

Brains to South

Promotion of Best Talent in Scientific Research 2018

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Section 1. Introduction

1.1 Background

One notable characteristic of the scientific research system in Italy, particularly in the South, is the lack of support for young researchers to develop independent career paths.

Despite an overall positive assessment of the Italian scientific environment by international ranking systems, there has been hardly any change to address the increasing brain drain from southern Italy or the lack of interest by foreign and Italian researchers. These circumstances are due to various factors, though they are largely related to the bureaucratic rigidity of the academic system and to limited or insufficient resources. Regrettably, such issues tend to impoverish the country, which - while producing highly qualified professionals - is unable to offer the right opportunities to keep the same professionals within the Italian research system. The CON IL SUD Foundation (hereinafter, the "Foundation"), therefore, aims to support quality and independent scientific research by attracting the best Italian and foreign talents to the research centers in southern Italy.

1.2 Objectives

With the fifth edition of the *Call for Proposals: Promotion of Best Talent in Scientific Research*, the Foundation intends to support the establishment of researchers and scholars from all over the world within research centers in southern Italy; thus presenting an opportunity for the lead researchers to develop and strengthen their careers while conducting an independent research.

At the same time, the Foundation, aiming to strengthening the ties between the southern regions of Italy and the rest of the world, intends to promote integration and advance scientific and technological relations between international and southern research institutions.

1.3 The Researcher ("*Principal Investigator*")

This Call for proposals is aimed at young researchers, who are currently doing their professional activity either abroad or in institutions outside the regions in which the Foundation operates (that of Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Puglia, Sardinia, and Sicily), and who intend to conduct their research at a host institution located in one of the regions of southern Italy.

The proposals must be submitted online and directly by the researcher, who in turn will assume the role of a **principal investigator** and who will have the opportunity to undertake an independent research project without the need of a supervisor¹.

1.4 Research centers ("*host institutions*")

The researcher, who intends to submit a research proposal, must indicate one or more host organisations (also called 'host institutions') where his/her research can be developed.

The host institution will not only have an opportunity to increase and improve the quality of its internal research through skill and experience inputs from different parts of the world, but it will have the possibility to implement its assets in addition to the researchers' costs. Therefore, the contribution from the Foundation may also cover investments in the host institution related to the research proposal such as necessary equipment, staff support, consumables and etc.

¹ The proposals must clearly and without ambiguity outline the leadership role of the scientific researcher as an effective administrator and coordinator of the research activities.

The equipment and assets purchased with the Foundation's contribution will remain available to the host institution after the completion of the project.

In turn, the host institution will formally undertake and provide the principal investigator, at least for the duration of the project, with an appropriate workspace, laboratories, necessary equipment, a qualified personnel (for example laboratory technicians, administrative support in managing the grant etc.,) and resources for the proper development of the project.

The host institution, furthermore must accept the "transferability" clause of the grant. In the event where the necessary requirements for the proper conduct of the research are missing/are not met or are unavailable, the researcher can transfer the funds and their research to another eligible institution.

Finally, the host institution undertakes to co-finance the research and to guarantee the management of the resources assigned to the principal investigator according to the funding conditions outlined by the Foundation (see section 3 General Rules and Contact Details, paragraph 3.1).

1.5 Scope of work

The Foundation will support only independent, applied scientific research proposals with a strong innovative intent, aimed at finding solutions in the technological fields, in energy, manufacturing, nanotechnology, ICT (Information and Communication Technology), agri-food, biomedical, pharmaceutical, diagnostic and in the environmental fields.

The research proposals must show independence and innovation and must not be connected with projects already supported by the partners, especially with those of the host institution. The research proposals, which are purely theoretical and do not project an impact with social applicability will not be taken into consideration.

In order to encourage concrete projects and projects meeting the objectives, the Foundation will pay particular attention in identifying applied research programs which:

- are strongly linked to clearly determined social needs;
- can offer an opportunity for economic and labour market growth; or/and
- provide a possibility for a technological implementation in the socio-economic field.

1.6 Partnerships

One important target of the call is bringing in specific competences and sharing experiences and technical knowledge. With this in mind, the involvement of other research centers as part of the proposing partnership will be positively evaluated. In addition to the host institution and in line with the research proposal, both Italian and foreign universities and/or research centers, educational and public institutions, as well as business organisations can therefore join the project.

A positive element when evaluating partnership submissions is the participation of subjects who are part of the not-for-profit sector, and Italian or foreign subjects who would financially support the programs' sustainability, or further improve the project's results in terms of technology transfer, the evaluation, and dissemination and territorial impact.

1.7 Available budget

The available budget for the call, depending on the quality of the proposals received, is equal to a maximum amount of EUR 4 million.

Section 2. Criteria

The call is aimed exclusively at researchers, both Italian and foreign, who have adequate experience in the field of scientific and technological research and who intend to develop their own applied research project in one of the southern research institutions.

2.1 Eligibility criteria for the principal investigator

2.1.1 The **principal investigator** is the only legitimate subject to submit a research proposal.

2.1.2 On the date of the Call's publication (18 September 2018), the applicants can take the role of principal investigators of a research proposal and access the contribution from the Foundation as long as they:

- a) have obtained their research doctorate (or equivalent) in universities located abroad or in the Italian regions where the Foundation does not operate²;
- b) they have experience, preferably in foreign research facilities, between 3 and 7 years since obtaining their first research doctorate (or equivalent qualification);
- c) they have conducted research for at least 36³ months in institutions located either abroad or outside the regions in which the Foundation operates (that of Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Puglia, Sardinia, and Sicily);
- d) they mainly deal with scientific research in one of the areas of interest set out in paragraph 1.5.

The research proposals must cover one of the areas of interest indicated by the Foundation and introduce an original idea. As an example, below is a list (by no means exhaustive) of the main research fields in which the research proposal can be presented:

- i) medicine: biomedical, neuroscience, learning disorders, neuro-physiology, aging, etc. (basic pre-clinical research is not allowed);
- ii) environment: hydrogeological instability, marine research, sustainable energy, ecology and climate change, ecological transport, agri-food, bio-economy, etc.;
- iii) technical-engineering: industrial biotechnology, biochemistry, information and communication technologies (ICT), nanotechnology, advanced materials, etc.

2.1.3 For the purposes of eligibility, the researcher must also:

- a) has published at least one research article as the first or last author in a peer-reviewed journal;
- b) has submitted only one research proposal. In case of submission of multiple proposals by the same researcher, all will be considered inadmissible;
- c) has indicated at least one host institution in which the researcher intends to develop his/her own research project.⁴

2.2 Eligibility criteria for the host institutions

2.2.1 In order to participate in the Call, through a special declaration (Annex A), each institution selected by the researcher must:

- a) commit to hosting the researcher at least for the duration of the research;
- b) contribute to the research project by providing the researcher with a workspace, laboratories, equipment, qualified personnel and resources for the proper development of the project, all of which must be clearly indicated in the research proposal;

² Consequently, candidates who have obtained their research doctorate in a university located in one of the Foundation's regions of operation (Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Puglia, Sardinia, and Sicily) cannot apply.

³ Even if a researcher has spent less than 36 months abroad or outside the regions in which the Foundation operates, the Foundation will evaluate the project on the basis of the researcher's profile, the quality of the proposed research and/or documented circumstances.

⁴ In the case of high volume of requests for a specific research institution, the Foundation reserves the right to evaluate its choice for an alternative research center, following the order of preference indicated by the principal investigator.

- c) accept the "transferability" clause of the contribution, i.e. in the case in which the necessary requirements for the proper development of the research proposal are missing or may be lacking in the course of the work, the scientific researcher can
- d) transfer the funds and his/her research at another eligible host institution;
- e) provide the researcher with a work contract (a contract⁵ agreement appropriate to the intended tasks, which will also include all necessary pension and health coverage) as stipulated by the CCNL (Contratto Collettivo Nazionale del Lavoro or the Collective Labour Agreement); the work contract must be finalised within 6 months from the allocation of the funds, or else refer to the "transferability" clause and/or revocation of the funds where it is not possible to transfer the project to another research organization;
- f) ensure co-financing of the research (see paragraph 2.3.1 letter f) and funds necessary for the final payment of the contribution (see paragraph 3.1 letter c);
- g) lastly, to ensure that all publications derived from the project show the name of the principal investigator as the last author.

2.2.2 The possible participation of "for-profit" organisations as partners should be inspired not by the pursuit of profit, but by the contribution of competences and resources aimed at the growth and development of the region and the society, but above all at future sustainability and application of the research project financed by the Foundation.

2.3 Eligibility criteria for the research proposal

2.3.1 All research proposals will be considered eligible if:

- a) submitted no later than 28 November 2018 at 13:00⁶;
- b) completed and in full, include all documents considered to be mandatory:
 - 1. a detailed project description (in Italian or English);
 - 2. a financial plan (in Italian or English);
 - 3. a recent CV and bibliography of the scientific applicant (in PDF format and a maximum of 5 pages);
 - 4. an article(s) published by the scientific applicant as first or last author (in a PDF format);
 - 5. a declaration by the host institution (Annex A).
- c) the proposed actions are consistent with one of the areas of interest stipulated in paragraph 1.5 and with the mission of the Foundation;
- d) suggest that no less than 50% of the time of the principal investigator is dedicated to the project;
- e) require a contribution from the Foundation of no less than 100,000 euros and no more than 400,000 euros;
- f) provide co-financing from the host institution, in terms of personnel, goods and materials, equipment, etc, equal to at least 10% of the total cost of the project;
- g) provide a timeline of the project (between 24 and 36 months), outlining all activities including those of planning and coordination and not directly related to research;
- h) do not create a negative environmental impact and guarantee respect for the natural, environmental and cultural heritage.

2.3.2 All research proposals will be considered ineligible if:

- i) do not comply with one or more of the eligibility criteria set out in paragraph 2.3.1;
- j) require funds for the financing of activities not strictly related to the research proposal;
- k) are merely theoretical;
- l) require funding for the creation of new research centers and/or for the preparation of laboratories and/or equipment.

⁵ The activation by the host institution of a contract as a fixed-term researcher (RTD) or equivalent contract will be positively evaluated (see Annex A).

⁶ Italian local time.

- 2.3.3 The Foundation will have an absolute discretion in the assessment of the existence and/or relevance of eligibility and non-admissibility requirements referred to in Section 3 and related subparagraphs.

2.4 Assessment criteria

The Foundation, in the course of the evaluation and assessment of the received research proposals, as well as in the allocation of the funds, will have an absolute discretion and without however, being obliged to do so, will refer to the evaluation criteria listed below. The evaluation process will be conducted by experts with proven skills in each field of the project.

In addition to the quality of the CV of the researcher and the host institution, the research projects will be positively evaluated, if they are in full compliance with the following requirements:

- a) demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the state of the the identified research field and present solid preliminary data in relation to the research objectives;
- b) provide a strategy relevant to the identified problems and needs, which will be effective in achieving the expected results;
- c) propose an appropriate plan with clearly formulated objectives and activities, resources (financial and professional) and an adequate time frame for their achievement, identifying suitable methods of monitoring and evaluation;
- d) ensure efficient use of resources to achieve the expected results;
- e) are characterized by quality content, innovativeness and practical applicability;
- f) are able to generate a potentially relevant impact from a scientific, economic and social point of view. For example, provide improvement of collective well-being, opportunities for economic and labour market growth, for technology transfers and/or good practices in the socio-economic field;
- g) provide partnerships or forms of collaboration with research centers, Italian and/or foreign;
- h) encourage an active participation of not-for-profit organisations and collaboration with other institutions, for profits and research centers;
- i) provide a plan for the collection of reliable additional resources, be able to guarantee the continuity of the research (even at the end of the Foundation's funding) or its replicability in the future;
- j) provide an effective communication plan for the promotion of the research, with the aim to encourage sharing and dissemination of results and models that are potentially exemplary for other territories, and which will reach both the scientific and the local community;

Section 3. General Rules and Contact Details

3.1 *Financing methods*

In the case when a research proposal submitted by an applicant is being selected and the fund granted by the Foundation is being approved, the latter will be provided directly to the research institution (host institution) that will host the research.

The allocation of the contribution to the host institution is divided in three parts:

- a) advance (equal to 40% of the contribution assigned by the Foundation);
- b) second part, based on actual expenses incurred and invoiced, should not be more than 30% of the grant assigned by the Foundation;
- c) third part, a total, based on the expenses actually incurred and invoiced.

3.2 *Submitting a research proposal*

The research proposals, accompanied by all required documentation, must be completed and sent exclusively online, by the deadline set out in the Call, through the CHAIROS portal available through the Foundation.

We invite all the partners to visit our new platform and to register as soon as possible on www.chairos.it⁷

3.3 *Selection result and general rules*

By signing the Declaration "Privacy" (Article 13 of the Legislative Decree 196/2003), the applicants must accept all the conditions set forth in this Call and its attachments, as well as the unquestionable and final decision of the Foundation. During the assessment phase, the Foundation reserves the right to carry out checks/audits and meetings, and/or request clarifications from the principal investigator, the host institution and/or the partners.

In the event when a project has been selected, the Foundation will inform the principal investigator and the host institution by sending a specific notice regarding the allocation of the contribution and the conditions of payment. The list of selected projects will be published on the Foundation's website.

Appeals, complaints, re-evaluation requests, or other forms of appeals against the published results will not be accepted.

The Foundation may at any time request the principal investigator, the host institution and/or any partners in the partnership to review the budget and the indicators for the implementation of the specific project.

The execution of the project, which also includes the contracting of the researcher, must start within 180 days from the signing of the notice regarding the assignment of the contribution. The Foundation reserves the right to revoke the award of the grant if there are serious breaches by the partners (including the host institution and/or the principal investigator) and, if necessary, may request the return of the amounts previously paid. In this case, the host institution will be required to immediately return any amount already received.

The notice regarding the award of the grant may also cover certain breaches considered serious for the purpose of this paragraph.

3.4 *Reporting and verifying*

The host institution, in agreement with the principal investigator, will be responsible for reporting on the entire project.

The method of reporting and verification will be specified by the Foundation in the notice regarding the allocation of the contribution.

In the course of reporting and after the checks/audits the Foundation could reduce the originally agreed grant amount.

⁷ Before registering on Chairros, the applicant (Principal Investigator) must fill in the 'Registration Form' and e-mail it to Fondazione CON IL SUD at iniziativa@fondazioneconilsud.it. After verifying that the form is complete and the information entered is correct, the Foundation will enable access to the platform.

3.5 Contacts

For further information, please write to our email address: iniziative@fondazioneconilsud.it

or contact the Institutional Activities Office by phone on 06/6879721 (extension 1) during the hours dedicated to telephone assistance:

Mon-Wed-Fri: from 9:00 am to 1:30 pm

Tue-Thu: from 2:30 pm to 5:30 pm

On the day of the deadline, the Offices will have a support service up to the time stated in the Call.

For any clarifications of general interest you can go to our website: www.fondazioneconilsud.it/faq/ under FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions).