

# Marie Curie Host Fellowships for Early Stage Research Training (EST)

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Warning :** *The answers to Frequently Asked Questions do not supersede the rules and conditions laid out, in particular, in Council and Parliament Decisions relevant to the Sixth Framework Programme, the Specific Programme, the Human Resources and Mobility Work Programme, the Call for proposals or the Guidelines on evaluation and selection of proposals. These documents are available at: <http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/find-doc.htm>*

### General information

**Q: What is an EST?**

A: Marie Curie Host Fellowships for Early Stage Research Training are aimed at offering structured scientific and/or technological training as well as providing complementary skills for researchers in the early stages of their career.

**Q: Who can apply for the EST host fellowships?**

A: Applications can be made either by a single host organisation (*mono-partner*) or by a consortium (*multi-partner*) of any legal entities (e.g. universities, research organisations, industrial firms, SMEs, international organisations, etc.) operating a coherent and integrated research training programme.

**Q: What size is an EST?**

A: One institution in the case of a mono-partner. For multi-partner applications, the consortium must be from at least three EU Member, Candidate or Associated States, of which two must be EU Member or candidate countries.

**Q: Which research topics are supported?**

A: Proposals from all areas of scientific and technological research of interest to the European Community are welcome and there are no predefined priority areas.

### Host institutions

**Q: What are the characteristics of eligible host organisations?**

A: The participants of the Marie Curie actions are organisations active in research and research training (universities, research centres or commercial enterprises, etc.).

**Q: Which countries can participate in the EST action?**

A: The 25 Member States of the EU; the “Candidate Countries” of Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, and Turkey; and the “Associated States” of Iceland, Israel, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Israel. In addition Third country institutions can participate on a duly justified basis.

**Q: Are there special conditions for non-Member States**

A: Yes. In multi-partner applications, participants from the Associated Countries (Iceland, Israel, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Israel) can only join in addition to a minimum of two legal entities from Member States or Candidate Countries. Once the consortium is created according to this rule, all partners are treated equally. For mono-partner applications the single institution can be from any EU Member, Candidate or Associated State.

**Q: How important is the presence of organisations from EU new Member States or Candidate Countries for the evaluation of a multi-partner EST proposal?**

A: Organisations from new Member States, like all eligible organisations, will be judged on their merits. There is no mechanism for ‘political correctness’ in the evaluation process. All proposals are evaluated according to the published criteria only.

**Q: Can organisations from “Third countries” participate in EST projects**

A: Yes in certain circumstance. “Third country” refers to any country that is neither a Member State/Candidate Country nor an Associated State (see above). Participation of third country research teams is possible only within multi-partners hosts, and financing is only possible in exceptional circumstances.

**Q: Is there a difference between the way a private company and a university are treated participating in a project?**

A: No.

**Q: Is it possible for a private company (e.g. SMEs) to coordinate an EST project?**

A: Yes

**Q: Can an institution from a third country be an EST co-ordinator?**

A: No, the coordinating institution must always come from one of the Member States, Candidate Countries or Associated States.

**Q: What are the outcomes of the proposals received in the first call with respect to the number of host organisations involved in the EST projects (mono- or multi-partner hosts)?**

A: Approximately 70-80% of the contracts signed in 2003 and 2004 were with mono-partners and the remainder multi-partner contracts. Both types of proposal have their particular merits and are evaluated accordingly.

**Q: What is an inter-related group?**

A: An interrelated group is a mono-partner application where the co-ordinator teams up with one or more local, regional or even cross border institutions, to provide training. The mono-partner is the contractor and would receive the contract, be responsible for its implementation and employ the early-stage researchers, although the training could take place within any of the partner organisations.

**Q: What does cross-border mean in the context of an interrelated group?**

A: Cross-border corresponds to the definitions applied under the INTERREG IIIA Community Programme. For more information consult [http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/interreg3/abc/voleta\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/interreg3/abc/voleta_en.htm)

A concrete example would be an interrelated group consisting of a co-ordinating institution in Copenhagen together with one or more institutions in the Malmö area of Sweden (the adjacent INTERREG IIIA regions of København and Skåne Län respectively).

**Q: Does the European Commission have a list of potential EST partners (host organisations)?**

A: The CORDIS website provides an on-line partner search tool: <http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/partners.htm> Potential EST host organisations can also advertise their partnering needs by publishing their own on-line profile <http://partners-service.cordis.lu/index.cfm?pos=2>

<b>Eligible researchers</b>
-----------------------------

**Q: Who are the targeted researchers?**

A: Researchers with less than 4 years of research experience. The researchers are appointed directly by the selected host for periods between 3 months and 3 years. Any researcher already holding a PhD is not eligible to be appointed.

**Q: Do eligible early stage researchers have to be enrolled in a doctoral programme to be eligible for EST fellowships?**

A: No. This was a formal requirement under FP5 which has been relaxed in FP6.

**Q: Are there exceptions to the rule that a researcher can only be involved in a project in a host country different from his/ her nationality?**

A: Yes. In the case of dual nationality, if the researcher has not lived in the host country during the last 5 years. Or, if the host is an international organisation (e.g. CERN or EMBL) in the researcher's home country. Or, if the researcher has lived in a third country for at least four of the last five years immediately prior to his/her appointment.

**Q: Are the vacancies for Marie Curie Fellowships for EST advertised?**

A: Yes. Once the EST is signed, the institution should advertise its vacancies for researchers on the Internet, in scientific press, and by its usual means of advertising. When available, these vacancies are published on the following CORDIS website <http://mc-opportunities.cordis.lu>. The applications should be made directly to the host institution rather than the Commission.

**Q: Is an early-stage candidate who has already benefited from two years of fellowship under FP5 still eligible under FP6?**

A: Yes, provided the overall cumulative maximum early-stage training period does not exceed four years (full-time equivalent).

**Q: Are there restrictions to the mobility of eligible early-stage researchers?**

A: Yes, they may not have resided or carried out their main activity in the country of the host organisation for more than 12 months in the three years immediately prior to their appointment.

**Q: Can third country researchers participate?**

A: Yes. However, they cannot represent more than 30% of the number of funded researcher-months to be delivered under the EST contract.

**Q. Apart from the above-mentioned restriction, are there any preferences on the share of researchers according to whether the countries of origin are EU Member States or FP6 Associated States?**

A: No, absolutely not.

<b>Project Implementation</b>
-------------------------------

**Q: In a multi-partner consortium, will the early-stage researcher be allowed to train in different partner organisations during his/her fellowship period?**

A: Yes. In multi-partner applications, fellows with stays of longer than 12 months are expected to be hosted by more than one partner. However, it must be clear that at least 75% of the training is undertaken within the appointing host organisation

**Q: Would a proposal aimed at the training of one single early-stage researcher, lasting three years, have any chance of success?**

A: No. The specific objective of EST fellowships is to provide structured research training and this is unlikely to be achieved if the project is limited to a small number of fellows.

**Q: Is there a preferred balance between the different durations of stays of EST researchers?**

A: No. There is no predefined preference but successful proposals often offer formal recognition of the training through masters or Ph.D. programmes. For shorter stays the successful proposals were careful to point out that these short-stay researchers were coming from a stable position in their home institution (as a Masters/Ph.D. student or graduate researcher).

**Q: Is it possible to divide a full training period into two or several periods in order to allow fellows to respect obligations in their home laboratories and departments?**

A: No. The training periods should be planned as continuous, full-time training periods.

**Q: Could an application envisage a secondment period in a third country for a fellow within the context of training (e.g. to participate in meetings, short visits, etc.)?**

A: Yes. The fellow can make short visits to other courses, labs and facilities nationally or internationally as part of his/her programme. However, these visits should be detailed in the application together with indicative duration.

**Q: Could the EST scheme be used to recruit young researchers who would be interested in a MBA?**

A: Yes if the Masters course was research-based as opposed to a purely taught course.

**Q: Is it possible for entities involved in a STREP, NoE or IP project which has already been approved by the EC, to submit an EST proposal on the same research topic?**

A: Yes. As long as there is no double funding, there should not be a problem.

**Q: If an organisation plans to host a certain number of researchers for a Ph.D. type of research and other researchers for short stays, does it need to include in the proposal the specific title for each Ph.D. programme and for short stay (regarding section B2 "Quality of the training activity" of the application)?**

A: No. The subject areas to be covered by the various projects should be described but not in so much detail that titles for projects are required. More information is in the Handbook.

**Q: Are proposers required to specify at the submission stage of the EST proposal how they plan to employ the early-stage researcher, i.e. whether it will be an employment contract offering full social security cover or a fixed-amount fellowship with limited social security?**

A: No, this is a negotiation issue.

<b>Financial &amp; contractual issues</b>
---

**Q: How can the funding be used?**

A: Funding is primarily of two types: for the researchers who are appointed by the host (their living allowances, travel expenses, etc); and for the execution of the project in the host organisation, (including a contribution towards overheads and management-related expenses). The successful projects in the first calls for EST in FP6, have budgets in the range €300 000 - €3 000 000.

**Q: Is it necessary to detail in the application form the requested funding for the project?**

A: No. Financial information is not required in the application forms. The budget is a function of the number of person-months of training offered, together with several variables such as whether the research is lab-based or not. The budget will be determined during project negotiation.

**Q: The maximum contract length is 4 years and the scheme allows a host organisation to ask for several three-year long Ph.D. programmes. Does this mean that all Ph.D.s must be defended within the four years of the contract or that they can simply start during the four years?**

A: No. There is no obligation to defend the PhD during the lifetime of the contract. Note however that expenses can only be charged to the contract during the 4 year period. In practice this means that all 36 month fellowships must commence within the first year of the project, if the host wants to charge the costs to the Commission.

## **Proposal Preparation and Submission**

**Q: What kind of document is the European Commission expecting in order to control that the submission of a proposal “has been authorised at the appropriate level within the organisation of each of the partners”?**

A: The Commission will not check that authorisation has been received by the applicants before proposal submission; this is the responsibility of the applicant.

**Q: In the case of a mono-partner EST with one or more interrelated groups should all partners fill in the A2-form in the application?**

A: No, only the institution which will sign the contract has to fill in the A2 form. The other partner organisations should not complete any forms but they should be described in detail in part B of the proposal.

**Q: Can individuals submit a proposal for the Marie Curie Host Fellowships for Early Stage Research Training?**

A: No, an individual cannot be the proposer of an EST project. As for all Marie Curie host-driven schemes within the Sixth Framework Programme, only host institutions can submit a proposal.

## **Evaluation**

**Q: How are applicants informed of the outcome of a proposal submitted under the EST scheme?**

A: Firstly, an Acknowledgement of receipt letter will be dispatched to the proposal coordinator (participant no. 1 in the A2 form). More information about the evaluation timetable is available in the Guide for Proposers. In general, it takes approximately 4 months from the submission deadline to publish the draft results on the web and 7-8 months from the submission deadline for signature of a contract.

**Q: Is there any possibility to look at the content of successful proposals?**

A: No, because of the rules surrounding data protection, the Commission is not allowed to divulge this kind of information.