and alignment with the objectives of the UT Austin Portugal Program and the challenges of the scientific area where it falls under;
- B. Scientific merit of the PI and the research team;
- C. Feasibility of the work program (including its planning) and the expected indicators, as well as the budget adequacy.

- D. Potential social and economic impact of the research work and contribution towards relevant Portuguese research and innovation agendas.

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

$$\text{MP} = 0.4 \text{ A} + 0.2 \text{ B} + 0.2 \text{ C} + 0.2 \text{ D}$$

The criteria A, B, C and D will be graded from one (1.0, minimum) to nine (9.0, maximum). The final score resulting from the application of the above formula will be rounded to two-decimal places.

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

Proposals scored with MP lower than 6.00 are not eligible for funding.

After the ranking of proposals, the selection process for funding will follow these criteria:

- i) For each thematic area, one eligible application with the highest score (MP) will be selected for funding, provided that it has an MP higher than 6.00.
- ii) The remaining applications to be funded will be selected exclusively in descending order of score (MP), up to the available budget limit.

In case of ties (projects with the same MP score), the ratings assigned to criteria A, B, C and D will be used sequentially and by decreasing order to provide the final ranking of the projects.

8. Submission of Applications

Applications must be submitted in **English**, between **December 23, 2025** and **February 10, 2026** at 5.00 p.m. (Lisbon time) through a specific electronic form available on [myFCT](#) platform.

The project proposal must be described throughout the application form in a manner that clearly demonstrates the unique collaboration between the UT Austin research team and the Portuguese research team.

Research Team in Portugal

The PI, the core elements, and the remaining elements of the Portuguese research team must have their *curriculum vitae* completed in English, on the [CIÊNCIAVITAE](#) platform.

The Statement of Commitment from the Principal Contractor will be available on the [myFCT](#) platform for agreement by the head of the Principal Contractor or their designated representative following the deadline for submission of applications and up to **February 24, 2026** at 5.00 p.m. (Lisbon time).

Research Team at UT Austin

A single application will be submitted by the Principal Investigator (PI) based in Portugal. However, the PI of the research team at UT Austin must provide their counterpart in Portugal with all information and documentation necessary for the preparation and submission of the proposal (please refer to the *Application Documents* sub-section).

In addition, the UT Austin research team must be registered by the PI in Portugal in FCT's electronic submission system as a *collaborative institution*.

When completing the application form, the PI in Portugal is responsible for ensuring that members of the UT Austin research team:

- Obtain a [CiêncialD](#);
- Register on CIÊNCIAVITAE (completion of the curriculum vitae is not required, though);
- Confirm their participation in the application.

Failure to complete these steps will prevent the assignment of tasks to members of the UT Austin research team.

Application Documents

Applications consist of the online form and the following documents, all submitted electronically:

- A 2-page CV of the UT Austin Principal Investigator and the other members of the UT Austin research team.
- 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 led by PIs at the Texas Advanced Computing Center (TACC), the statement must indicate that the PI is a full-time senior researcher with PI status;
- A one-page document describing how the proposed project aligns with flagship projects at both national and EU levels.
- File with budget for the UT Austin team;
- File with the project timeline and main tasks (including national entities and the UT Austin team)
- Commitments of private non-academic organizations (if applicable).

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 of Projects Financed Exclusively by National Funds, approved by Regulation No. 999/2016, of October 31, in its current wording, and by other applicable national and community legislation.

Before submitting a proposal, applicants are advised to read the documents of the Call, all available at the Call's webpage

11. Data Protection

In the context of this call, personal data are collected and processed in compliance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 (General Data Protection Regulation – “GDPR”). In addition, data processing complies with the provisions of Law No. 58/2019 of 8 August, which ensures the implementation of the GDPR in the Portuguese legal framework.

The Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P. (FCT) acts as the funding body for the projects and is responsible for launching, evaluating, deciding on, and managing the funding process. For these purposes, FCT acts as the data controller with regard to the personal data collected and processed under this call, in accordance with the GDPR. The processing of personal data is carried out for the purposes of managing the call and the corresponding funding instruments and complies with the principles of lawfulness, fairness, transparency and storage limitation.

The processing of personal data by FCT is based, pursuant to Article 6(1)(c) and (e) of the GDPR, on compliance with legal obligations to which FCT is subject and on the performance of tasks carried out in the public interest vested in FCT, namely in the context of public funding of scientific research. In the context of the UT Austin Portugal Exploratory Project Call, and considering the specific funding model whereby the University of Texas at Austin (UTA) provides financial support to the U.S.-based research team, it is necessary to share certain information contained in the submitted proposals with UTA. Such data sharing is strictly limited to what is necessary to:

- confirm that the UTA Principal Investigator holds a faculty appointment at UTA; and
- verify that the proposed budget includes costs eligible under the UTA Portugal program at UTA.

For these purposes, restricted access to the submitted proposals will be granted to a limited number of members of the top governance structure of the UTA Portugal Program, namely the UTA Portugal Executive Director in Portugal, the Associate Director at UTA, and the National Directors of the UTA Portugal Program. Access to personal data will be limited to the information strictly necessary for the purposes described above and will not be used for evaluation, selection, funding decisions, or any other purposes.

Where applicable, this sharing of personal data may involve an international transfer of data to the United States of America, which is carried out in accordance with Chapter V of the GDPR, on the basis of the European Commission’s adequacy decision regarding the EU–US Data Privacy Framework, to which UTA is certified, thereby ensuring an adequate level of protection for the personal data transferred.

Applicants are hereby informed that this limited and controlled sharing of personal data is necessary for the management and implementation of the UTA Portugal Program and is carried out in compliance with the GDPR and applicable national legislation.

For detailed information regarding the personal data processing to be performed by FCT within the scope of this call, applicants should consult the Personal Data Protection document made available on the call’s webpage.

12. Contacts

For **matchmaking support**, i.e., to help you find a suitable research partner at UT Austin, please contact the UT Austin Portugal office at UT (Marco Bravo: bravo@austin.utexas.edu)

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

For specific information related to the application **submission and FCT's applicable regulations**, please contact concursoprojetos@fct.pt.

Madalena Alves

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



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