# GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR BELSPO

## S4P Driven call 2024 – 2025

You can find the *Information file S4P – driven* here - Latest update of document: 04/12/2024.

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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*** | | ***September 2025*** |
| | **Submission process start *November 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 priority (or in short "research topic" or "topic") 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 research topic. It is thus *not possible* to pick only one or two of the deliverables per research topic, as only one research team/project will be selected per topic. 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 FPSs request 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 topics (see Information file S4P, Part II (p. 10 – 42)), you are welcome to send us your questions at S4Policy@belspo.be. 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.

**Due to the postponement of the call, you are still welcome to ask us questions until the end of December 2024** and we will update the document.

### 2.2.  Can a research unit participate in 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. You can submit more than one proposal to the S4Policy Driven call, for example you can submit a proposal for multiple research topics.

### 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, public research centres, etc. If you are in doubt, please contact S4Policy@belspo.be and attach the statutes of your organisation and the form available on our website. Please inquire us about your eligibility before the 25th of November!

### 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. **If you miss the deadline, it will not be possible to hand in your EoI/Full Proposal.**

If you wish to involve (funded) partners in the research project, you will have to communicate the (funded) partners in the Expression of interest. The coordinator will be able to fill in the details of the (funded) partner(s), but the (funded) partner(s) cannot modify the EoI. The partners cannot be changed in the Full Proposal, unless due to unforeseen circumstances, adjustments to the list of partners can be made. Changes to the partners, after the submission of the EoI can be communicated to us via mail S4Policy@belspo.be.

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 to 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.

In case of doubt if a partner is eligible to receive funding, please mail us (1) the filled-out Institution Request form (which can be found on our website) and (2) the statutes of your institution at S4Policy@belspo.be.

## 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 and on our website. 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. If you would have any doubt if the funded partners are eligible to receive funding, please mail us (1) the filled-out Institution Request form (which can be found on our website) and (2) the statutes of your institution at S4Policy@belspo.be.

Lastly, we examine if the scope outlined in the EoI is "in-scope" with the information of the chosen research topic in the Information file. In case the EoI is out of scope, we will advise you against submitting a Full Proposal, however you will not be restricted to submit a Full Proposal.

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 are accepted.

The funded partners must remain the same in the EoI and in the Full Proposal; However, if due to unforeseen circumstances, you wish to change the funded partners, after the EoI has been submitted or before and during the Full Proposal submission period, please mail us the desired changes to S4Policy@belspo.be **as soon as possible**. We will adjust the list of partners.

## 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, is as follows:

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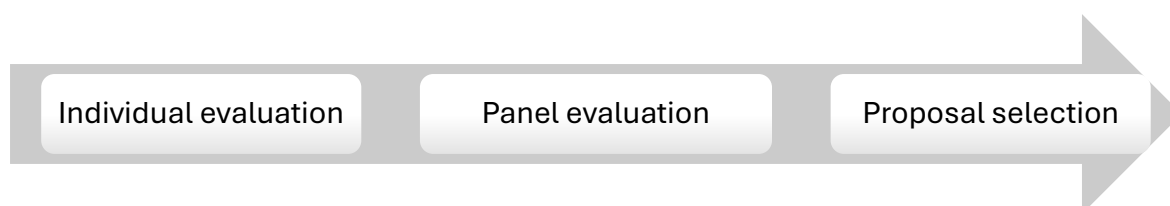
Throughout this process, the applicant will not have the opportunity to interact with evaluators. The evaluations are done solely on the basis of the written Full Proposal submitted by the applicant on the online platform.

### 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.

### 2.12. How should I fill out the GANTT Chart in the Full Proposal

The S4Policy funding is a co-financed structure, meaning that there will be two contracts (one with BELSPO, and one with each relevant Federal Public Service). However, you can combine the budget from BELSPO and the relevant Federal Public Service when filling out the Gantt Chart.

## 3. Budget & Funding

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

Yes. Universities, for example, do not automatically get more funding than colleges of higher education 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 themselves 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 per 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 (a) 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. My institution covers all the overheads the BELSPO overheads could cover, how should I fill out the budget table?

*Please note that from august 2024 the terminology has changed: what was previously called "indirect costs" are now called "overheads". You can find the latest budget table with the correct terminology on our website and on the platform.*

The indirect costs are the overheads that derive from implementing the project within your institution. They cover the expenses listed under the category in the Budget Table (see screenshot), which correspond to the standard items/activities of every project. *The overheads are a fixed compulsory amount for all BELSPO projects.* Our budget rules set overheads at 15% of the total of Staff costs and Specific Operating costs of your project - no more, no less. This amount is to be used throughout the duration of the project. **Following BELSPO's budget rules you must enter overhead costs for your project, regardless of what your institution provides.**

**What are overheads?**
Overheads cover the general operating costs of each partner:
- Office material (computers, smartphones, printers, cartridges, licences for non-specific software such as Windows, Adobe Acrobat, etc.);
- Heating, electricity and water cost
- Cleaning and security services;
- Payment or reimbursement of rent;
- Costs of horizontal services and departments (accounting, corporate communications, management, human resources, training, etc.);
- Telephone and internet costs;
- Insurance costs for equipment or vehicles;
- Equipment maintenance and repair costs;
- Office supplies (Commissary) ;
- Laboratory consumables (except for specific supplies required for the research project).

**What are the budget rules for overheads ?**
Overheads are a lump sum. The total amount of this item is set at 15% (fixed amount) of staff and specific operating costs.

*Figure 1: Budget Table: Overhead category - types of expenses.*

## 3.8.    Can I include a FOR-PROFIT organisation in my proposal?

You cannot include a for-profit organisation as a funded partner to your proposal. If you rely on specific competences and expertise from a for-profit organisation for the project, you can include a for-profit organisation in the budget under the category "subcontracting", under the conditions that: special scientific or technical competences outside the institution's normal area of activity. Subcontracting may only concern a **limited part of the project**, and must take place in direct relation to the project's tasks. You can find all the budget rules in the Budget Table & Budget Rules on our website.

# 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** (by 29 May 2025), and one or more bilateral contracts with **each responsible FPS** (by 29 May 2025 or later). Concerning the contract with BELSPO, the *Base Contract* will be signed by 29 May 2025. The start of the projects is foreseen for 15 June 2025. By then 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 September 2025. However, since the timing between the notification of the final selection and start of the project is 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 the coordinator can submit an EoI via the platform, using their platform account. The coordinator will have to follow some quick and easy registration steps

to register on and access the platform for the first time. It is not recommended to share your login data.

Submission Full Proposal: both the coordinator and promotors/funded partners have access to the platform. 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.

The coordinator will be able to fill out the Full Proposal (Gantt Chart, State of the Art, Risk Management Assessment, etc.). The promotor/funded partner will be able to fill in their own budget table (the coordinator fills in their budget table as well). Once submitted both the coordinator and the promotor/funded partner will have an overview of their application(s).

If there would be any problems submitting your EoI and/or Full Proposal, please contact S4Policy@belspo.be. If you foresee any problems submitting the application during the submission period, please contact us as well.

## 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: November January 6 and Full Proposal: January 27). 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 xlsx.) and the Budget Table (Excel xlsx.) will have to be filled out offline and uploaded to the platform).

## 5.3.    Online Forms

Please note that both the EoI and the Full Proposals will be an online form to fill out. We will not accept any .docx file sent via mail.

- The text fields in the online forms do not have the option to format your text.
- The text fields have a limited character count. This means all characters are counted, including white space, and not just the words. You can check the characters count easily in a Word processor by changing the count from "words" to "characters with space" at the bottom right of your screen (see screenshot).