Programme description
ATTRACTION
Opportunities for Outstanding Young Researchers in Luxembourg

Table of Contents

1. ATTRACT in Brief ..................................................................................................... 2
2. Aims of the ATTRACT Programme ....................................................................... 2
3. Target Groups ........................................................................................................... 3
4. General conditions for application ......................................................................... 3
5. Gender Equity ........................................................................................................... 4
6. Career track ............................................................................................................. 4
7. Application, Selection and Evaluation Procedure .................................................. 6
8. ATTRACT Selection Criteria .................................................................................. 7
9. Scope and duration of funding ................................................................................ 8
10. ATTRACT Call 2020: Timing ............................................................................... 9
11. How to Find a Host Institution for an ATTRACT Project ....................................... 10
12. Relocation Support and Individual Coaching ....................................................... 11
13. Further Information ............................................................................................... 11

Version Call 2020, 03/07/2019

Changes to the previous call:

- The FNR has signed the “Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)” and therefore has introduced changes in how it assesses research proposals. This means that the FNR evaluates quality and impact independently of journal-based metrics and gives value to all research outputs. The application and peer review guidelines have been adapted accordingly.
- The FNR requires gender parity per institution in the Call 2020 applications.
- From the ATTRACT Call 2020 onwards, the FNR implements a co-funding requirement.
- A few additional changes:
  At Pre-Proposal stage:
  o requirement for an institutional statement on fit of project/candidate
  At Full Proposal stage:
  o requirement for commitment letters by non-contracting partners
  o requirement for a project plan (FNR Gantt Chart)
1. ATTRACT in Brief

The ATTRACT programme by the National Research Fund (FNR) aims to support the Luxembourg research institutions to expand their competences in strategic research areas by attracting outstanding young researchers with high potential to Luxembourg.

The programme is designed for researchers not yet established in the country.

The ATTRACT grant shall enable them to set up their own research group in a domain of strategic relevance to the host institution. ATTRACT candidates are employed by the institution either in a tenured position or in a tenure track, with predefined conditions and criteria for career development based on a final assessment of their achievements at the end of the ATTRACT funding period (see Chapter 6 “Career Track”).

ATTRACT proposals must be submitted jointly by the candidate and the host institution.

Proposals submitted should be innovative and of high scientific quality and candidates must have gained a minimum of two and a maximum of eight years’ professional experience since successful completion of doctoral studies.

Proposals selected under the ATTRACT programme have a lifespan of five years. The financial contribution by FNR can be up to EUR 1.5M€ or 2M€ for ‘Starting Investigators’ or ‘Consolidating Investigators’, respectively.

Within the frame of the ongoing Performance Contract 2018-2021 (PC) with the Luxembourgish Government (see FNR website), emphasis will be put on the assessment of ATTRACT candidates in light of their contribution to the development of a given priority area for Luxembourg (the so called strategic merit assessment). Proposals will need to show how the candidate’s research activities will integrate into the institution’s strategy and how the candidate will contribute to strengthen this particular field. The FNR will look at the past and present achievements within the particular research field in Luxembourg as well as the past and future investments of the institution within this domain.

2. Aims of the ATTRACT Programme

The ATTRACT objectives are:

- Enabling the recruitment of high potential researchers
- Strengthening research areas of strategic importance to Luxembourg
- Offering recruited ATTRACT fellows interesting career perspectives, through a tenure track with transparent promotion criteria

The aim of the ATTRACT programme is to attract outstanding researchers with high potential to Luxembourg. The proposal submitted jointly between host institution and applicant, should aim at strengthening strategically important research fields in Luxembourg by integrating new skills and innovative research programmes in the existing research competencies, while
supporting highly talented junior researchers in establishing independent research teams and providing attractive career perspectives beyond the ATTRACT funding.

3. Target Groups

In order to be eligible for the programme, candidates must not have been employed by the host institution for more than a year at the time of the Full Proposal submission deadline and must have proven experience of research in a professional context for a minimum of two years and a maximum of eight years following successful completion of doctoral studies (career breaks will be considered; see guidelines). Furthermore the candidate should have gained experience in several international research environments and demonstrated mobility in his/her career.

Amongst the applicants falling into this definition, the FNR distinguishes between two categories of target groups:

**Category 1 Starting Investigator:** The starting investigators are postdoctoral researchers having made some outstanding contributions to their field of science. They have not yet established (or only just started) their own independent research programme and group, but show great potential in their ability to set up and to establish a research programme and team capable of significantly advancing research in a relevant domain.

**Category 2 Consolidating investigator:** Consolidating investigators are experienced postdoctoral researchers with proven track record in the field. They have already established their own independent research line and with the ATTRACT grant they can further consolidate their research programme and group. These candidates may have already been appointed to their first established academic post or group leader position.

The FNR estimates that suitable ATTRACT candidates need to have reached the category 2 career stage within 5 years postdoctoral experience barring specific circumstances that may have prevented them devoting time to research after their PhD (such as career breaks).

4. General conditions for application

Applicants submit their proposal to the FNR jointly with a Luxembourg public-sector research host institution (see section “How to Find a Host Institution for an ATTRACT Project”).

The application should describe a highly innovative research project that is central to a research programme that she/he seeks to establish at the host institution. The project description should be accompanied by a statement by the host institution on how the applicant’s work fits in the main scientific trust of the ‘department’ where the applicant will reside. The statement should also describe the framework conditions in terms of career perspectives, research and office space and other financial contributions offered to the candidate by the host institution within and beyond the timeframe of the project. A successful ATTRACT candidate (i.e. principal investigator) should be able to manage the research within the remit of the ATTRACT grant and ensuing research group with relative autonomy.
The framework condition offered by the host institution should enable the ATTRACT fellow to:

- have full responsibility for the ATTRACT research project and the direction of their overarching research programme,
- be able to submit new projects to funding agencies and with the support of the host institution (i.e. expand their research programme),
- be able to interview and select the required personnel for the ATTRACT project as well as ensuing projects,
- manage the ATTRACT budget at his/her own discretion,
- supervise PhD candidates,
- initiate new scientific collaborations,
- have access or obtain dedicated lab space and infrastructure for the project-associated analyses and experiments,
- take part in inter-departmental strategic discussion and decision bodies,
- take part in teaching activities

In order to avoid overburdening of the ATTRACT candidates with high teaching and administrative loads during the initial phases of establishing their research programme, upper limits for the first 3 years should be negotiated with the candidate and given in the statement by the institution.

5. Gender Equity

Through the ATTRACT programme, the FNR also wishes to address the gender gap in leading academic and research positions. The FNR’s requirement for Luxembourg host institutions to propose at least 40% of female ATTRACT candidates in the years 2017-2021 is far from being fulfilled (UL currently leading with 25%).

In the Call 2020, institutions are therefore required to respect gender parity in their applications. For the University of Luxembourg, gender parity will be considered from the 3rd application onwards, whereas for all other institutions, gender parity will be considered from the 2nd application onwards.

This measure applies to submissions at pre-proposal stage. Institutions are encouraged to be proactive and make use of their international networks and their links to international institutional leaders to specifically scout for highly promising female candidates.

The FNR would also like to highlight that in the Call 2019, the ATTRACT panel was constituted by 4 women and 2 men and that all ATTRACT Calls considered since 2007, no disparities between overall female and male success rates can be noted (female success rate: 27%, male success rate: 26%).

6. Career track

One essential aim of ATTRACT is to provide the candidates with the means to build and establish their own research group and their research career as an independent principle
investigator. It is therefore indispensable that the host institution traces out a clear career track for the candidates and that the procedures and requirements to transition from one stage of this career track to the next are communicated to the applicant from the start.

1. **Starting position**

ATTRACT fellows must be appointed at an appropriate seniority level within the existing career framework of the host institution, thus guaranteeing that the above-stated conditions are fulfilled. It is not in the spirit of the programme that ATTRACT fellows are hired into a specially created personnel category.

- At the University of Luxembourg, the entry level for a “Starting investigator” ATTRACT fellow should be at least in the rank of Senior lecturer (« Chargé de cours ») (Faculty) or Senior Researcher (Interdisciplinary Centre);
- At the University of Luxembourg, the entry level for a “Consolidating investigator” ATTRACT fellow should be in the rank of Assoc.-Prof. (Faculty) or Chief Scientist (Interdisciplinary Centre);
- At a public research centre (LIST, LIH or LISER), the entry level for an ATTRACT fellow should be in the rank corresponding to Senior research scientist or Group leader.

The initial appointment could be either a tenured or a tenure-track position. In the latter case, it is mandatory that the host institute provides a plan for tenure conditional upon a positive evaluation.

2. **Transition to next career stage**

A formal evaluation of the ATTRACT fellow’s research accomplishments will take place at the latest after four years and is the basis for the decision on whether the candidate can transition to the next career stage and obtain tenure and promotion.

In dialogue with the FNR, the Host institution, which will be leading the evaluation process, sets out the procedure and criteria for the evaluation. The evaluation must be based on a merit based review process which should primarily focus on the individual performance of the candidate during the ATTRACT fellowship. The evaluation process must be guided by fair, transparent and objective criteria. The candidate must not be put in competition with other contenders for tenure or promotion.

It is recommended that individualised targets or objectives regarding all criteria are discussed and agreed on with the candidate*. There may be different sets of targets for tenure and

---

* Examples of possible evaluation criteria are:
  - Scientific output produced
  - External funding gained
  - Extend and sustainability of the group established
  - Quality of the laboratory management
  - Supervision of Master Diploma students
  - Supervision of PhD candidates
  - Teaching activities
  - …
promotion. The sets of individual targets, the detailed criteria and the procedure for this evaluation need to be clearly set out before the ATTRACT grant starts and are an integral part of the contract signed between the FNR and the host institution.

A negative evaluation result could lead to not attaining tenure. A positive evaluation will lead to tenure (if not already the case) and, provided the corresponding set of targets is attained, to promotion.

- At the University of Luxembourg, promotion consists of the advancement into the next higher rank of faculty category.
- At the public research institutes LIST, LIH or LISER, promotion may not necessarily imply a change of rank, but can also consist in an increase of group size and/or budget or additional responsibilities.

Tenure and promotion must not depend on the circumstantial availability of a free position and/or budget. Thus, right from the beginning the institution must be able to guarantee that the position and the budget required will be available after expiry of the FNR funding.

7. Application, Selection and Evaluation Procedure

The ATTRACT programme foresees one annual deadline and proposals will undergo three evaluation stages:

- Pre-proposal: Assessment of ATTRACT basic requirements concerning the candidate’s track record and strategic merit assessment (SMA) by the ATTRACT standing panel
- Full Proposal:
  - assessment of candidate and research programme through remote evaluation, ranking of proposals by the ATTRACT standing panel and short-listing of candidates to be invited for interview
  - interview of candidates, ranking of proposal and funding recommendation by the scientific expert panel

Pre-proposal application

All written Pre-proposals that are submitted to the FNR before the annual deadline will be evaluated by the ATTRACT standing panel and assessed on their potential contribution to strengthening priority research domains in Luxembourg (see SMA criteria below). The ATTRACT standing panel is composed of members of the FNR’s Scientific Council and other leading international researchers in a range of disciplines. Pre-proposals are also used to test the eligibility of the applicants, i.e. that the candidate has not been employed by the Host Institution for more than a year at the date of the Full Proposal deadline and that the...
host institution will provide the appropriate framework conditions in terms of starting position and career perspectives. Candidates retained in the Pre-proposal stage will be invited to submit a Full Proposal.

**Full Proposal evaluation**

Full Proposals will be remotely evaluated by min. three independent and senior experts in the relevant field with regard to the criteria set out below (see selection criteria). Reviewers will look in particular at the quality of the research project, the candidate's knowledge and experience in the field of research, the level of quality of previous work and his/her potential to establish and lead an independent research group.

Following the written evaluation process, the ATTRACT standing panel will select a limited number (usually not more than five) of candidates who will present their projects in an interview session. Interview sessions usually take place in Luxembourg in June. The candidates will need to present the proposal in front of the scientific expert panel and representatives of the research institution during an interview session. The expert panel is composed of experts from the particular field of research as well as members of the ATTRACT standing panel.

The expert panel may suggest several candidates for funding to the FNR's Board. Should no proposals meet the criteria of excellence, the panel explicitly reserves the right not to propose any candidate for funding.

The panel’s recommendation will be evaluated by the Board of the FNR who takes the final funding decision.

**Monitoring and final evaluation**

During the course of the project, the project progress is monitored by the FNR with 1 written progress report per year. At the end of year 4 a joint evaluation by the host institution and the FNR is foreseen which decides on the tenure/promotion of the candidate (see above).

**8. ATTRACT Selection Criteria**

**SMA Criteria**

1. **Value of strategic development and expected impact**

   Experts will assess the strategic alignment of the proposal with the national R&D strategy and strategic orientation of the institute. They will judge the added value of the candidate’s research programme to the strategic research focus of the host institution as well as the potential for synergies with existing research competences at the host institution in order to ascertain the potential for the integration of the candidate into the research institution in terms of thematic orientation and (technological) expertise.
Their assessment will also be based on the past investments and achievements of the institute as well as its commitment (in terms of further investment) to the domain.

2. Track-Record and Potential of Candidate

The scientific track record (publications, awards, patents, etc.) and past achievements beyond scientific output (contribution to the development of institutions, IP generation, collaboration with private sector etc.) will be assessed as well as the candidate’s potential to establish/consolidate and lead an independent and internationally competitive research group.

Full Proposal evaluation criteria

1. Track-Record and Potential of Candidate
2. Scientific Quality and Originality of the Project
3. Feasibility, Quality and Efficiency of Project Plan
4. Intended Outcomes of the Proposed Project

Details concerning the selection criteria are included in the ATTRACT Peer Review Guidelines - Call 2020.

9. Scope and duration of funding

ATTRACT provides five year funding with a maximum FNR contribution of €1,500,000 for ‘Starting Investigators’ and €2,000,000 for ‘Consolidating Investigators’, respectively.

In addition to the FNR grant, a financial contribution by the host institution is expected, as ATTRACT should be understood as a joint investment. No minimum numerical amount for the contribution by the host institution is set but it is expected that the host institution will provide the regular starting package for the position the candidate will occupy. This should include at least 1 PhD position.

The scope of the ATTRACT goes beyond a mere project but seeks to establish a new research programme and group. The funding covers in part the ATTRACT project central to establishing the scientific programme but sufficient leeway should be given in the budget and personnel to be able to initiate several new research lines.

It is also understood that although most of the successful candidate’s working hours will initially be devoted to the ATTRACT project, financed essentially through the FNR’s contribution, the candidate is encouraged to submit additional grant applications to the FNR and other research funders on the international level (e.g. to the European Commission under H2020 or to other European or international programmes).

The candidate will be the scientist in charge of the ATTRACT project and should have a clear mission to establish his/her own research programme and group. He / She will manage both the project and the research team. This will contribute to the career development of the ATTRACT candidate as an independent established researcher.
The ATTRACT programme is not formally restricted to specific research fields. However, the scope of fields is naturally limited by the fields of research covered by the host institutions in Luxembourg and the proposal should demonstrate that it will contribute in strengthening a focus research area of the host institution. The applicants are advised to consult with the public-sector research bodies well in advance of the submission deadlines to discuss their fit with the institutions' fields of research and internal selection processes of the institution (see point 10).

10. ATTRACT Call 2020: Timing

The ATTRACT Call 2020 has the following mandatory deadlines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15th November 2019</td>
<td>Pre-proposal Deadline: Joint submission by the candidate and the Luxembourg host institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th February 2020</td>
<td>Full Proposal Deadline: Joint submission of the Full Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2020</td>
<td>Expert Panel meeting and interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2020</td>
<td>Funding Decision by the FNR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Candidates are responsible to check early in advance whether the Luxembourg host institution for their ATTRACT grant has an internal deadline prior to the FNR deadline.

The suggested start of the projects from the ATTRACT 2020 Call is 1st of January 2021. Please note that FNR reserves the right to review any offer of support if the start of the project is delayed to a date beyond the 1st of July 2021.
11. How to Find a Host Institution for an ATTRACT Project

The following is a list of public-sector research institutions in Luxembourg that are potential host research institutions for ATTRACT.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTITUTION</th>
<th>ADDRESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| University of Luxembourg | Maison du Savoir  
2 Avenue de l'Université  
L - 4365 Esch-sur-Alzette  
T (+352) 46 66 44 4020  
www.uni.lu |
| Luxembourg Institute of Science and Technology (LIST) | 5 Avenue des Hauts-Fourneaux  
L - 4362 Esch-sur-Alzette  
T (+352) 275 888-1  
www.list.lu |
| Luxembourg Institute of Health (LIH) | 1A-B rue Thomas Edison  
L - 1445 Strassen  
T (+352) 26 970-1  
www.lih.lu |
| Luxembourg Institute for Socio-Economic Research (LISER) | 3 Avenue de la Fonte  
L - 4364 Esch-sur-Alzette  
T (+352) 58 58 55 - 1  
www.liser.lu |
| Max Planck Institute Luxembourg for International, European and Regulatory Procedural Law (MPI) | 4 rue Alphonse Weicker  
L - 2721 Luxembourg  
T (+352) 26 94 88  
www.mpi.lu |

Eligible for funding are also other public bodies, departments or establishments in Luxembourg with the mission to undertake research activities and to develop and transfer technology in their respective fields. For more information on these institutions please contact the FNR.

In case candidates have a project idea without knowing whether they will find a host institution interested to develop the proposal in common, it is strongly recommended to contact the FNR, who may help to establish a contact with potential host units for the research project in Luxembourg. It is also important to contact the FNR or the host institutions as soon as possible and to explore sufficiently in advance the conditions for implementation of the project in Luxembourg (including working conditions and possible regulatory obligations). Please note also that institutions may have internal evaluation processes to select the candidates with whom they will submit proposals and therefore you are advised to contact potential host institutions as soon as possible.
12. Relocation Support and Individual Coaching

The FNR will provide relocation assistance as well as financial support to help in the process of moving to Luxembourg (including obtaining visas, completing work and residence permit procedures, finding accommodation, opening bank accounts, becoming familiar with the tax system and learning about the country).

In addition, the FNR will provide a professional coach who will define, together with the ATTRACT candidate, an individual assistance and training programme for the development of management and/or personal skills.

13. Further Information

For further information please visit the National Research Fund Luxembourg website www.fnr.lu/attract or contact:

Fonds National de la Recherche
B.P. 1777
L-1017 Luxembourg

Tel: +352 26 19 25 - 1
Fax: +352 26 19 25 - 35
www.fnr.lu

ATTRACT Programme Contacts:
Marie-Claude Marx, ATTRACT Programme Coordinator, marie-claude.marx@fnr.lu
Sanda Nittel, Programme assistant, sandra.nittel@fnr.lu