

Marie Curie Conferences and Training Courses (SCF – LCF)

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

Q: What are Marie Curie Conferences and Training Courses’?

A: Marie Curie Conferences and Training Courses are implemented either as a ‘Series of Events’ (SCF) or ‘Large Conferences’ (LCF) for the purpose of providing training primarily to researchers with up to ten years of experience. The first call for proposals with deadlines in 2003 and 2004 was open to funding of both SCF and LCF whereas the 2005 and 2006 calls only foresee funding of SCF. No more calls are envisaged for LCF.

Q: Can an SCF include conferences?

A: Yes; the type of events can be either training courses or conferences, or a combination of the two. However, it should be noted that the total number of event participants (with or without EU support and incl. keynote speakers) should normally not exceed 150 for each event.

Q: Is there a specific accelerated procedure for short-term events?

A: No. Events which take place less than six months after the corresponding deadline for submission of proposals under the Marie Curie Conferences and Training Courses’ scheme will not be eligible for funding.

Q: What is the average budget for a ‘Series of Events’?

A: As an indication, based on the first call under this action in the Sixth Framework Programme, the size of the projects will vary between approximately €180 000 and €400 000.

Q: Which research topics are supported?

A: The action has a bottom-up approach. This means that all fields of science and technology are eligible for funding, and there is no *a priori* distribution of the budget between scientific disciplines.

Q: How does one apply?

A: Interested organisations should first read the SCF-LCF Handbook prepared by the Commission in order to understand the rules for participating in this scheme (available on the website of the Marie Curie Actions: http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fp6/mariecurie-actions/information/publications_en.html). Once they have decided to prepare a proposal, applicants should read carefully all relevant documents from the InfoPack available for each call for proposals on the CORDIS website:

http://fp6.cordis.lu/fp6/call_details.cfm?CALL_ID=192 The legal documents listed in chapter VII of the Guide for Proposers might also help applicants to understand better the evaluation process, the rules for participation, contractual and financial issues, etc. The application is made through the on-line Electronic Proposal Submission System (EPSS): <http://fp6.cordis.lu/fp6/subprop.cfm>

Host Organisations

Q: What kind of organisations can apply?

A: A ‘Series of Events’ (SCF) may be proposed by all kinds of legal entities active in research or researcher advanced training (e.g. universities, research organisations, international organisations, industrial/commercial firms, SMEs, ...).

Q: Who precisely are the ‘participants’ mentioned in the Commission documents?

A: ‘Participant’ refers to the legal entity taking part in the project as organiser or as co-organiser and with whom the Commission concludes the contract. This should not be confused with ‘event participant’ which refers to the researcher attending the conference or training course and who is the final beneficiary of support given under the contract.

Q: What is the minimum number of conference/course organisers (‘participants’) in a Series of Events (SCF)?

A: For Series of Events (SCF) proposals may be made *either* by a single legal entity established in a Member State or an Associated State, *or* by a consortium of two or more mutually independent legal entities of which at least one must be established in a Member State or an Associated State.

If a project has two or more participants, the participants may choose to create a consortium.

Q: Is a conference/course organiser a “host organisation” in the sense referred to in the Work Programme and, if so, how do the rules applicable to hosts translate in this case?

A: Yes, a conference/course organiser is a host organisation, and the rules of the Work Programme apply analogously; e.g. for “recruitment (of researchers)” read “registration” in this case.

Q: Can a conference/course organiser of an SCF be located in a third country?

A: Yes, provided that the project has at least one other participant established in a Member State or Associated State. In any case the participation of third country legal entities must be duly justified in the proposal.

Eligible researchers

Q: Who can benefit from EU support in order to attend the conferences and training events (the ‘eligible researchers’)?

A: If a proposal is successful, the attendance of researchers with less than ten years of research experience can be supported by the European Commission, with priority being given to those with less than four years’ experience. Subject to certain conditions, the attendance of researchers with more than ten years of experience may also be supported for an SCF.

Q: Is there a way for individual researchers to apply directly to the Commission in order to request grants for attendance at conferences?

A: No. EC support for attendance at conferences is always provided to eligible researchers through the event organisers, if they have already obtained a funding contract from the European Commission.

Q: Where can researchers find the list of events supported by the Marie Curie Conferences and Training Courses action?

A: For each contract the coordinator must advertise the details of the events and the number of available vacancies on the CORDIS website:

http://mc-opportunities.cordis.lu/home_evt.cfm

Q: Are researchers from third countries eligible for financial support when attending an event under the Marie Curie Conferences and Training Courses action?

A: For an SCF, third-country nationals with up to ten years of work experience in research (full time equivalent) could benefit from the European contribution.

For ‘Large Conferences’ (LCF), third-country nationals (with up to ten years of research experience) are only eligible for funding if the conference takes place in a Member State or an Associated State.

Q: Is there a ceiling for the attendance of researchers from third countries?

A: Yes; in all cases, the proportion of funded researchers from third countries may not exceed 30% of the total funded researchers for each event. Furthermore, for SCF only, the proportion of third-country researchers attending each event may not exceed 30% of the total number in attendance.

Q: Is there a ceiling for the overall attendance of researchers from Member States and Associated States?

A: No. However, for SCF only, no more than 30% of the total number of researchers attending each event may be nationals of the same Member State or Associated State.

Q: Must the team of event participants be the same in each event within an SCF?

A: No; participation in each event should be open to any interested researcher, and the eligibility of each participant for EU financing will be determined each time a new event is organised.

Project implementation

Q: Is the Marie Curie Conferences and Training Courses action similar to the EuroConferences activity in the previous Framework Programmes?

A: The Marie Curie Conferences and Training Courses action maintains, to some extent, the objectives of the High-Level Scientific activity under FP5 and the EuroConferences activity under FP4 and FP3, i.e. the training of young researchers and networking of European researchers working outside Europe. Within the FP6 Series of Events, the proposers still have the possibility to organise the same types of events as under the previous Framework Programme. Typically, what were previously referred to as EuroConferences, EuroWorkshops and EuroPhDConferences will now fall into the conferences category, while EuroLabCourses and EuroSummerSchools will be considered as training courses.

Q: Are organisers of the FP5 High-Level Scientific Conferences activity allowed to keep the EuroConference label if they receive support under the FP6 Marie Curie scheme for Conferences and Training Courses'?

A: Yes. You may, of course, give any label to your events, and you could keep this label to stress continuity. But please bear in mind that the Commission support received should be clearly acknowledged in all your communications and publicity, mentioning the official name of the action: 'Marie Curie Conferences and Training Courses'.

Q: What is meant by the "coherence" of an SCF covering several themes?

A: From a scientific and/or training point of view this could involve the relation between theory and application, different contributions to the resolution of the same set of problems, etc. From an organisational point of view, one should think of economies of scale in organising the series in the same format, with the same teaching resources, etc.

Q: Is it permissible to present a series of conferences and summer schools in the same proposal?

A: Yes, the Series of Events measure has been designed specifically for this purpose, thus encouraging the potential coordinators in building synergies to reach the critical mass while respecting the coherence of the project.

Q: Is it possible to apply for a single conference?

A: No. The 2005 and 2006 calls for proposals only foresee funding for Series of Events. The minimum number of events in a Series is four, and for each event the total number of event participants (with or without EU support and incl. keynote speakers) should normally not exceed 150.

Q: Is it permissible to submit a proposal for an SCF which would include only training courses?

A: Yes.

Q: What are virtual events?

A: Virtual events are meetings taking place via the web, whereby the participants remain at their own locations and meet in a virtual environment via interconnected computers.

Q: Is it possible for organisations which are involved as host organisations in another multi-partner Marie Curie action (i.e. RTN, EST, or TOK) to apply for a Series of Events in order to offer workshops or to hold their annual meeting?

A: Yes, this is possible as long as there is no double funding. The proposal description should clearly demonstrate that the objectives of the proposal go beyond the frame of the existing host contract.

Q: Can events be organised outside the EU Member States and Associated States?

A: Yes; third-country locations are eligible. However, any event located in a third country should be well justified in the proposal description.

Q: What is the minimum and maximum duration of an event?

A: There is no minimum duration. It is expected that conferences will typically last a few days, while training courses will last from one to a few weeks. The maximum duration is four weeks for each event. Please note that for the purpose of estimating the EU contribution, an average duration of five days for conferences and 10 days for courses (including summer schools) is used by the Commission.

Q: What is the maximum duration of an SCF project?

A: The maximum duration of a Marie Curie Conference and Training Courses project is four years.

Q: Should the number of days counted in a conference or training course include Saturdays and Sundays or only weekdays?

A: Saturdays and Sundays should be counted in the total number of days if the programme of the event has scheduled activities during these days.

Financial and contractual issues

Q: How can the funding be used in Series of Events?

A: First of all, funding is available for the benefit of the eligible researchers as a contribution to their travel costs, their daily living expenses, and the cost of their participation in the conferences and training courses.

Furthermore, the EC funding comprises a contribution to the costs linked to the organisation of the events (including new equipment).

Finally, funding is available to cover that part of the expenses related to project management (including the audit).

Q: Are the costs related to the preparation of a Series of Events by the coordinator (and partners) considered as eligible for EU funding?

A: Some of the costs related to the preparation of the Series of Events may be covered by the contribution to project management provided that these costs occur after the start date of the project.

Q: Are personnel costs related to the events secretariat, the creation of a website, the design of invitations, etc. eligible for EU funding?

A: Some of these costs may be covered by the contribution to organisational costs

Q: As regards travel and living allowances, do the organisers have to collect the plane tickets, train tickets and hotel bills from every eligible researcher? How are they supposed to report the actual costs?

A: The contribution to travel and living expenses of the funded event participants must cover real costs. The coordinator should make sure to keep all the necessary documents required by the auditors when preparing the periodic management reports and financial statements

Q: Are the costs related to travel and daily allowance of the keynote speakers and experts who will give lectures and training eligible for EU funding? If yes, are there any requirements regarding the nationality or research experience of those speakers and experts?

A: Yes, these costs are eligible for EU funding and should be presented as a part of the organisational costs (for SCF only). There is no specific requirement regarding the nationality and research experience of the speakers. However, since speakers are counted as event participants, they must be taken into account by the coordinator when checking the nationality balance of the event.

Q: Are the costs associated with producing lecture notes and proceedings eligible for EU funding?

A: Yes, these costs are eligible for EU funding and should be presented as a part of the organisational costs (for SCF only).

Q: In the table of eligible expenses in the Work Programme (section 2.8.2.), what is meant by ‘A: Living Allowance’?

A: This refers to the contribution covering the subsistence expenses of the researchers attending the event(s). The contribution can cover up to 100% of the real expenses of each eligible event participant up to a maximum per day and per eligible event participant. This maximum is set at €150 multiplied by the correction coefficients of section 2.8.1 Table 3 of the Work Programme. (The correction coefficients are applied to take into account the cost of living in the country/countries where the event(s) take(s) place.)

Q: In the table of eligible expenses in the Work Programme (section 2.8.2.), what is meant by ‘B: Travel Allowance’?

A: This refers to a contribution to cover the costs for the eligible researcher of travelling between his/her location of origin and the location of the event(s). The contribution can cover up to 100% of the real costs of each eligible event participant. However, it is capped per eligible event participant to the rates provided in section 2.8.1 Table 2 of the Work Programme.

Q: In the table of eligible expenses in the Work Programme (section 2.8.2.), what is meant by ‘E: Contribution to the participation expenses of eligible researchers’?

A: This refers to the contribution to the event participation fees. The contribution can cover up to 100% of the participation fees of each eligible event participant on the basis of the official rates publicised for the event.

Q: In the table of eligible expenses in the Work Programme (section 2.8.2.), what is meant by ‘F: Contribution to the research/training/transfer of knowledge programme expenses’?

A: For SCF only: these are all the cost incurred for the organisation of the event(s). They may include in particular the costs for publication, publicity, venue rental, event secretariat, as well as the costs linked to the participation of the keynote speakers (travel, subsistence, etc.). Please note that these costs may only be partially covered by the EU contribution depending on the proportion of eligible researchers attending the event financed by the EU compared to the total number of researchers attending.

Q: In the table of eligible expenses in the Work Programme (section 2.8.2.), what is meant by ‘G: management activities (including audit certification)’?

A: These expenses cover the management of the contract and should not exceed 7% of the EC contribution for SCF and 3% for LCF. These expenses may include, for instance, the work expended on the preparation of the contract deliverables and the costs linked to the audit certification of the claimed costs.

Q: In the table of eligible expenses in the Work Programme (section 2.8.2.), what is meant by ‘I: Other types of eligible expenses/specific conditions’?

A: For SCF only: these expenses include the costs of purchase or leasing with option to buy new equipment necessary for the project. These expenses, which must be duly justified on the basis of real costs, are subject to the depreciation rules of the equipment according to the applicable accounting principles. Only in exceptional cases, duly justified by the use of the equipment and if its final destination is determined, the Commission may accept to reimburse the expenses related to the purchase or leasing with option to buy of new equipment without depreciation. An example of such expenses would be the upgrade of the video and/or audio facilities in the lecture hall of the event venue.

Q: What happens if the participation in a conference/course is lower than foreseen? Do the organisers have to reimburse part of the EC funding?

A: The coordinator needs to explain any deviation to the contract and must provide an updated implementation plan (including financial aspects) in the periodic reports. Transfer of unused funds from one reporting period to the next may be allowed if well justified.

Proposal preparation and submission

Q: When is the best time to apply for a Series of Events?

A: There should be at least six months between the deadline for the submission of the proposal and the starting date of the (first) event. Events taking place earlier than that will be ineligible.

Q: Can individuals apply to the Commission for conference attendance?

A: No, individual applications should be submitted directly to the organisers. Researchers should therefore contact the project coordinators who will give them all the necessary information.

Q: In the proposal form A4, should the keynote speakers be presented as ‘event participants’ and included in the "Total number of event participants"?

A: Yes.

Q: In the proposal form A4, where should the applicants indicate the requested contribution from the EC to the participation of eligible researchers?

A: Applicants are not required to state this amount themselves in the A4 form. The Commission will estimate the maximum EC contribution on the basis of the number of eligible event participants, as indicated in the A4 form.

Q: In the proposal form A4, how constraining is the information given about the composition of the audience for each event (in groups 1, 2 or 3)?

A: This information will be used to estimate the requested contribution, which will be used in the negotiation of the proposal. It is understood that these figures may change in the course of the project. However the distribution of the event participants should be respected as much as possible.

Q: Can the costs of the invited speakers and of the organising or scientific committees be covered by the EU contribution?

A: For LCF: no, such expenses are not eligible.

For SCF: yes, these expenses are eligible since they are part of the total organisational costs of the events. Please note, however, that the EU contribution to such expenses will be proportional to the number of eligible researchers supported. Thus, if an event is attended by 50 researchers of whom only 30% are eligible for EU funding, the EC contribution will cover no more than 30% of the total organisational costs.

Q: When preparing a proposal, how can one calculate the EU contribution?

A: Applicants do not need to calculate the EC contribution since it will be estimated directly by the Commission based on the information provided in the administrative forms of the proposal. Note that for SCF, proposers are asked to indicate in form A4 the total organisational costs of the events; the Commission will use this amount to work out the maximum EC contribution to organisational expenses.

Q: With a Series of Events is there a risk of getting close to profit-making formats?

A: All proposals showing an intended profit will be rejected. Furthermore, the systematic follow-up of the contracts should guard against any profit-making in the course of the project.

Evaluation

Q: Is there a preference for certain areas of research for Marie Curie Conferences and Training Courses?

A: No, the action will cover all research fields ('bottom-up' approach). However, the evaluation criteria (both "scientific quality" and "Community added value and relevance to the objectives of the scheme") place emphasis on subjects of relevance to Europe, and of a multidisciplinary, intersectorial, or leading-edge nature.

Q: Could the Commission decide to fund only some events in a proposed series?

A: The evaluation panel will judge the quality of the proposal as a whole. If the events proposed are of unequal quality or if some of them are not considered as justifiable for the project, the panel will mark down the proposal accordingly. The panel could recommend that the Commission negotiates a revised project, but it is up to the Commission to decide whether to follow this recommendation. It should be noted in this context that special event locations (including third countries) should be explicitly justified in the proposal.

Q: How does the weighting system for project evaluations work? If a threshold of 70% is set for the total of the evaluation, how do you view individual thresholds for individual evaluation criteria? For example, does it mean that a conference cannot be financed if the training value was marked lower than four by the experts?

A: If any individual criterion value is below its individual threshold, the proposal will be rejected. In theory, a proposal may get a mark higher than the global threshold but may still be rejected because it failed on one individual criterion. It should be noted that criteria with high individual thresholds have low weights: the discrimination between the best proposals is effectively done by the criteria with the higher weight.

Q: How are proposals evaluated? Who are the evaluators? How many evaluators assess each proposal? How are evaluators selected? Does everybody have access to the guidelines for evaluators?

A: The Guidance Notes for Evaluators address these issues in detail. The general principles are set out in the Guidelines on Proposal Evaluation and Project Selection Procedures (the "Evaluation Manual"). These documents are available at the Marie Curie web page: http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fp6/mariecurie-actions/pdf/guidance_evaluators.pdf and at <http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/find-doc.htm#evalproc>.

Q: What is the average duration between a call for proposal's deadline and the signing of the contract between the European Commission and the host institution?

A: It usually takes about six months from the deadline for proposal submissions until the signing of the contract.

Q: Are there any statistics available from the first SCF-LCF call for proposals with respect to the number of applications submitted and the number of successful applications?

A: For the first deadline in April 2003, the total number of proposals submitted was 347 of which 316 were eligible. Of these, 31 proposals (11%) were eventually funded. For the second deadline in April 2004, the total number of proposals submitted was 399 of which 373 were eligible. Of these, 30 proposals (8%) were eventually funded.