

Research Training Network (RTN)

Frequently Asked Questions

Warning: *The answers to Frequently Asked Questions do not supersede the rules and conditions laid out, 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 a Research Training Network (RTN)?

A: Research Training Network consists of a consortium of teams located in different countries that propose a common research project to serve as a vehicle for providing training and, where necessary, transfer-of-knowledge.

Q: Who can apply?

A: A consortium of any legal entities (e.g. universities, private or public research institutions, governmental and non governmental organizations and any other commercial and non-commercial entities in particular industrial partners, including SMEs, etc.) may submit proposals insofar as each of them has an active role to play in the project.

Q: What is the size of a RTN?

A: A network consortium must have legal entities from at least three Member or Associated states of which two must be EU Member or Associated Candidate Countries. The size must be chosen to best achieve the training and transfer of knowledge objectives, while ensuring effective overall management and interaction amongst the teams. Typically, the composition of the network partnership ranges from 6-14 teams.

Q: Which research topics are supported?

A: Proposals from all areas of scientific and technological research of interest to the European Community are welcomed and there are no predefined priority areas. Projects that fully exploit the network structure to provide training/transfer of knowledge and particularly those that contribute to overcoming institutional and disciplinary boundaries will be valued more highly.

In addition to open calls the Commission may launch dedicated calls, asking for proposals which specifically address one or more objectives of the action as specified in the Work Programme (see for example call for 'Interdisciplinary and Intersectorial' projects published on 11 September 2004).

Q: Are research fields within the EURATOM programme eligible for funding?

A: Activities relating to human resources and mobility in areas covered by the EURATOM treaty are not eligible under the actions in the area of Human Resources and Mobility of the FP6.

Q: Can a project only be based on the exchange of information, training and courses between partners within the frame of a special topic?

A: No, the joint collaborative research project undertaken by the network is to provide a platform for training, for the transfer of knowledge and for career development of the recruited researchers.

Therefore, RTN projects cannot only aim to provide education and training, or pure “exchange of information and know-how-transfer”, or pure research. They must include and combine all those aspects.

Q: Is a RTN compatible with a Network of Excellence (NoE)? Is it allowed to submit a RTN proposal linked to a NoE proposal?

A: It may be compatible provided that no double funding is involved and that, i.a., the proposed RTN project is in line with the objectives and Training and Transfer of Knowledge activities set out in the Work Programme for the RTN actions. In any case, the eligible researchers have to devote 100% of their time to the RTN in which they have been appointed.

Host institutions

Q: What is meant by "Participants" and "Contractor"?

A: Participants in FP6 projects are *legal entities* contributing to an indirect action and having rights and obligations with regard to the Community and to one another under the terms of the Rules for Participation and the *model contract*. Under the contract with the Community participants are referred to as *contractors*.

Q: Are there other type of contributors in a RTN?

A: Normally, the contributors in a RTN are contractors that have signed the RTN contract. In addition and under the conditions laid down in the contract and Work Programme, individual experts or small teams in the joint research training project may be involved without them necessarily becoming contractors and without receiving directly the EC financial contribution. Their contribution should be of direct relevance for the project as specified in Annex I of the contract (Description of work).

Q: What is meant by “Coordinator”?

A: Among the various contractors in a network, there will be a coordinating institution. The coordinator is the contractor identified in the contract who, in addition to its obligations as a contractor, is obliged to carry out the specific coordination tasks provided for in the contract. The coordinator shall be the intermediary between the contractors and the Commission (with the exceptions foreseen in the contract) and to monitor and report progress. The network coordinator should therefore have the appropriate management expertise, as well as the technical expertise. The network coordinator's tasks also include administrative and financial matters, such as arranging the formalities for all contractors to accede to the contract, general liaison with the Commission, the submission of all documents, including cost statements and technical reports, and the distribution of the financial contribution from the Community.

Q: Are there specific rules on who can coordinate the network?

A: The person who carries out the coordinating tasks must work in the coordinating institution but may not be the same person as the scientist in charge, even though this is generally the case.

Q: What are the tasks and responsibilities of a Scientist-in-charge (in a host organisation)?

A: The main responsibility of the scientist in charge is to ensure the fulfilment of the contractual commitments as defined in the contract and its annexes. He/she monitors and reports on the work under the project in his/her organisation. He/she is usually the regular contact point for the Commission and the network coordinator concerning all issues relating to the implementation of the project.

In case a scientist-in-charge no longer wishes to work for the network, the contractor must contact the Commission Project Officer for advice on action to be taken.

Q: Can a SME be a RTN coordinator?

A: Yes

Q: Which countries are associated to the Marie Curie programme (FP6)

A: In October 2004 Candidate countries that are associated to FP6 are: Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. Other countries that are associated to the 6th Framework Programme are: Iceland, Israel, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland (Switzerland only from 01 January 2004)..

Potential participants should however confirm the exact situation of all these countries at the following FP6 International Cooperation website:

<http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/inco.htm>

Q: Can organisations from third countries participate?

A: 'Third country' refers to a country that is neither an EU Member State nor an Associated State (see above). While the participation of organisations from third countries in RTNs is welcomed and possible, it is clear that the proposal needs to present strong arguments in order to receive funding. It must be demonstrated that financing is **essential** to achieve the objectives of the project *i.e.*, that the contribution of the network team cannot be provided by any other means and that the project could not be achieved without its involvement. Furthermore, third country participants can only join in addition to the minimum number of legal entities from Member States or Associated Countries (the minimum number is three of which two must be Member States or Associated Candidate Countries).

Q: What is the status of an international organisation?

A: The participation of international organisations is possible above the minimal number of participants (see above). Its financing is possible if it is essential to attain the objectives of the action.

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

A: The CORDIS website provides an on-line partner search tool:
<http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/partners.htm>

Potential RTN host organisations can also advertise their partnering needs by publishing their own on-line profile at:

<http://partners-service.cordis.lu/index.cfm?pos=2>

Q: Can a team be part of more than one RTN?

A: It is possible that one team participates in more than one network provided that it has an entirely different and distinct role and that they can demonstrate a different contribution in each of the RTN. However, it is necessary to demonstrate that no double funding of researchers and other activities is taking place and that the team has sufficient resources for participating in both networks.

Q: If two independent teams from the same university with well-defined distinct tasks participate in the same RTN, are they to be seen as two different legal entities?

A: No, two teams from the same university must be represented by the same legal entity. Therefore, they will be required to fill in only one A2 form. Their respective contribution to the project is defined in Annex I of the contract.

In case your entity is a Joint Research Unit with a partnership between legal entities and without legal entity of its own, please read the information on Joint Research Units available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fp6/model-contract/pdf/fp6-faq-cost4b_en.pdf

Eligible researchers

Q: Who are the targeted researchers?

A: A RTN project is primarily directed at the training of **Early Stage Researchers** who have at the time of the appointment no more than 4 years (full-time equivalent) research experience since obtaining the diploma giving access to doctoral studies (the degree must entitle the holder to embark on doctoral studies, without having to acquire any further qualifications) in the country in which the diploma was obtained and who do not have a doctoral degree.

Experienced Researchers are defined as: *i*) researchers having at least 4 years (but not more than 10 years) of research experience (full-time equivalent) since gaining a university diploma giving them access to doctoral studies (the degree must entitle the holder to embark on doctoral studies, without having to acquire any further qualifications), in the country in which the degree/diploma was obtained or, *ii*) researchers already in possession of a doctoral degree, independently of the time taken to acquire it.

Q: Can researchers with more than ten years of research experience participate as ‘experienced researchers’ in an RTN?

A: No, researchers with more than 10 years of research experience (full-time equivalent), counting from the time the degree/diploma was obtained giving access to embark on a doctorate in the country where it has been awarded, will not be eligible for selection.

Q: Can third country researchers be appointed?

A: Yes, the appointment of third country researchers is possible within the limit of a maximum of 30% of the total number of funded researcher-months for the network as a whole. A national from a third country who has legally resided and having had his/her main activities in the Community or in Associated State(s) for at least four years (in total) out of the last five years immediately prior to his/her appointment is treated as a national of the Member State or Associated State in which he/she has resided for the longest period and therefore does not fall under this limit of 30%.

Q: Can third country researchers be hosted in a RTN member organisation located in a third country?

A: No, researchers from third countries cannot carry out their transnational mobility in a third country, be it in the country of their nationality or in another third country.

Q: Is there a ratio envisaged between early-stage and experienced researchers in an RTN?

A: The RTN activities are primarily directed at early-stage researchers for the purpose of initial training (including within the frame of doctoral studies) while more experienced researchers will be eligible with respect to the needs of knowledge transfer in the project as justified, for example, in highly multidisciplinary and intersectorial projects. Taking this objective into account, it is up to the network itself to propose the most appropriate balance of early-stage and experienced researchers for a particular network project.

Q: Is it correct that early-stage and experienced researchers can only take part in an RTN if they are appointed in a host organisation not located in their home country?

A: Yes, early-stage and experienced researchers must be nationals of a state other than that of the host organisation. Moreover, at the start of their involvement in the project, researchers may not have resided or carried out their main activity (work/studies, etc.) in the country of their host organisation for more than 12 months in the three years immediately prior to the start date. Short stays such as holidays are not taken into account. Exceptions to this rule are explained in the following question.

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: - In the case of a national holding more than one nationality, he/she will be able to carry out a period of mobility in the country of his /her nationality in which he/she has not resided during the previous 5 years. Short stays such as holidays are not taken into account.

- Researchers holding the nationality of a Member State or an Associated State can carry out their mobility activities in their home country of nationality if they can provide evidence testifying that they have resided legally and had their main activity in a third country for at least four of the last five years immediately prior to their appointment.

- In the case of the hosting of eligible researchers by international European interest organisations or international organisations, eligible researchers may carry out their project in any eligible international organisation, whatever its location.

Q: How long can appointed researchers be trained within an RTN?

A: A researcher can be appointed under a RTN for a duration of at least 3 months up to a maximum of 36 months.

In addition, the overall cumulative training received as an early stage researcher within the framework of Marie Curie Host Fellowships for Early Stage Research Training and Marie Curie RTN cannot exceed 48 months (full-time equivalent).

Q: At the time of submitting a proposal, do participants of an RTN have to know which researchers will be appointed?

A: The proposers do not need to know the identity of the early-stage and experienced researchers at the time of submitting the proposal. Moreover, if the proposal is selected for funding and a contract is signed, the contractors will have to internationally advertise the vacancies and researchers must be selected following open, transparent, impartial and equitable selection procedures.

Q: Can individuals submit a proposal for the Marie Curie Research Training Networks?

A: No, a participant in the RTN project is always an organisation. As for all Marie Curie host-driven schemes within the Sixth Framework Programme, only host institutions can submit a proposal to receive a grant from the European Commission.

Contract and project implementation

Q: Is the contract made with the legal entity or with the individual?

A: If the proposal is successful, the Commission will sign an RTN contract with the different institutions involved but not with individuals. In case a person changes his/her institution, this does not necessarily affect the contract itself unless (upon written request to the Commission) there is an amendment to the contract to change the composition of the consortium – for example, if the institution where a person works withdraws and is replaced by a new institution in which the person is recruited. This would, i.a, require the agreement of all the institutions involved.

Q: Shall the contractor transmit the declaration of conformity?

A: In conformity with point 4 of Annex III, within 20 days of the appointment of the researcher, the contractor shall transmit to the Commission, via the coordinator, a signed declaration on the conformity of the agreement (concluded between the contractor and the researcher) with the contract. The coordinator shall register the appointment and update the list and description of vacancies available, following the layout and procedures communicated by the Commission.

The model for the declaration of conformity is available at:

<http://www.cordis.lu/mariecurie-actions/rtn/manage.htm>

Q: Is there any guidance for amending the contract?

A: Yes. There is the guidance on amendments to FP6 contracts available at the following address:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fp6/working-groups/model-contract/pdf/amend_guide_en.pdf

Before submitting a request for amendment, you are advised to contact the Commission Project Officer for further information.

Q: Does a change of denomination of one contractor require an amendment?

A: When legal details (such as simply the name or address of a contractor, or the change of authorised legal representative) are changed no formal contract amendment is needed. However, the Commission has to receive all the legal documents concerning the change.

If however a new entity has been created (e.g. following a merge) an amendment to the contract to include this entity is needed. See the Guidance on amendment to FP6 contracts mentioned in the previous question and contact the Commission Project Officer for further details.

Q: Are subcontracts allowed within an RTN?

A: Contractors are expected to have the resources necessary to carry out the work required by the project. However, contractors may subcontract minor services, which do not represent core elements of the project work and cannot be directly assumed by them, where this proves necessary for the performance of their work within the project.

Where it is necessary to subcontract certain elements of the work to be carried out, this must be clearly identified in Annex I of the contract.

Any subcontract must be awarded on transparent grounds to the best bid offered taking into consideration price and quality and following any national legislation in force.

Q: Can a secondment be done to an organisation outside the network?

A: No, a secondment cannot be done to an organisation outside the network. Secondment period means a period spent by a researcher at a contractor's premises other than those of the contractor, which has appointed him/her under the project.

However, the host contractor will have to appoint this researcher if the secondment period is longer than 30% of the total period of the agreement in force between the researcher and the other contractor who has appointed him/her previously. In this case, the conditions for eligibility of the researcher will have to be checked again.

Q. What is an 'audit certificate' and how many audit certificates will have to be provided by the contractor?

A: An audit certificate certifies that the costs incurred by the contractor during a period meet the conditions laid down in the contract. It is provided by a qualified external auditor (a contractor that is a public body may opt for a competent public official). The price of an audit certificate (excluding VAT) is a direct cost (if eligible) under the "Management" activity.

The periods for which an audit certificate is required are determined at the contract negotiation stage and are set out in article 7.2 of the core contract (normally, every year or every two years).

Q: What is the difference between audit and audit certificates? How long is it compulsory to keep the documents for a control or an audit?

A: The Commission may launch at any time and up to five years after the end of the project an audit. Therefore there is an obligation to keep all original documents relating to the contract for up to 5 years from the end of the project. Such audits may cover scientific, financial, technological and other aspects relating to the proper execution of the project and the contract.

Financial aspects

Q: How much funding can an RTN expect to receive?

A: There is no predefined limit to the overall maximum budget of a Marie Curie RTN in FP6. The overall budget is worked out according to the nature and scope of the research and training activities taking into account the proposed research programme, the number of contractors, the training and transfer of knowledge plan proposed, the person-months to be delivered and whether stipend or employment contracts will be used, etc. Based on the experiences of the first call for RTN in FP6, the number of contractors in most projects range from 6 to 14, and the overall approximate budget ranges from €1500 000 and €3 000 000.

Q: How can the funding be used?

A: At least 65% of the Community contribution must be spent on eligible expenses for contributing to the activities carried out by the researcher, that is, living, travel, mobility and Career Exploratory allowances as well as participation expenses of eligible researchers. The rest goes to eligible expenses for contributing to the activities carried out by the host organisations and benefiting all the consortium, that is, research/training/transfer of knowledge programme expenses, management, overheads and equipment expenses (if the Commission's prior agreement is obtained at the negotiation stage).

For an overview of the expenses that could be covered by an RTN contract, please refer to the table for RTN actions in the Human Resources and Mobility Marie Curie Work Programme (page 66 in the edition of September 2004).

For further information on the different type of costs, please consult the RTN Handbook.

Q: How can researchers be appointed under an RTN?

A: Under Marie Curie Actions, the host institution can opt between a fixed-amount fellowship with the researcher or an employment contract according to the annual reference rates indicated in the contract.

The choice between fixed-amount fellowships and employment contracts is determined at the contract negotiation stage and will chiefly depend, on the legal and administrative situation of the host organisation and/or the researcher as well as on the national legislation of the host institution.

Q: What happens to the costs linked to the participation of researchers not appointed by the network?

A: Eligible costs related to networking activities of researchers who participate in the training and networking actions for the benefit of the whole network but who are not recruited by the network can be charged to a RTN contract on a real cost basis within the conditions and limits set out in the contract. These expenses fall within cost category F(1) of the table of Eligible expenses for RTN actions included in the Human Resources and Mobility Marie Curie Work Programme (page 66 in the edition of September 2004).

Q: Are management activities covered by EC funds?

A: The cost for management activities of the project may be charged to the project up to 7% of the Community contribution or the lower percentage set out in article 9 of the core contract. This 7% (or the lower applicable percentage) is to be applied at network level and limited to actual expenses.

Q: Under which cost category are language courses for a researcher recruited by the network included?

A: The monthly mobility allowance (which is only due for those researchers doing a transnational mobility) is meant for covering, *i.a.*, language courses for recruited researchers.

Q: Is VAT an eligible cost?

A: No. Indirect taxes, including VAT or duties, are non-eligible costs.

Q: When is mobility allowance applied?

A: It is applied "at time of appointment" according to the family situation of the researcher: e.g. if a researcher is single at the beginning but then gets married, he/she will still only be entitled to the single person's mobility allowance during his/her appointment. The mobility allowance depends on family status and not on mobility of the spouse (and/or children). However, it is only paid in those cases where the researcher has undertaken a physical transnational mobility.

Q: How are overheads calculated?

A: A flat rate of 10 % calculated on the basis of the direct eligible costs excluding subcontracting costs may be charged to the contract to cover the indirect costs of the project. The overheads associated with the management/auditing expenses must be included in the maximum EC contribution established for this type of cost. It follows therefore that the flat rate of 10 % for overheads excludes the management/auditing expenses.

Submission and evaluation of proposals

Q: Can individuals submit a proposal for the Marie Curie Research Training Networks?

A: No, a participant in the RTN project is always an organisation. As for all Marie Curie host-driven schemes within the Sixth Framework Programme, only host institutions can submit a proposal to receive a grant from the European Commission.

Q: How can proposers be sure that their application has been received and registered by the Commission?

A: Once a proposal has been received and registered by the Commission, an ‘acknowledgement of receipt’ containing the proposal number is sent by post to the proposal coordinator at the latest one month after the deadline for submission of proposals. Proposers who have not received such an acknowledgement by that time should contact the HRM Helpdesk at rtd-mariecurie-actions@cec.eu.int mentioning the call to which the proposal was submitted. The sending of an acknowledgement of receipt by the Commission does not imply that a proposal has been accepted as eligible for evaluation.

Q: When are the evaluation results made available?

A: Preliminary evaluation results are expected to be available within four months after the second stage deadline for submission. These results are published before the final Commission Decision, are only preliminary, and should be considered as purely informative. An evaluation summary report (ESR) for all evaluated eligible proposals will be sent to each applicant with the score details and the evaluators’ comments on the proposal. In cases where the proposal has been judged non-eligible, applicants will be informed.