

Call for Exploratory Research Projects, Thematic Schools, and Early-stage Researcher Mobilities

WP 5. Enhancing Quality of Research through an Aurora Research and Innovation Community

Task Team 5.2 . Academic Collaboration and Community Building

14 January 2025

AURORA



Co-funded by
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GENERAL PURPOSE

Building on the success of the Aurora R&I program and the first call for Incentive Research collaboration conducted in 2024, this second call aims at fostering tangible collaborative Research actions between the Aurora universities to address Aurora's values and hubs:

Aurora key values are sustainability, social transformation, and societal impact, addressed through five research-driven educational hubs:

- 1) Sustainability & Climate Change,
- 2) Digital Society & Global Citizenship,
- 3) Health & Wellbeing,
- 4) Culture: Diversities & Identities,
- 5) Social Entrepreneurship & Innovation

The present call supports three types of key actions:

- (1) Exploratory and collaborative research projects,
- (2) Thematic schools,
- (3) Short-term research secondments for early-stage researchers (up to 3 months).

The goal of these actions is to build Research communities among the Aurora universities who address identified societal challenges.

In order to do so, the proposals are generally expected to promote collaboration between researchers (create new research relationships and/or consolidate existing ones) within the Aurora universities with the aim to build new networks or communities. They should address Aurora values in connection with Aurora's research driven educational hubs. However, we note that this call is thematically totally open. It is recognized that links to HUBS cannot always be established easily.

Proposals from all research disciplines are welcome: Health Sciences, Humanities, Social and Economic Sciences, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

This call will be repeated on an annual basis until 2027 at least.

EXPECTED PROPOSALS

Action 1 – Exploratory and Collaborative Research Projects

The proposals that will be funded are concrete exploratory research:

- answering societal issues, but also contribute to the increase of knowledge
- developing research communities within Aurora
- preparing large-scale collaborative projects.

Project duration: 2 years

Eligibility:

- Proposals need to include researchers from **at least three Aurora 2030 member universities: at least two researchers must come from universities with full membership¹, and one of the researchers may come from an associated university².**

Please note, however, that the associated university cannot receive any funding through this action. Moreover, for each participating institution, the principal investigator needs to have a permanent (or similar) position at their university.

- The researchers must apply as a group, describing their mission and vision. They should put forward the mutual gains of the expected collaboration, in terms of complementarity of competences and approaches. Teams can be formed both within a single discipline, or can be multi-disciplinary.

Applicants are encouraged to find collaborators with the [Aurora Connect Gateway](#) and/or make use of shared [research Aurora infrastructures](#).

¹ Aurora 2030 full members: University of Iceland, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, University of Duisburg-Essen, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Université Paris-Est Créteil, Palacký University Olomouc, Universität Innsbruck, Copenhagen Business School, University Federico II of Naples.

² Aurora associated members: Associate Partners are Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, University of Tetova, South-West University Neofit Rilski. Global Partner is University of Minnesota.

Action 2 – Thematic schools

This action funds **early-stage researchers** (PhD students and postdocs mainly). These schools should serve as a career development opportunity, a knowledge sharing hub and as a network/community building activity for the group of participants and lecturers.

The schools should cover a specific Research theme for a short period of time (generally 1 or 2 weeks and consist of lectures, practical work, or conferences **given by 5-10 (or more) experts from at least three Aurora 2030 full member universities**³.

The **focus of this action is disciplinary and multi-disciplinary training** rather than training of transversal skills (such as communication, grant writing, etc).

N.B: experts or lecturers from higher education or research institutions outside the Aurora 2030 community can be invited too but should represent a minority among the invited lecturers (<30%). Applicants need to hold permanent (or similar) positions at Aurora full member universities.

Action 3 – Short-term Research Secondments for Early-stage Researchers

This action enables early-stage career researchers (Master, PhD, postdocs) to go on short term mobility in a research laboratory or unit of an Aurora 2030 full member university.

The short-term research secondments can last up to 3 months. The research to be conducted in the host laboratory/unit **should be well defined with a clear work plan** and give the candidate important skills that are needed for his/her future research. Research topics can be from all disciplines, as is the case for Action 1.

Master³, PhD and post-doctoral researchers are eligible for this type of mobility. Candidates and host laboratory or research unit must be from an Aurora 2030 full member university.

A Master student, PhD candidate or postdoctoral scholar may be the applicant. However, both the supervisor and the host researcher must agree with the applicant's proposed research project (signatures from both are required).

³Since this type of mobility must take place in a research laboratory/unit, the Master student should already be working on his/her Master thesis project.

BUDGET

Action 1 – Exploratory and collaborative research projects will be granted up to 25,000 € in total and are expected to last 2 years. The budget can be used to facilitate travel and networking, information sharing, gaining access to data, conducting preliminary research, and for preparing future responses to calls for larger research projects. The total amount of funding allocated to this action is 125,000 € in this call. We expect funding between 5 and 8 projects.

Action 2 – Thematic schools can receive funding up to 20,000 € for organizational costs. These funds can be used to cover operating costs or co-fund travel of lecturers and/or participants. Two schools can be supported each year.

Action 3 – Short-term research secondments for early-stage researchers will be supported by Aurora mobility funds managed at each university (up to a maximum of 3 months). Partner universities are free to use other Erasmus+ financial resources. The exact grant amount will be aligned to the local mobility policy. This action will support at least 10 short term secondments every year.

HOW TO SUBMIT A PROPOSAL?

For proposals and applications for the three key actions, please fill-out the respective forms available on the [Aurora website](#):

[Application for Key Action 1 - Exploratory and Collaborative Research Projects](#)

[Application for Key Action 2 - Thematic Schools](#)

[Application for Key Action 3 – Short-term Research Secondments for Early-stage Researchers](#)

The deadline for proposals is 28 March 2025, 12:00 (noon) Central European time (CET).

The submission process is as follows:

1. Please complete the following [online form on Call for Incentive Research Collaboration 2025](#).
2. Please send your full application to the following e-mail address: aurora.arc.office@gmail.com.

The subject line should read: [Submission to Aurora Research 2025 Call_NAME
Principal Investigator_University of Principal Investigator].

EVALUATION PROCESS AND CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS

Proposals for the three key actions will be evaluated by the Aurora Research Council (ARC). This Council includes representatives from all Aurora universities, representing diverse research fields. Depending on their complexity, received proposals may be sent to external experts for peer review. The ARC will make recommendations for funding to the Aurora Vice-rectors for research, who will make the final decision on funding.

The schedule for submission and evaluation is the following:

- Release of the call: 14 January 2025
- **Deadline for the submission of proposals: 28 March 2025 12:00 CET**
- Decision on funding: July 2025
- Funding period: September 2025 to September 2027 (Key Action 1). Thematic schools and research secondments (Key Actions 2 and 3) must be completed by December 2026.

General criteria for selection of proposals are:

- A clear description of project goals, their originality as well as their scientific quality.
- A convincing argumentation of the **Aurora added value**: collaboration, in particular for community building, meeting societal challenges, ability to respond to large scale calls during the project duration (Key Action 1).
- A credible description of the provisional budget and eventual co-funding resources.
- The inclusion of three partners from Aurora 2030 member universities (Key Actions 1 and 2).

REPORTING

Reporting on project outcome will be solicited 3 months after end of the project, the summer school or the research secondment, respectively. A reporting form will be made available in due course. For Key Action 1, a short intermediate report is due 15 months after the project's beginning. Reporting will include a list of scientific publications (submitted/or prepared) and proposals (or intentions) in response to European research calls.

The funding will be awarded as a lump sum which can be used as described in the proposal and as needed for the project.

COMMUNICATION, DISSEMINATION AND SYNERGIES WITH THE AURORA EDUCATIONAL HUBS

Project leaders will be asked to give oral presentations of the outcome of their project at Aurora annual conferences in order to illustrate their efforts to foster scientific collaboration within Aurora.

Project leaders must comply with the communication charter specified in the grant agreement they will sign.

Proposers are encouraged to collaborate with one or more of the 5 Aurora Hubs.

QUESTIONS

Please address all your inquiries concerning eligibility, the application process and evaluation procedures, or any other concern, to: aurora.arc.office@gmail.com.