GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR BELSPO

S4P Driven call 2024 – 2025

You can find the *Information file S4P – driven* here - Latest update of document: 17/07/2024.

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1. The Science for Policy (S4Policy) Programme

1.1.   How is the S4Policy Programme structured?

The aim of the S4Policy Programme is to pursue research on the strategic/research priorities of the Federal Departments spanning across different themes.

There are three different types of instruments within the S4Policy programme:

1) Policy-driven *(as seen in this call!)*

The research priorities within these types of projects are proposed by and respond to the specific needs of the Federal Public Services (FPSs). Policy-driven research has a narrow scope and aims to support the concerned department(s) and/or government in the implementation and management of their public policies/responsibilities. For this research, mono- or multidisciplinary scientific expertise (lasting longer than 18 months) is requested. The scientific results of the projects will be used and implemented specifically by the FPS(s) concerned. During the project, there will be a close collaboration between the scientific team and the Federal Departments, with the support and supervision of BELSPO.

This type of research is co-financed: BELSPO funds maximally 90% of the budget, while the FPSs fund minimally 10%. During this first call (2024-2025), there is an exception which allows BELSPO to fund 100%.

2) Policy-oriented

This type of research aims to fund a set of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research projects (with a duration from 24 to 48 months) of a strategic nature around broad policy themes – possibly across several FPSs. The goal of this type of research is to create/enable sufficient and representative evidence to support long-term decision-making. Furthermore, the aim is also to achieve international recognition through collaboration.

This type of research is 100% funded by the Federal Departments. This means that new initiatives are to be developed during budget conclaves at the request of relevant Ministers/Departments. Therefore, decisions on topics and themes still have to be made. BELSPO is responsible for the overall management of the programme and a part of the budget is reserved for BELSPO to cover the cost of the peer evaluation, staff to monitor the programme and to promote the projects.

Examples of this type of research are the DRUGS, POST-COVID and DEFRA programmes.

Attention! We have also launched a call for proposals in the framework of the DRUGS programme! More information is available on the DRUGS website.

3) FLASH

"FLASH" research is a tool that allows to rapidly answer urgent needs of the FPSs or their responsible Minister(s), within a limited in time frame (under a year). The aim is to rapidly mobilise expertise or a body of existing scientific knowledge to inform decision-making, using "Rapid Reviews". These reviews are a method of evidence synthesis that provides more timely information for decision-making than standard systematic ones, and often will also provide an overview of new or emerging research topics. Research done within a "FLASH" project is therefore not *novel* research (i.e. unpublished and new to Belgium or relating to the state of scientific

knowledge). Consequently, curiosity-driven research is excluded. Furthermore, the research is conducted by scientists from outside the FPSs.

During the project lifecycle, there will be a close collaboration between BELSPO and the FPSs and applications from the FPSs are received all year round. This means that calls for proposals can be launched throughout the year.

More information on the instruments and the S4Policy Programme is available on the website.

1.2. How are the next calls organized and what is the timeframe?

Currently, there are no ongoing calls for Policy-Oriented projects. This instrument will be launched in the future.

The timing for the upcoming four calls for the Scienc4Policy - Policy-driven programme is described in the table below:

2024-2025 // 2026-2027 // 2028-2029 // 2030-2031 // (20X-20Y)

Table 1: timing upcoming calls S4P policy-driven

Call 1	**Launch Call**	**Project start**
	June 2024	*February 2025*
	Submission process start *August 2024*	
Call 2 - 4	Launch Call	Project start
	September 20X -1	*September 20X - February 20Y*

1.3. What proposals does the programme support?

The full proposal should answer directly to a research topic (RT) as described in the information file and should be within scope and must answer to all of the deliverables requested in the call text of the RT. It is thus *not possible* to pick only one or two of the deliverables per RT, as only one research team/project will be selected per RT. It is also *not possible* to submit a *new* research topic that would fit the themes (Digital Transformation, Strategic Autonomy & Resilience of Belgium, Inclusion, Health & Wellbeing, Green and Societal transition), the latter merely serve as an indication of the strategic/policy priorities of Federal Departments for this call (2024-2025), this subsequently implies that next call could include very *different* research topics, deliverables and disciplines.

The information file will give you a description of what the FPS requests in terms of scientific support. We invite you to be open and creative in your research proposal, however there are some topics which include detailed deliverables that should be accurately included in your Full Proposal.

2. Submission and evaluation procedure

2.1. Can I contact the federal departments when writing my proposal?

No, we want a fair distribution of information among applicants. However, if you have further specific questions regarding the Research Priorities (i.e. research call topics, see Information file S4P, Part II (p. 10 – 42)), you are welcome to send us your questions at S4Policy@belspo.be until 23 July 2024. We will provide clarification as soon as possible via mail and publicly on our website in the "FAQ Research Topics" Document (available soon). It will be indicated on the website when the document is last updated. New information will be added until 31 July 2024.

2.2. Can a research unit propose more than one project?

Yes. There is no limitation to the number of proposals a given applicant may participate in as partner and/or coordinator. You will be asked to indicate this when submitting your proposal on our platform.

2.3. Is my institution eligible to submit a proposal?

This call is addressed to all non-profit organisations that have the pursuit of scientific research in their statutes: universities, colleges, universities of applied sciences and public research centres...., If you are in doubt, please contact S4Policy@belspo.be and attach the statutes of your organisation and this form available on our website.

2.4. Who can submit a proposal?

The coordinator of the project will be able to create an EoI and Full Proposal on the platform. Concerning the EoI, the coordinator will be able to fill in the details of the partner(s), but the partner(s) cannot modify the EoI.

However, when included in the Full Proposal by the coordinator, the funded partner(s) will then also be able to register on the platform. Subsequently, the partner(s) will be able to adjust the Full Proposal and fill in their own budget table.

2.5. Are international partners eligible to participate in this call?

International partners are allowed to participate as "non-funded" partners but are not eligible to receive funding.

2.6. In case of a consortium submitting a proposal, do we need a signed collaboration agreement?

The proposal submitted by a network of partners does not require that a collaboration agreement is attached to the proposal. By submitting the proposal, partners bind themselves to implement it collectively in case of selection. In this latter case, the research contract with BELSPO will not require such an agreement as it constitutes an agreement between the respective contracting parties.

2.7. Will I receive feedback on my Expression of Interest?

You will receive a conformation that the EoI is submitted successfully. To do so the EoI has to be submitted on time, you can find all deadlines in the information file. It is also important that you verify that your (non-funded) partners are eligible, if you have included those. You can find more

information in the information file (1.4, page 5-6). Please note that international partners cannot be funded. Otherwise, the EoI mainly serves the goal to give BELSPO an idea on which experts the applicants propose, and how many Full Proposals might be submitted.

Attention! In order to submit a Full Proposal, you have to submit an Expression of Interest as well!

2.8. Is it possible to modify information in my Full Proposal as opposed to my EoI?

The content of the description in the full proposal may vary from that of the EoI to some extent. However, it cannot diverge to the point that the expertise mobilised for the evaluation of the proposal will become irrelevant. The acronym, call priorities, indicative budget, and keywords must remain the same. Changes concerning the title or the partners are accepted.

2.9. Do I need to present my proposal in front of the experts?

The selection of proposals is based on an international peer-review evaluation of the Full Proposals that guarantees scientific excellence and the alignment of the projects with the project call. The procedure, organised by BELSPO, develops as follows:

Individual evaluation	Panel evaluation	Proposal selection
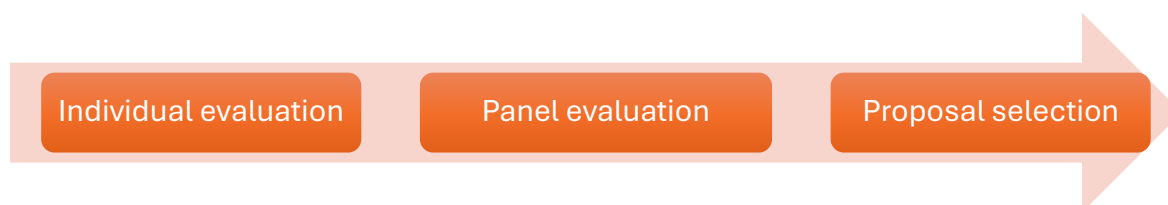
Throughout this process, the applicant will not have the opportunity to interact with evaluators. The evaluations are done solely on the basis of the written Full Proposal submitted by the applicant on the online platform.

2.10. In terms of reviewing and scoring a proposal, how are criteria like innovation and multidisciplinarity defined, judged and rewarded by BELSPO?

You can find all information available regarding the evaluation criteria in document "Evaluation criteria" available on our website.

2.11. Do we need to contact the stakeholder committee before the Full Proposal or can it be a list of potential members?

It is sufficient to include a list of potential stakeholders (including a motivation why). You are free to gather (a) letter(s) of intent, but you do not have to include these when submitting the proposal.

Attention: BELSPO used to provide the template for the letter of intent, and previously you could include these in your submission dossier, but this is not foreseen anymore on our submission platform! Nor is it necessary to include these letters in your Full Proposal.

3. Budget & Funding

3.1.   Are all partners eligible for funding funded at the same rate?

Yes. Universities, for example, do not automatically get more funding than colleges or other research institutions.

3.2.   What type of personnel can be funded for the project?

Staff devoted to the implementation of the project; this is, recruited personnel and/or non-statutory personnel made (partially) available to the project and to be implemented on the project budget. Statutory staff and academic and scientific staff working within the framework of an institution - full time or part time - cannot apply for him-/herself for BELSPO staff budget for that part.

BELSPO prefers staff to be hired under labour contract.

However, tax-free doctoral or post-doctoral scholarships can be exceptionally accepted under the following restrictive conditions: the total number of person months funded by the BELSPO project under a tax-free scholarships scheme is limited to max. 50% of the total number of person months funded under labour contract. In any case, there shall not be more than 2 tax-free scholarships/project.

3.3.   Will the budgets proposed in the Information file be allocated to one project?

Yes. For each research topic only one proposal will be funded. In case several proposals are in competition, the proposal scoring highest will be selected.

3.4.   Is there a possibility that the budget proposed in the Information file for each research topic will be increased?

No. For each project, the maximum project budget is provided in the information file of the call. It shall not be exceeded by applicants in their proposal. The scientific contribution to the project shall be co-funded by the concerned federal department(s) to the amount of min. 10% per participating federal department. The main and remaining funding will be provided by BELSPO (max. 90%).

3.5.   Can I deviate from the timing proposed in the Information file (e.g. to fund a PhD)?

Yes, however any significant deviation should be justified in the Full Proposal. In general, projects should not run longer than four years, and depending on the deliverables/requested scientific support of the FPS, intermediate results and findings are expected to be integrated into the FPS's ecosystem throughout the duration of the project, and not only after its completion.

3.6.   Is there a preference for projects with smaller budgets? Do proposals asking for smaller budgets have an advantage?

No. BELSPO follows the ranking list from the expert review panel, which includes whether the budget is realistic, well-balanced among partners (if applicable), and in line with the objectives and expected outcomes of the project. More information on the evaluation criteria can be found on our website.

Please note: for each research topic only one proposal will be funded. In case several proposals are in competition, the proposal scoring highest will be selected.

3.7.   Is there a possibility for a meeting with the financial department?

Yes, we will arrange a meeting with our financial department with the selected projects. This meeting will take place after December 4th.

4. Contracts

4.1.   How will the contract be concluded?

S4P *policy-driven* is a co-financed call which implies that there will be at least two contracts signed, one with **BELSPO** (Feb 2025), and one or more bilateral contracts with *each responsible FPS* (Feb 2025 or later). Concerning the contract <u>with BELSPO</u>, the *Base Contract* will be signed by 15 Feb 2025. This means the project can officially start from that point onwards and you will be able to make a first application for an advance. This first advance is 30% of the budget reserved for each partner. We will also draw up the Annex I to the contract, which you will also have to sign.

4.2.   When will the contract (and my project) start?

The start of the contract is foreseen for the 15th of February 2025. This means your project should also start around that date. However, since the timing between the notification of the final selection and start of the project is very short, we will give you three months extra time to make some practical arrangements (hiring new staff, etc) for the research project.

5. Platform

5.1.   Who has access to the platform?

<u>Submission Expression of interest</u>: only coordinator can submit EoI via the platform. The coordinator will have to follow some quick and easy registration steps to register/access the platform.

<u>Submission Full Proposal:</u> both the coordinator and promotors/funded partners have access to the platform and will be able to fill out the Full Proposal forms on the platform itself. At this point, the promotor/funded partner will have to follow some quick and easy registration steps to register/access the platform. Changes can be made and saved over time on the platform, before submitting the Full Proposal officially. However, it is the responsibility of the coordinator to officially submit the full proposal.

Both the coordinator and the promotor/funded partner will be able to fill out the Full Proposal form (such as the Gannt Chart, state of the art, risk management assessment, etc.). Concerning the budget: the coordinator will only be able to fill out their own budget table (subcontracting, partners included), and *the respective promotors/funded partners* will only be able to fill out their own budget tables. Once submitted both the coordinator and the promotor/funded partner will have an overview of their application(s).

5.2.   How to use the documents provided on our website

The documents available on our website serve as a guide to fill out the submission forms on our online platform. *Everything* that is included in the documents provided, will be asked on the platform. This way you can prepare your EoI, Full Proposal and budget table in advance, and if needed in collaboration with your research staff/colleagues/partners before the official start of the submission on the platform (EoI August 27th, Full Prop September 5th). You will have to fill out the forms on the platform itself, you will not be able to upload a document to the platform (**exception**: the Gantt chart (Excel) will have to be filled out offline and uploaded to the platform).