



## **Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment**

# CoARA Boost Cascade Funding Programme

**Guidelines for Applicants - Second Round** 

Opening: 21 February 2025

**Closing:** 21 April 2025 at 17:00 CEST

Funding Call information, documents and templates:

https://coara.eu/second-call-for-cascade-funding/

#### **Funding Call Application Platform:**

https://esf.smartsimple.ie/s\_signup.jsp?token=XVtQCloGYV5ZSxtZXxJXRlJWYUllH3 Rt





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## Introduction

This document aims to assist applicants submitting proposals for the second Cascade Funding Call under CoARA Boost. It contains information on eligibility criteria, evaluation procedure, submission requirements and timeline for the call.

# Key figures

Total funding	Up to 1.22 M €
Funding per project	30,000 EUR to 60,000 EUR: a lump sum, depending on the type of project
Number of projects to be funded	20-25 projects
Target applicants	Legal entities interested in reforming research assessment practices in their institutions
2nd call opens	21 February 2025 – 21 April 2025
Duration of the projects	Implementation within 12 months after signature of a Third-Party Project Agreement – TPPA
Start of the projects	Within 3 months from TPPA signature

# Context of the call

Over 800 research organisations, funders, assessment authorities, professional societies, and their associations have agreed on a common direction and principles for reforming the assessment of research, researchers and research organisations, outlined in the <u>Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment</u>. They have also committed to implement changes within their organisations.

The <u>Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment</u>, CoARA, offers a platform for collaboration and mutual learning. However, given the complexity of the reform





process, providing support for institutions to test, design, and carry out in-depth institutional changes is crucial to implement the Agreement commitments.

The CoARA Boost project, funded by the European Union, strengthens CoARA's operational capacity. It provides a means to develop a critical mass for reforming research assessment, to generate gravitas for new members as well as to investigate and implement new models for research assessment. Find out more about the project here: CoARA Boost Project

The Cascade Funding Programme within CoARA Boost represents more than half of the project's overall budget. This programme will support a minimum of 50 organisations in tackling specific challenges related to reforming research assessment and implementing the Agreement commitments. By supporting different types of proposals, the programme will maintain a balanced portfolio of projects. The cascade funding programme consists of two rounds of open calls, the first one was launched in April 2024 and second one in February 2025.

# Summary of the call

CoARA Boost's Cascade Funding calls facilitate institutional change and targets pilot and exchange-of-knowledge initiatives. It will fund +20 projects facilitating knowledge-exchange, piloting new initiatives within institutions, and enabling lasting institutional change. As such, it encourages and supports research organisations to investigate and test what will efficiently work 'in real life'. More specifically, the Call aims to:

- Facilitate the exchange, transfer and adaptation of proven good practices and their adoption in research organisations.
- Catalyse the set-up or transformation of research assessment practices and tools in line with the commitments of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment.
- Support the development and testing of new and innovative research assessment approaches, models and procedures.

Projects can be proposed by any of the organisation types specified below through a cascading grant mechanism. By the end of the programme, it is expected to have a diverse portfolio of projects available that will translate the shared vision outlined in the Agreement into tangible, lasting institutional changes in research assessment practices.





# Types of projects

The CoARA Boost cascading grants are a tool for organisations to implement the 10 commitments that are enshrined in the <u>Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment</u> (ARRA) and facilitate institutional change in the context of research assessment. The activities eligible for support must demonstrate the commitment to a systemic change with medium-term or long-term trajectories and impact. The grants will support organisations to develop, pilot and implement, assessment criteria, tools and processes; while avoiding contradictions across assessment systems, types and purposes, through continuous dialogue. There is room for diverse starting points and approaches. As part of the first call, three types of projects will be supported. These reflect different stages of an institution's reform journey, namely: 1. knowledge exchange (teaming projects), 2. piloting (institutional pilot projects), 3. paving the way for a lasting change (institutional change projects). Their description is provided in DOCUMENT 1.

#### Relevant dates

## **Applications**

Opening: 21.02.2025

Deadline for submission: 21.04.2025, 17:00h CEST

## Rules and conditions

## Eligible countries

As the call is meant to support institutions from across the European Research Area (ERA), only legal entities based in the EU Member States and <u>countries associated</u> to the Horizon Europe Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (see under the heading "Third countries associated to Horizon Europe") are eligible to apply.

For more details on eligibility details, please consult the FAQ.





## Eligible beneficiaries

The primary targets of the CoARA Boost Cascade Funding Programme are legal entities of the following types:

- Academies, learned societies that implement some form of research assessment,
- National/regional authorities or agencies that implement some form of research assessment,
- Public or private research funding organisations,
- Research centres, research infrastructures,
- Universities,
- Other relevant non-for-profit organisations that implement some form of research assessment.

Applications from faculties of universities are also eligible. However, the application needs to be formally in the name of the university (applicant), and not the faculty.

Consortium members of the CoARA Boost project are not eligible to participate in the call. In the case of beneficiaries that are umbrella organisations, their member organisations are eligible. Nominating organisations of the CoARA Steering Board members are also eligible, as the Steering Board does not directly participate in the evaluation of the proposals. The Steering Board will not have any role in both the evaluation and selection of winning applications.

To ensure diversity in the allocation of resources, <u>beneficiaries of the first round of the Coara Boost Cascade Funding</u> are not eligible to apply.

# **Financial Support**

CoARA Boost Cascade Funding will only provide financial support to entities (registered in Member States or associated countries) for the successful projects submitted to this open call.

The total budget available for this second call is 1.22M EUR. The grant is distributed over the course of the CoARA Boost project, following a "flat rate" approach. This means that the funding is distributed gradually, subject to meeting specific outcomes and milestones included in the agreement, considering completion of





activities/tasks as indicator, but also taking into account administrative justifications of time and/or expenses claimed in the application.

The program offers three types of grants based on the project's type:

Ту	pes of projects	Maximum grant amount	Maximum project duration
1.	Teaming projects	40 k€	1 year
2.	Institutional pilot projects	30 k€	1 year
3.	Institutional change projects	60 k€	l year

## Subcontracting

Regarding "subcontracting," it is important to note that within the context of CoARA Boost Cascade Funding, subcontracting is strictly prohibited for core/essential tasks. This signifies that the primary responsibilities associated with the project must be undertaken and carried out by the team members described in the proposal. It is essential to maintain a clear understanding that the core tasks should not be delegated to external entities or subcontractors. The team should possess the necessary expertise and capacity to fulfil these crucial obligations to ensure the successful execution of the project.

#### Indicative distribution of the funds

Payments will be disbursed in two stages of meeting designated milestones or KPIs and delivering specific outputs, considering the work plan and resources claimed in the application.

- 70% once KPIs definition and outcomes are approved by the CoARA Secretariat (approx. month 1)
- 30% after the final review (appro. month 12, depending on the project duration)

# Origin of the funds

Once an applicant has been selected for funding, they will be required to sign a dedicated Sub-Grantee Funding Agreement with the CoARA Boost Coordinator (ESF). It is important to note that the funds attached to the Sub-Grantee Funding Agreement come directly from the funds of the Horizon Europe Project CoARA Boost,





which has been funded by the European Commission via Grant Agreement Number 101131826.

#### **Evaluation Procedure**

Formal eligibility check: Performed by CoARA Secretariat. End of April 2025

<u>Pre-assessment</u>: All applications will be made available to the review panel prior to the panel meetings, for each application to be pre-assessed by two panel members and read by all panel members. Each submission will be reviewed by one Lead Reviewer panellist and one Secondary Reviewer panellist. They will have access to each other's reviews. **May 2025** 

Review panels: During the review panel meetings (teleconference), each application will be presented by their reviewers and discussed by the full panel. Each application will be presented by Lead Reviewer panellists who will introduce both pre-assessments alongside the application. At the end of each panel, recommendations for funding allocation ('to be funded', 'to be funded if funding available', 'not to be funded') will be collectively agreed by the panellists. **June 2025** 

<u>Panel chairs' meeting:</u> During the panel chairs meeting (teleconference), chairs of the topical panels bring results of their respective topical panels together. They agree on the overall funding recommendations and make final selection decisions.

#### **End of June 2025**

<u>Results</u>: The panel members will then produce a consensus report for each application, summarising the panel discussions. Narrative assessment from the consensus reports will be communicated to the applicants, together with information on which evaluation brackets/quadrium the project fell into:

- To be funded with strong consensus
- To be funded close to the cut-off line
- Not to be funded close to the cut-off line
- Not to be funded.

#### Mid-July 2025

Further information on diversity measures when compiling the pool of reviewers as well as a detailed description of the evaluation process can be found in document 2: EVALUATION GUIDELINES.





## **Evaluation Criteria**

Panellists will evaluate the proposals considering three criteria. Criteria will bear an equal weight in the assessment and each criterion will be qualitatively assessed following the scales provided in the table below. Scoring is complemented by comments from reviewers.

Reviewers will score each award criterion on a scale from 0 to 5:

Score	Definition
0	Proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
1	Poor – criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2	Fair – proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses
3	Good – proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
4	Very good - proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
5	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

The total score will be calculated as the sum of the score of the three criteria. The threshold for each criterion will be three (3), while the overall score threshold will be ten (10). That means if a proposal receives less than 3 in one criterion or less than 10 overall score, will not be recommended for funding by the independent evaluators and will be automatically rejected.

The scoring sheet and detailed evaluation criteria can be found in Annex 3.

# Submission Requirements

# Overall process

The submission will be done through the official SmartSimple submission platform (operated by <u>ESF</u>), which is directly linked to the CoARA Boost Website at <a href="https://coara.eu/call-cascade-funding-coara-boost/">https://coara.eu/call-cascade-funding-coara-boost/</a>. Only applications received directly through this platform will be considered eligible. For technical guidelines on





how to use the platform, see the section "Technical Guidelines – Platform Guidelines for Applicants".

The application form must be submitted in two steps:

The first part of the application form should be completed directly on the SmartSimple platforms. For technical guidelines on the Platform, please to "Technical Guidelines – Platform Guidelines for Applicants" final section of this document.

Title of the proposal *	
Type of project*	<ul> <li>Please select one among the following:</li> <li>Teaming projects</li> <li>Institutional change projects</li> <li>Institutional pilot projects</li> </ul>
Main keyword*:	Please select one among the following:





Second keyword (optional):	Please select up to two among the following:  Assessment of research organisations  Careers  Assessment of research proposals  Changing culture  CVs and Narrative  Disciplines and inter, trans and multidisciplinary  Equity  Equity  Ethics and integrity  Impact  Language  Metrics and indicators  Open Science  Peer-review  Quality and excellence  Raising awareness and engagement  Rankings  Sharing good practices  Sustainability (e.g. costs, over-assessment, reviewer fatigue)  Team science  Transparency  Other: please specify:
Contact details of the project coordinator: *	Title, First and Last name, affiliation, department, e- mail address and ORCID ID
I confirm that I have the authority to submit the proposal on behalf of my organisation and on behalf of the organisations mentioned in point 7 below: *	Yes   No

<sup>\*</sup>Mandatory





2. The second part of the application form must be uploaded on the SmartSimple platform. The Application Template can be downloaded from the <u>webpage of the Call</u>: Annex 2\_Application Template and Annex\_4 and 5\_Project Budget.

The use of the Application Template and Use of Resources Templates are mandatory – please do not delete any sections and keep to the page limit (please do not exceed 5 pages, all included, i.e., figures, tables, charts, etc.) – font-size Arial 11.

These forms must be entirely filled and uploaded to the online SmartSimple platform. Applicants shall merge Application Template and Use of Resources Template before uploading them as one sign file PDF file as specified on the application platform.

Sending these templates in any other format and via e-mail or any other means will automatically disqualify the submission.

## **Application reception**

Submissions will be done only via the SmartSimple platform, and it will be the unique entry point for all application submissions. Applications submitted by any other means will not be considered nor evaluated. Only the documentation in the right format included in the submission will be considered by evaluators. A full list of applicants will be drafted containing their basic information for statistical purposes and clarity (which will be also shared with the European Commission for transparency). The application reception will close on **21.04.2025**, **17:00 CEST**. The deadline for submission is as stated in this Guidelines for Applicants document. Please note that the system time depends on the user's configured time zone and may or may not coincide with the correct time (this depends on the user, not the platform for submission).

## Language

Applicants must submit their proposals in English. Submissions done in any other language will not be eligible and will not be evaluated. The grant management process (including the submission of documents and deliverables) will be conducted in English.

#### **Ethical Issues**

CoARA Boost strictly adheres to the fundamental ethical principles outlined in the "European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity." To ensure compliance, all applicants are required to acknowledge and accept our privacy policy and





declaration of honour (ethics) during the submission process. This acknowledgment confirms that, by submitting the form, they accept the terms described in the provided text. No additional documents need to be uploaded; applicants are solely required to read and agree to the terms outlined when submitting the form. In terms of ethics, aligning project proposals with the principles of the <u>Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment</u> is also strongly recommended.

During the evaluation process, the CoARA Secretariat may verify whether the self-assessment declaration aligns with the contents of the application. In cases where clarification is needed, the CoARA Secretariat reserves the right to contact the beneficiaries. If an applicant indicates that their application may have ethical issues, an ethics review will be conducted. Applications that fail to adequately address ethical concerns or privacy aspects will be rejected.

#### **Data Protection**

CoARA Boost Cascade Funding Call requires access to Personal and Entity Data to process and evaluate applications. As open call coordinator, ESF/CoARA Secretariat will act as the Data Controller for all data submitted through the SmartSimple platform for this purpose. To ensure the safety and security of this data, the SmartSimple platform has been designed and operates under strict compliance with The General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR). Therefore, all applicants are required to accept the SmartSimple Platform terms to ensure full coverage. For more information regarding the data privacy policy and security measures implemented by SmartSimple, please refer to their website.

## Contact information

Any questions regarding the call can be directed to the CoARA Secretariat: <a href="mailto:funding@coara.org">funding@coara.org</a>

In case of technical questions concerning the submission platform SmartSimple (operated by <u>ESF</u>) please reach out to: <u>esf-panels@esf.org</u>

An online information session for interested parties has been organised on the 30 of January 2025 at 14:00 CET, the materials presented during the session are available here: <a href="https://zenodo.org/records/14794738">https://zenodo.org/records/14794738</a>.

## **Support information**

CoARA Secretariat offers a dedicated support channel available for applicants at <a href="mailto:funding@coara.org">funding@coara.org</a>. Requests will receive a response within 2 working days of their submission. While all possible efforts will be made to respond in a timely manner,





the applicants should plan their submissions, accordingly, allowing enough time before the deadline (i.e., at least 2 working days prior) if they expect an answer. Lack of the receipt of an answer to an enquiry shall not constitute grounds for extension or re-evaluation of a submission.

In addition to the support channels above, there is a collection of Frequently Asked Questions made available on the <u>website FAQ</u>. This will be continuously updated from the questions received through the support channels.

Please note that any email received outside the designated support channel will not be taken into account. It is imperative that all requests or inquiries related to the submission system or the call itself are directed through the official support channels.

# Technical Guidelines – Platform Guidelines for Applicants

For all correspondence concerning the online submission of your application, please send an email to <u>esf-panels@esf.org</u>.

#### REGISTER

If you have already registered on our platform, you will not need to do this step again. You can directly go to your portal (<a href="https://esf.smartsimple.ie/s\_Login.jsp">https://esf.smartsimple.ie/s\_Login.jsp</a>), login with your email address and the password you have selected and start your application.

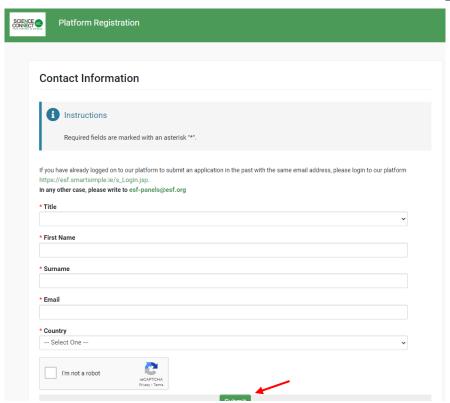
You will be able to register on the submission platform using the following link:

https://esf.smartsimple.ie/s\_signup.jsp?token=XVtQCloGYV5ZSxtZXxJXRlJWY UI1H3Rt

Then, please fill in your Contact Information details. Required fields are marked with an asterisk "\*".

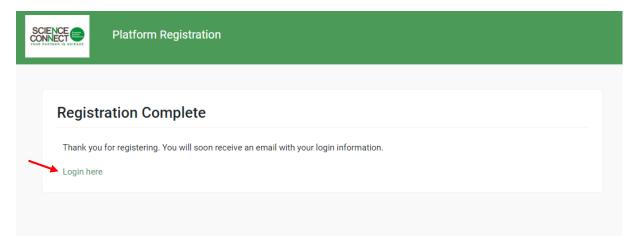




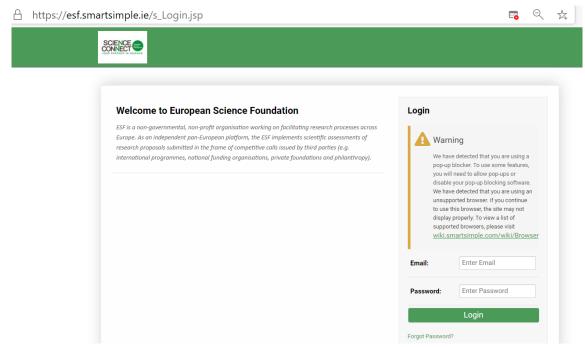


Once everything is completed, click on "Submit". Then, click on "Login here".

(!) Make sure that the email address you indicated is correct.







After a short while, you should receive a confirmation email, "Platform Registration confirmation", from <u>esf-panels@esf.org</u>. If you have not received it in your inbox, **please check your spam folder.** 



In this email, you will find your login (the email address you have indicated on the Registration Form) and a temporary password to connect to the platform.



#### LOG IN TO THE PLATFORM

Once you have completed your first login (using the information provided in the email), you will have to choose a new password.

This is strictly personal and ESF will not have access to it.

(!) Make sure to remember your password.

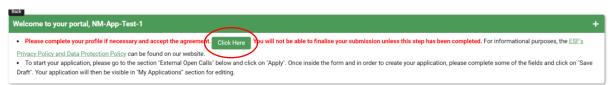


You should then receive a verification code to enter the platform (please check spam and deleted items folders). You will then have access to your portal, your **profile** and your **application**.

First, you will need to complete your profile.

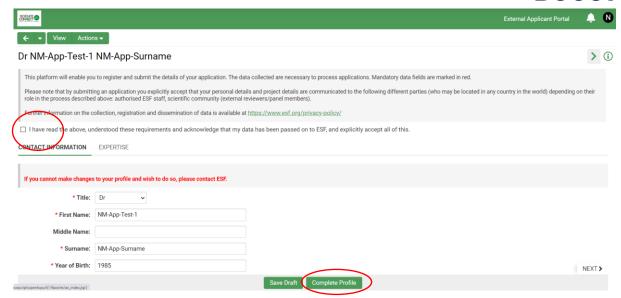
(!) If your profile is not completed, you will not be able to submit your proposal.

To complete your profile, click on the button "Click Here" on the "Welcome to your portal" section.



Fill in the Contact Information Details and click on "Complete Profile" once it is done.





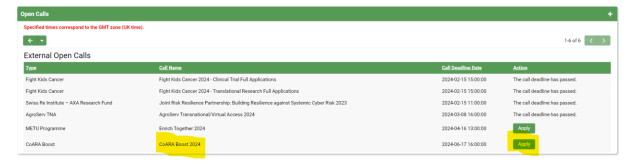
Please note that once you have completed your profile, it will be locked and you will need to contact <u>esf-panels@esf.org</u> to modify it.

To go back to your portal, click on the arrow



#### SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION

Click on "Apply" for the CoARA Boost 2024 Call.



## Make sure that you do not hide the instructions.

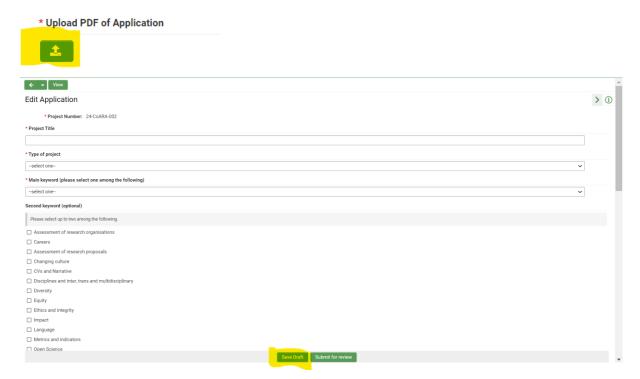






You will have to dully fill in all the mandatory fields: Project Title, Type of project, Main and Second Keywords, Abstract, Contact details of the project coordinator, name and Organisation's PIC number

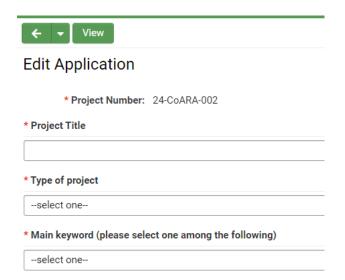
Under **Template for Application & Instructions for Submission**, you will find these guidelines for the applicants, the Application template in word format that has to be used (mandatory) and to upload the PDF of your application once it is ready, click on the arrow as shown below:



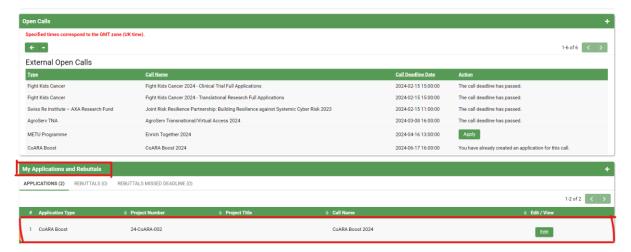
(!) When you are filling in your application form, **remember to click on "Save Draft" regularly.** 

The first time you will click on "Save Draft", you will obtain the reference ID (project Number) for your application:





If you log out and re-login later, you will find your application under the "My Applications" section. You will have to click, then, on the Edit button.



Finally, when you are ready to submit your application, click on "Submit for review". If you have made any modifications, you will need to first save them by clicking on "Save Draft" before submitting your application.



(!) Be careful, once you have submitted your application, you will not be able to modify it anymore!

Once you have submitted your application, the platform will generate a pdf overview of the fields you have completed that you can download by clicking on "Print Form".







If you need any help in submitting your application or using the submission platform, please contact <u>esf-panels@esf.org</u>.