

Expanding the European Research Area in Molecular Plant Sciences II

2nd Call for Proposals (2014)

Call Notice



January 2014

1. Introduction

Plants are essential to human life, providing the majority of the food we consume, feed for our livestock, and valuable non-food products. Plant sciences therefore face important challenges at the European and global scale due to the increasing demands from a burgeoning world population. Competition for land, water and energy will increase and the need to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change is crucial.

To guarantee food security, the world requires new ways to produce adequate and stable food supplies in an environmentally sustainable manner. The challenge for plant sciences is to further improve current knowledge of plant biology and agronomy, to increase crop yields and enhance the access to a far greater diversity of safe and nutritious food on a global scale.

The ERA-CAPS (Coordinating Action in Plant Sciences) network was launched in 2012 in order to embed molecular plant sciences more firmly in national policies and processes whilst continuing to fund excellence-driven research in this area. ERA-CAPS aims to strengthen and expand the existing ERA-PG (Plant Genomics) network within and beyond Europe. The ERA-CAPS network comprises currently 19 partners and 7 observers from funding organisations in 23 countries, including recent additions to the EU, and non-EU countries.

The ERA-CAPS research programme will incorporate two joint calls. In addition, interaction between researchers, funders, and relevant European initiatives will be promoted through external engagement. ERA-CAPS will assist in the systematic exchange of information to facilitate the expansion of the network and to involve new members and affiliates. The joint ambition of the scientific Councils, Ministries and Agencies collaborating in the ERA-CAPS network is to enhance synergies between scientific and economic capabilities to increase the quality and impact of a coordinated and sustainable transnational plant science research programme in Europe.

The first ERA-CAPS call was launched in November 2012 with funding from 16 organisations in 15 countries. The broad and inclusive call received 110 high-quality applications. 14 proposals have been granted adding up to an amount of about M€ 21. The projects are listed at the [ERA-CAPS webpage](#).

2. Purpose of the Call

The second ERA-CAPS call for proposals launched on 14 January 2014 is entitled: **“Expanding the European Research Area in Molecular Plant Sciences: Call 2”**.

This second ERA-CAPS call will fund high quality collaborative transnational research in fundamental molecular plant science (see section 4). The funding partners agree that this unifying approach is a fundamental prerequisite to maximise the utility of the limited resources available and to meet the European demand for molecular plant science innovation with a long-term perspective. Project proposals should indicate (i) the synergistic values of collaborative research between project partners and reduction of duplication. (ii) Each collaborative research project (CRP) should comprise scientists with different and complementary areas of expertise to create an inclusive body of research. (iii) Access

to varied resources which will add value to the research effort should be identified. (iv) Given the increasing complexity of the multi-disciplinary research, there is a necessity to develop/ use commonly agreed standards for storing and sharing the large amounts of generated scientific data. Each CRP should therefore develop a plan for data-storage and –sharing. An ERA-CAPS data sharing policy document will be available at the time the consortia will be invited back for full proposals. Since the call aims at developing new collaborations as well as strengthening and enlarging existing partnerships, the applicants are encouraged to consider inviting partners throughout the whole network of countries. To foster this process, ERA-CAPS offers a web-based [Search for collaborations](#) tool, currently containing information about consortia that were funded under the ERA-NET Plant Genomics Programme. This data will be complemented with the profiles and partner-search-requests from any new candidates, who can post their data through an on-line survey. The link to this survey can be found at the above mentioned ‘ERA-CAPS Search for collaborations’ page.

3. Call Structure

19 ERA-CAPS partner organisations from 18 countries will participate in this second call (Table 1). The exact funds committed by each partner are not specified, though indications for individual countries may be given in National Annexes. It is expected however that the call will jointly provide funds in the order of 20 million Euros.

Each national funding organisation will fund only the project participants from its own country.

Table 1. Funding organisations financially contributing to the second ERA-CAPS call

Abbreviation	Funding organisation	Country
FWF	Austrian Science Fund	AUSTRIA
F.R.S.-FNRS	Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique	BELGIUM
FWO	Research Foundation - Flanders	BELGIUM
DASTI	Styrelsen for Forskning og Innovation	DENMARK
ETAg	Estonian Research Council	ESTONIA
ANR	Agence Nationale de la Recherche	FRANCE
DFG	Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft	GERMANY
MTA-OTKA	Centre for Agricultural Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences	HUNGARY
MOARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	ISRAEL
MIUR	Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca	ITALY
LZA	Latvijas Zinatnu Akademija	LATVIA
MBIE	Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment	NEW ZEALAND
RCN	Norges forskningsråd, Research Council Norway	NORWAY
NCBiR	Narodowe Centrum Badan i Rozwoju	POLAND
FCT	Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia	PORTUGAL
MPNTR	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development	SERBIA
SNF	Swiss National Science Foundation	SWITZERLAND
BBSRC	Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council	UNITED KINGDOM
NSF	National Science Foundation	USA

4. Themes of Research

By agreement of the funding organisations involved, the second joint call launched by ERA-CAPS will follow the same broad scope as described in the first joint call. This will cover all areas of molecular plant science, allowing maximum engagement of the plant science.

No specific topics have been defined; however, the themes below have been identified as being of common interest to several of the funding organisations and align with the overarching themes of Joint Programme Initiative for Food Security, Agriculture and Climate Change (FACCE-JPI). These are examples of areas of research where we would welcome high quality applications, but they **do not exclude** other areas of molecular plant science.

- **Food Security:** research that contributes to the sustainable and secure supply of safe and nutritious food for an increasing global population. This includes yield optimisation, quality traits and nutrient use efficiency, amongst other research areas.
- **Non-food crops:** this theme includes research into crops (or appropriate models) where the end-use includes bioenergy or industrial biotechnology.
- **Adaptation to a changing climate:** research that addresses how plants can adapt, or be adapted, to grow in a changing environment.
- **Biotic/abiotic stresses:** this theme includes research into plant responses to either biotic or abiotic stress, or how plants contend with a combination of biotic and abiotic stresses.

Applications in other areas of molecular plant science are welcomed where the research answers fundamental biological questions of relevance to the development of the European (and Global) Research Area in molecular plant science.

Applicants should note the following:

- Research must have a significant molecular aspect (including, but not limited to, genetics, 'omics technologies, molecular breeding, molecular evolution, developmental biology, molecular plant pathology etc.).
- Plants under investigation can be model plants or reference species as well as crops, including horticultural crops, ornamentals, trees and forage plants.
- Some funding organisations will only consider applications in specific research areas, or have identified research themes of importance to their country; these are identified in the National Annexes.
- Additionally, some funding agencies can only support basic underpinning research, or more applied research. Rules governing the involvement of industry in consortia vary for each partner. Applicants should check the National Annexes carefully when preparing their proposal.

- It is of central importance that proposals **demonstrate** the added value of collaborative research throughout the project.

The expected **duration of projects will be three years**.

5. Application

In formulating the applications the following should be noted:

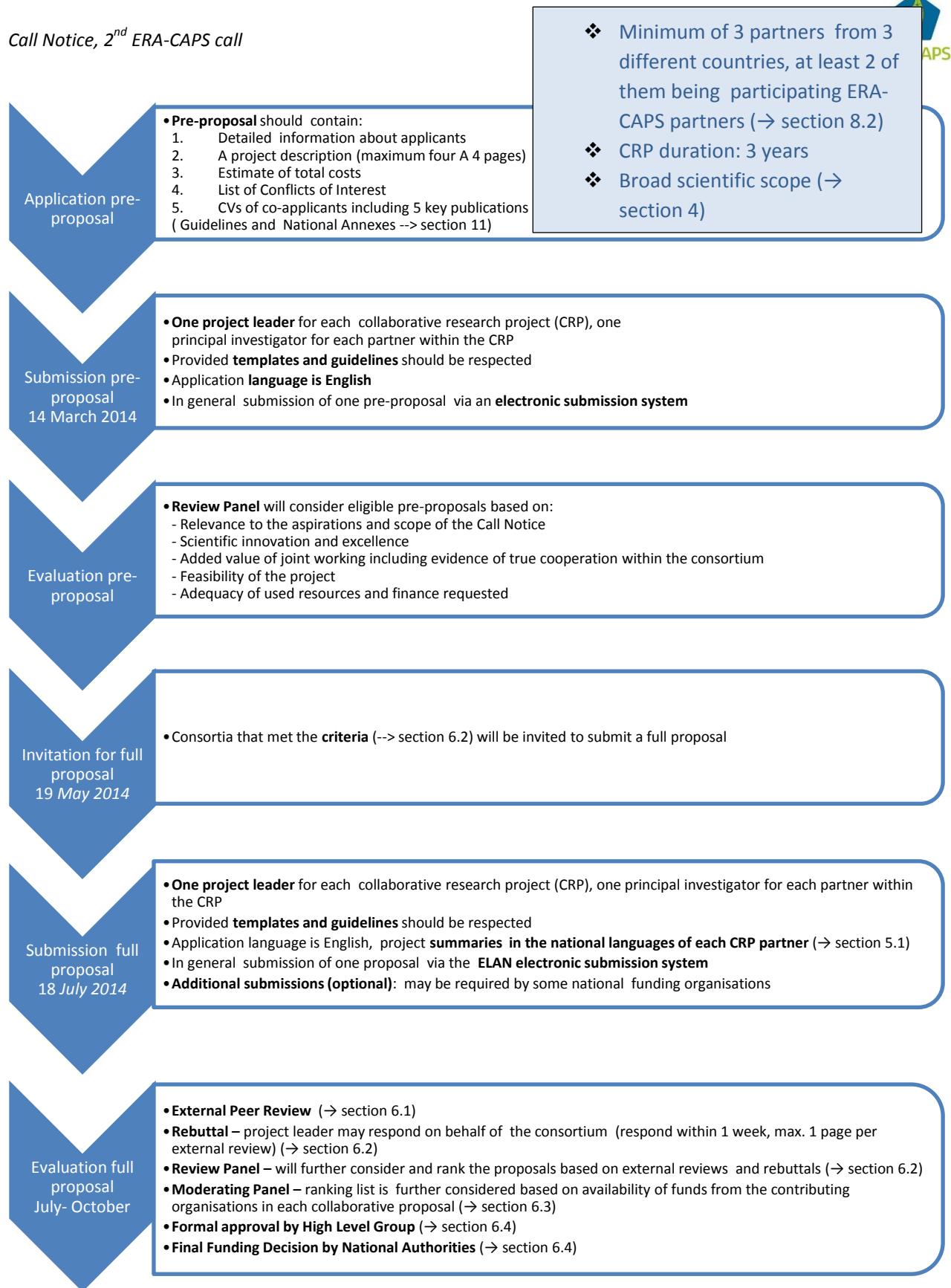
- Proposals should take into account and search for solutions to the problems of data sharing, data management, and data access (see National Annexes for any specific national requirements).
- There should be due consideration of issues of protection of intellectual property and envisaged exploitations.
- Exchange of personnel for short periods during the lifetime of the project will be encouraged, funding for this purpose can be requested.

Since the call aims at developing new European cooperation as well as strengthening and enlarging existing partnerships, each joint proposal should encourage movement of personnel to carry out research in partner laboratories in countries other than their own when appropriate.

The call was introduced by a pre-announcement, issued on 21 November 2013, to offer interested parties more time to build their consortia and start preparing their proposals.

5.1. Application Procedure

There is a **two stage** procedure for joint applications and accordingly a **two stage** review procedure (see Figure 1 -).



Grant award letters (early 2015)

Figure 1: General workflow application- and evaluation-procedure of second ERA-CAPS call

Pre-proposals must be submitted in electronic form to the central Call Secretariat before **14th of March 2014, 12.00 CET**. Pre-proposal application forms and guidelines for application are available at <http://www.era-caps.org/joint-calls/era-caps-calls>. The decision on selection of applications for invitation to full proposal will be communicated by 19 May 2014.

In addition to the above conditions, applicants are requested to refer to National Annexes and follow the national regulations. *Applications not fulfilling national criteria will be rejected without further consideration.*

Applicants should strictly follow the detailed instructions available in the '*Guidelines for Application of pre-proposals*' (Annex Ia, provided at the ERA-CAPS website).

A project leader (applicant 1) should be identified for each collaborative proposal (primary contact person for consortium). In addition, a principal investigator should be designated from each of the other collaborative institutions (applicants 2, 3 etc.).

A pre-proposal must contain:

1. A project description (maximum four A 4 pages)

This should be a short description of the scientific ideas and research hypothesis of the joint project including the duration of the project, an overview of the work programme, shared know-how and distribution of work during the course of the project. Please address the following issues:

- Objectives of the project
- Links to the research themes of the programme
- Main research methods employed
- Significance and applicability of the research results
- Added value of the collaboration

2. Estimate of total costs (1 page)

An estimate of total project costs and costs per partner including details of personnel costs and other costs.

3. CVs of the co-applicants (please use available template)
4. List of people with whom co-applicants have a Conflict of Interest according to the ERA-CAPS Code of Conduct on CoIs. (Please use available template)

Submission of pre-proposals

For each collaborative research project one pre-proposal must be uploaded to an electronic submission system, which is provided by the central Call Secretariat at: [pre-proposal submission](#)

Once a pre-proposal has been declared eligible and has passed the threshold criteria according to the Review Panel, the consortium will be invited to submit one full proposal using the ELAN system for electronic submission.

Full Proposals must be submitted to the central Call Secretariat before **18th of July 2014, 12.00 CET**. Application form and guidelines for application will be available with the invitation to submit a full proposal at <http://www.eracaps.org/joint-calls/era-caps-calls> .

In addition to the above conditions, applicants are requested to refer to National Annexes and follow the national regulations. Applications not fulfilling national criteria will be rejected without further consideration.

- Applicants should take note of regulations for individual partners mentioned in the *National Annexes*, and should contact their national call coordinator (see Section 10) for any queries related to these Annexes. In particular consortia involving applicants who are seeking for financial support from the Hungarian partner-organisation MTA-OTKA should note that the Hungarian applicants have to submit their proposal to MTA-OTKA for a parallel evaluation procedure.
- Applicants should strictly follow the detailed instructions available in the '*Guidelines for Application of full proposals*' (Annex Ib, provided at the ERA-CAPS website by the time of the full proposal invitation.
- The application forms and the guidelines will be available at <http://www.eracaps.org/joint-calls/era-caps-calls>
- All applications must be written in English. In addition, a project summary in the national language of each partner may be required (see National Annexes).
- A project leader (applicant 1) should be identified for each collaborative research project, who is the primary contact person for the consortium. In addition, a principal investigator should be designated from each of the other collaborative institutions (applicants 2, 3 etc.).

Submission of full proposals

Full proposals must be submitted to the ERA-CAPS Call Secretariat **using the ELAN Electronic Submission System**. When submitting the proposal, the responsible applicant should strictly follow the detailed instructions available in the '*ELAN Manual for electronic Submission of ERA-CAPS proposals*', provided at the ERA-CAPS website (<http://www.eracaps.org/joint-calls/era-caps-calls>). Please note that the 'responsible applicant' does not have to be the project leader. However, s/he needs the formal consent of all project partners to submit the proposal on their behalf.

Consortia who have not submitted a pre-proposal will not be eligible for submitting a full proposal.

In addition, some funding organisations require submission of **partial project information** to their national systems at the application stage. Details are outlined in the corresponding National Annexes and summarized in the section “National submission” of the *Guidelines for Applications*.

6. Evaluation Procedure

6.1 Review Panel (RP)

The evaluation of applications will be overseen by a Review Panel. The members of the Review Panel are selected from the international scientific community by the funding organisations of the call. Expertise within this Panel will cover the topics in the proposals and may be complemented by independent experts if appropriate. The Panel will be headed by an independent chairperson. Final agreement on the composition of the Review Panel will be reached by the High Level Group of ERA-CAPS.

6.2. Pre-proposal evaluation

The RP will make a short assessment of the pre-proposals, resulting in either *invitation to submit a full proposal* (with or without changes of working plan or partnership) or *rejection*. Selection of pre-proposals will be according to the following criteria;

- Relevance to the aspirations and scope of the Call
- Scientific innovation and excellence
- Added value of joint working including evidence of true cooperation within the consortium
- Feasibility of the project
- Adequacy of used resources and finance requested

Full assessment of the scientific content of the pre-proposals will not be carried out at this stage.

According to the results of this first stage, full proposals will then be invited from selected applicants.

6.3. Full Proposal evaluation

External peer review

The proposals will be sent out for external peer review by a minimum of two reviewers. Evaluation of the proposals will be according to the following criteria:

- Novel, innovative research within the scientific scope of the call

- Scientific quality of the project
- Feasibility of the project
- Transnational added value and complementarity of expertise
- Scientific track record and potential of applicants
- Adequacy of resources, cost effectiveness and project management.
- Economic, societal and environmental relevance (plan for use and dissemination of knowledge and data-management)

Rebuttal and Review Panel

Before the Review Panel starts the evaluation, the anonymous referee reports are forwarded to the project leader, who on behalf of the consortium may comment briefly (within one week, max. 1 page per external review) if the applicants wish to do so.

The proposals, external reviewers' reports, and rebuttals are then forwarded to the Review Panel who will further consider and rank the proposals. A list of high quality proposals considered worthy of funding will be identified by the Review Panel.

6.4 Moderating Panel

The list of selected and ranked proposals will then be further considered by a Moderating Panel based on availability of funds from the contributing organisations in each collaborative proposal. The Moderating Panel will consist of representatives from the funding organisations responsible for the selected projects. The Moderating Panel will also have crossover membership from the Review Panel.

6.5 Further Approvals and Final Funding Decision

The final recommended list for funding will be formally approved by the ERA-CAPS High Level Group.

Once all evaluation steps have been completed, the final funding decisions rest with the corresponding national authorities and at the end of this process the decision will be communicated to the project leader by the Call Secretariat.

7. IPR, Consortium Agreement and State Aid Rules

Transnational co-operation at the level of Collaborative Research Projects needs special attention – in particular concerning rules related to Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) - which cannot be covered properly by the national funding regulations. In order to address this issue adequately, the funding partners of the ERA-CAPS Call for Proposals agreed on “Intellectual Property Rights Conditions for Collaborative Research Projects” or “IPR Conditions” (Annex II).

These "IPR Conditions" are complementary to the national funding rules and their application is highly recommended to all funding organisations of ERA-CAPS. All funding decisions arising from this ERA-CAPS Call for Proposals will be in line with the regulations of the European State Aid Rules. Funding rates for participants of the Collaborative Research Projects cannot exceed the Community Framework for State Aid for Research and Development.

Each consortium is requested to sign a Consortium Agreement before the start of the project. Such an agreement shall not affect the participants' obligations to the national funding organisations and to one another arising out of the “IPR Conditions” or the national funding rules. The funding partners of a particular Collaborative Research Project may withhold the funding until the Consortium Agreement has been signed by all participants of that Collaborative Research Project.

With respect to the effective execution of Collaborative Research Projects (including using and disseminating of research results as well as protection of intellectual property rights arising from the Collaborative Research Projects), the Consortium Agreement shall address topics such as the intellectual property rights arrangements, confidentiality, publication, internal organisation of the consortium, and settlement of internal disputes. A model of a Consortium Agreement which is in line with the “*IPR Conditions*” can be downloaded from the ERA-CAPS website (<http://www.era-caps.org/joint-calls/era-caps-calls>).

8. Eligibility and Terms and Conditions

8.1 Themes, funders, and target group

This second ERA-CAPS Call is a broad call and has the ambition to open access to the ERA-CAPS network to all interested researchers in the broad field of molecular plant sciences.

All researchers working in the remit of this ERA-CAPS call as defined at section 4 and eligible to apply for financial support from the participating national research funding organisations are cordially invited to apply for funding. National funding organisations will only support the costs of eligible applicants from their own countries. Researchers from countries other than the countries mentioned in Table 1 are welcomed as participants in consortia, but should be able to provide evidence of funding support. Consortia who wish to include participants from countries **not** mentioned in Table 1 should satisfy themselves that the potential partners will be able to provide funding for their participation in the project.

Applicants are **strongly recommended** to contact their National Call Coordinators for guidance when preparing their applications. Additional information can also be obtained from the Call Secretariat. Contacts may be found at the end of this document (see section 10) or on the ERA-CAPS website (<http://www.eracaps.org/joint-calls/era-caps-calls>). Please also consult the *Frequently Asked Questions* list for further guidance.

8.2. Eligibility

Consortia for funding should consist of a minimum of three partners from three different countries. At least two of these must be ERA-CAPS partner or observer countries contributing funding to the call (see Table 1). There is no upper limit on the number of partners; however, the individual consortium must demonstrate that its size is manageable with respect to project coordination (see also section 2). Applicants should refer to the annexes of their national funding organisations for guidance on all details of eligibility and funding availability.

Applications should be in accordance with the Guidelines for Application.

8.3 Participation of Industry

Industrial participation is welcomed by most of the contributing funding organisations, and details of whether and how industry may participate in consortia is given in the individual National Annexes. Because of the different regulations of the contributing funding organisations on this specific issue, the participation of companies will not influence the rating of a proposal and will not be among the evaluation criteria. For clarification, a brief summary for each partner is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: National requirements towards industry participation

Organisation	Country	National requirements regarding industrial participation
FWF	AUSTRIA	Only natural persons are allowed to submit an application. Industrial participation is welcome as national or international partner but the immediate publication right must be guaranteed. The industrial partner cannot receive money from FWF.
FWO	BELGIUM (Flanders)	Industrial partners cannot be funded by the FWO
F.R.S.-FNRS	BELGIUM	A company or other private partner can be involved as a project partner but FNRS will not fund industrial partners or any activity related to the private sector.
DASTI	DENMARK	Private-sector institutions and enterprises may, to a certain extent, receive funding through DASTI. Funding to the private sector is subject to the restrictions stated in the national guidelines.
ETAg	ESTONIA	See National Annex
ANR	FRANCE	See National Annex
DFG	GERMANY	Researchers at institutions that are not non-profit or which do not allow immediate publication of research findings in a generally accessible form are not eligible to submit proposals. However, researchers from industry can be

		involved as partners in DFG-funded projects without receiving public funding themselves.
MBIE	NEW ZEALAND	Participation of New Zealand companies is encouraged. New Zealand researchers from industry may also be eligible to receive funding. However, the New Zealand part of the proposal must be led by an organisation whose primary purpose is research as opposed to commercial activity.
MTA/OTKA	HUNGARY	See National Annex
MOARD	ISRAEL	Commercial companies / entities, SMEs and organisations with other statutory nature are welcome as participants if an added value to the project is proven and if their costs are covered by their own resources or by other external sources.
MIUR	ITALY	See National Annex
LZA	LATVIA	Companies registered in the Register of Enterprises of the Republic of Latvia and carrying out their activities mainly in Latvia are eligible for funding in the framework of this ERA-CAPS call.
RCN	NORWAY	Norwegian companies can be project partners and can also receive funding from RCN if pre-conditions are met.
NCBiR	POLAND	Enterprises with the status of R&D centres and conducting R&D activity in other forms are eligible for funding in the framework of this ERA-CAPS Call.
FCT	PORTUGAL	Companies and other private partners that carry out or participate in scientific research activities can be eligible for funding in the framework of this ERA-CAPS call.
MPNTR	SERBIA	A company and /or a public enterprise can be a participant in the project under the National Programme if it provides work material, equipment and/or financial contributions. Such participants are not eligible for funding from MPNTR.
SNF	SWITZERLAND	See National Annex
BBSRC	UNITED KINGDOM	BBSRC will consider proposals for projects involving academic-industrial partnerships. BBSRC supports science carried out by academic researchers in partnership with UK industry or other user organisations. The Council does not provide funding to the industrial partner.
NSF	USA	See National Annex

9. Synopsis of the Time Schedule

Call Announcement:	14 January 2014
Due-date pre-proposals:	14 March 2014; 12.00 CET
Invitation full proposals:	19 May 2014
Due-date full proposals:	18 July 2014; 12.00 CET
Peer Review	July- mid October 2014
Rebuttal:	October 2014
Communications of evaluation results:	December 2014
Funding decisions:	March 2015
Start of selected projects:	April-May 2015

10. Contact and Help

10.1 Call Secretariat

The ERA-CAPS Call Secretariat is the main contact point for the delivery of the joint call and is located at the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, German Research Foundation) in Germany.

The Call Secretariat is supported by a team of national contacts (National Call Coordinators), where each participating organisation provides at least one contact person.

The Call Secretariat is the contact point for the National Call Coordinators and the reviewers. Together with the National Call Coordinators, it supports the scientists during the application procedure and is the main contact address for all questions regarding proposal submission. For issues concerning requirements stated in the National Annexes, please contact the National Call Coordinators in the first instance. All national contact persons and addresses are listed in section 10.2.

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10.2 National Call Coordinators

Country	Contact person & Organisation	Email / Phone
AUSTRIA	Dr. Bettina Reitner Austrian Science Fund	Bettina.reitner@fwf.ac.at +43 1 5056740 8203
BELGIUM (FLANDERS)	Dr. Olivier Boehme Research Foundation Flanders (FWO)	erant@fwo.be +32 2 550 15 45
	Geertrui Poelaert Research Foundation Flanders (FWO)	erant@fwo.be +32 2 550 15 55
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11. Annexes

Annex Ia – Guidelines for Application of Pre-proposals

Annex Ib – Guidelines for Application of Full proposals

Annex II – IPR Conditions