



AXA
Research Fund
Through research protection

Ph.D. Applications Guidelines

2012

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1 About the guide

This guide contains the practical information needed to apply for the Ph.D. fellowships financed by the AXA Research Fund (ARF), as well as a general overview of the selection process.

2 Which institutions are eligible to apply for fellowships?

- Only institutions that have been registered by the AXA Research Fund may apply for these fellowships.
You can check on our online platform if your institution is already registered (<https://secure-researchfund.axa.com/Public/InstitutionSearch.aspx>).
Otherwise liaise with your institution in order **to fill in the registration form** (see the specific Modus Operandi on our website: <http://www.axa-research.org/how-to-register-an-institution>).
- An applicant can be presented by only one institution.
- Please note that although a candidate may be presented twice by the same institution, each candidate cannot submit the same proposal several times.
- Applications must be submitted by the research institutions **to which the host laboratory is attached** and where the post-doctoral work is to be carried out.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The institution must be able to host and accommodate the applicant for funding in accordance with prevailing legislation in the country where the institution is located.¹ This institution must be the same as that presenting the Ph.D. candidate.

¹ In France, the host institutions will draw up an employment contract directly with the Ph.D. researcher. AXA will ensure that the Ph.D. has an employment contract that complies with French labour law. AXA will have no relationship of subordination with the Ph.D. researcher.

3 Eligibility and selection criteria used to select Ph.D.s

Every application that is submitted must be complete **in English** and must comply with the criteria below in order to be submitted for review by the AXA Research Fund's Scientific Board.

The Scientific Board oversees the applicant selection process, basing its decisions on the assessments offered by a network of experts whose reputation in their fields is international in scope.

The AXA Research Fund annually grants about thirty Ph.D. fellowships. For information, the global rate of selection is 10 to 15%.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

The AXA Research Fund, operating at European scale, follows the spirit of the Bologna process which defines the doctoral cycle as a three-year cycle. Students who are already engaged in a Ph.D. programme are not eligible.

3.1 Eligibility Criteria

3.1.1 Areas of research eligible for funding

The Ph.D. work financed by the Fund must fall within the scope of one of the themes identified by the AXA Scientific Board. The themes for 2012 are identified below, and can also be found on the website of the AXA Research Fund: <http://researchfund.axa.com/>

- Life risks
 - Aging and long term care
 - Biomedical risk
 - Addictions and risky behaviours
- Socio Economic Risks
 - Geopolitical risks
 - Macro-economic and systemic financial risks
 - Individual and collective behaviours when facing uncertainties
 - Large corporate risks
- Environmental risks
 - Climate change
 - Natural hazards
 - Human driven environmental changes

As an illustration please refer to Figures 1, 2 and 3.

The AXA Research Fund does not fund clinical research or research projects meant for commercial exploitation.

The AXA Research Fund, for ethical reasons, does not fund research in the following areas:

- *research violating national regulations*
- *research having direct military use*
- *research having potentially dangerous environmental impact*
- *biomedical research led without the informed consent of the donor*
- *research on embryo stem cells*
- *processing of private personal data without the informed consent of the concerned (incl. genetic information)*
- *research activities aiming at human cloning*

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

These projects should contribute to a better knowledge or understanding of one of these three families of risks. Although these projects must fit into any of these themes, we will accept applications coming from **any** discipline, including but not limited to: Earth Sciences, Physics, Applied Mathematics, Social Sciences, Economics, Political Sciences, Philosophy, Chemistry, Sociology, etc...

Figure 1 – Environmental Risks

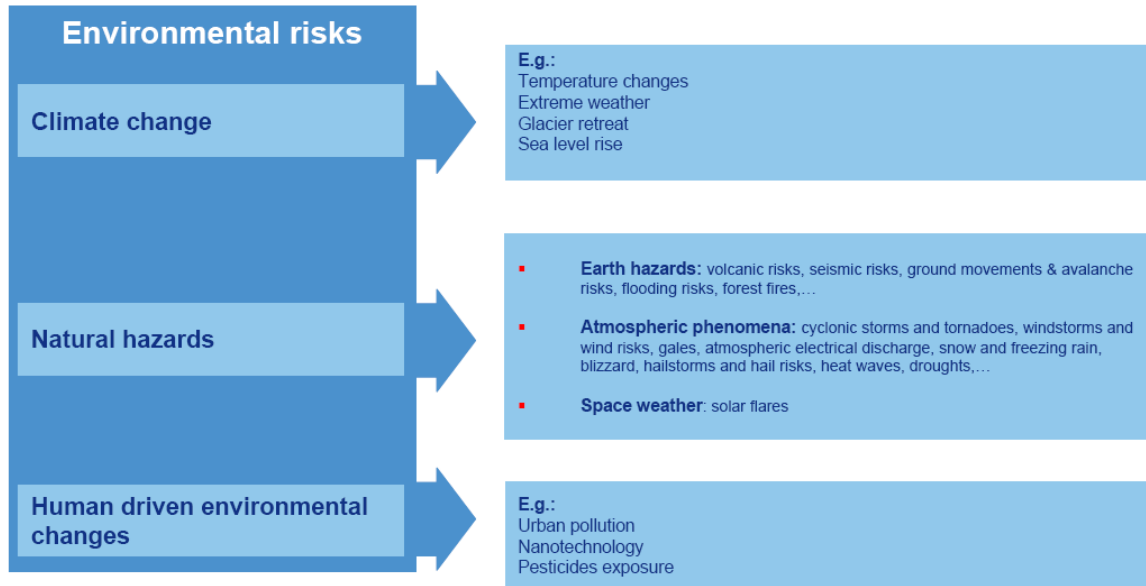


Figure 2 – Life Risks

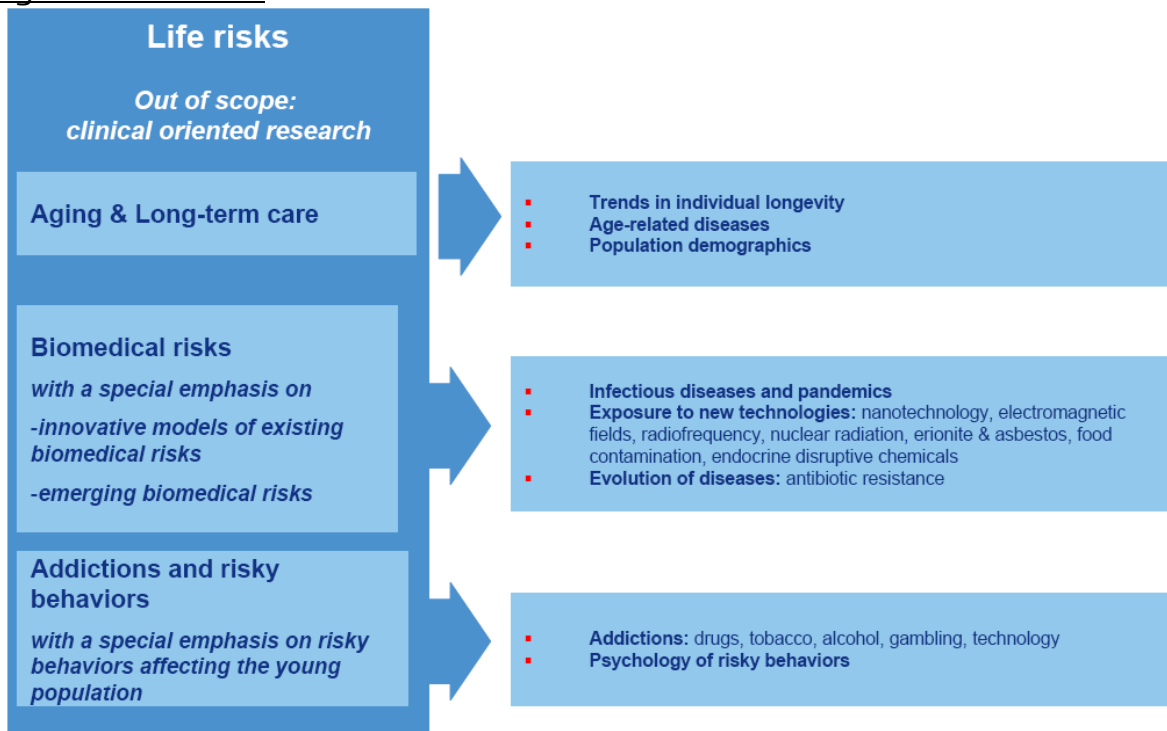


Figure 3 – Socio-Economic Risks



3.1.2 Geographic scope of funding

The AXA Research Fund supports both:

- Candidates wishing to do a Ph. D in an institution established in:
 - one of the member states of the European Union, or
 - one of the countries associated to the EU within the meaning of the 7th Framework Programme of the EU (FP7, i.e. Switzerland, Israel, Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Turkey, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia, Albania and Montenegro), or
 - in Asia (Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, India), or
 - in Latin America (Brazil and Mexico).

In this case, the Fund does not place restrictions on the nationality of the applicant.

- Candidates who are citizens of:
 - one of the EU member states, or
 - one of the countries associated to the EU within the meaning of the 7th Framework Programme of the EU (FP7, i.e. Switzerland, Israel, Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Turkey, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia, Albania and Montenegro), or
 - Asia (Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, India), or
 - in Latin America (Brazil and Mexico)

In this case, the Fund places no restrictions on the country in which the Ph. D research laboratory is located.

3.1.3 Start date of the Post-Doctoral research

The period between the date on which the AXA Research Fund announces the results of its selection process and the starting date of the Ph.D. (i.e., the date of the administrative registration of the Ph.D. by the host institution) must not exceed 6 months.

3.2 Selection criteria

The AXA Research Fund's selection process will be improved in 2012. Firstly, this will allow the candidates to submit detailed and complete application only when they have **reasonable chance** of obtaining a grant. Secondly, this will favor research agendas that are **strategically crucial** to their institutions and thus fully supported by them.

The 2012 PostDoc campaigns will thus be organized in **two rounds aiming at assessing two key actors**: the institution and the PostDoctoral candidate.

The first round is meant to select the institutions allowed to propose candidates. This selection will be primarily based on academic excellence of the institution in the chosen fields – assessed by our Scientific Board.

Please note that the list of selected institutions is established to ensure a balance of applications between the three clusters of risks defined by the AXA Research Fund (see section 3.1.1). Moreover, the record of applications submitted in the past by the institution is taken into account (dynamism in the previous campaign is an asset). The AXA Research Fund also wishes to give a chance to newly registered institutions.

Then, institutions will be informed of the number of applicants they may propose for the second round (from 0 to 2).

The second round aims at selecting a PhD candidate with regards to the following criteria:

- Academic excellence of the candidate and the advisor
- Innovative nature and originality of the project
- Feasibility of the project (management, organization, budget)
- Quality of the host laboratory with regard to development opportunities offered to the PhD
- International reach/International scope of the host laboratory

4 Funding budget and duration

The Ph.D. funding is for a period of 3 years. During the period of funding, the Doctoral researcher should not occupy another position and should work full time on the research project selected by the Scientific Board.

The fellowship comes to a maximum total of €120 000 for the entire duration of the 3 years funding, and covers the following, pursuant to specific details to be worked out with the host institution in the contract and in accordance with local practice and legislation in force:

- The annual gross salary of the Ph.D. student, which will be equal to €25 000 minimum.
- The coverage of any additional costs incurred by the Ph.D. student in relation to the research, provided that expense receipts are submitted (colloquia, etc.) and limited to €1 000 a year.
- Related fees paid to the host institution, used to cover all or some of the expenses related to the Ph.D. research.

NB: Incidental expenses must be directly related to the research project the AXA Research Fund has selected. All overheads must be motivated.

The following indirect costs are not eligible:

- Costs related to general administration and management-costs of office or laboratory space including rent or depreciation of buildings and equipments and related expenditure such as water, heating...
- Maintenance, insurance and safety costs
- Communication expenses, network connection charges, postal charges and office supplies
- Common office equipment such as PC's, laptops, office software
- Miscellaneous recurring consumables.

5 How to apply for funding

Only those institutions referenced by the AXA Research Fund and allowed to candidate may present applicants for funding. The AXA Fund does not accept any unsolicited applications from individual students.

5.1 Selection timetable for 2012

One call for applicants will be made during the year.

- 1st round: Institutions to post their intent to participate to the campaign
 - opening: **January 2nd, 2012;**
 - closing: **January 19th, 2012 at noon (French time GMT+1).**
- Results Announcement: January 26th, 2012.

- 2nd round:
 - step 1: Institutions to propose candidates
 - opening: **January 26th, 2012;**
 - closing: **March 1st, 2012 at noon (French time GMT+1).**
 - step 2: Candidates to submit their application
 - opening: **March 1st, 2012;**
 - closing: **March 29th, 2012 at noon (French time GMT+1).**
- Results Publication: June 29th, 2012.

5.2 Detailed description of the steps

The Institution needs to be registered before being able to participate to a campaign.

Institutions are required to designate a single point of contact responsible for partnerships (Institution Representative) with the AXA Research Fund and register.

It is possible to check whether an institution is already registered or not (<https://secure-researchfund.axa.com/Public/InstitutionSearch.aspx>).

Registration is an online process (<https://secure-researchfund.axa.com/Public/InstitutionEdit.aspx>) and is explained in detail in the modus operandi entitled "How to register" available on the website (<http://www.axa-research.org/how-to-register-an-institution>).

IMPORTANT: Please note that no institution's registration will be accepted within 3 days of the deadline of a campaign.

IMPORTANT: as applications are reviewed by international experts, all fields and documents must be in **English**.

Step 1: First Round of the Campaign

Every registered Institution has access to the online form of the first round.

The Institution Representative is expected to select from 1 to 12 research fields where he/she believes fundamental research carried out within the institution is excellent and might submit an application.

Please note that with regards to the second round, institutions will not be limited to these initial choices and will be allowed to propose candidates in other research fields.

He/She has the opportunity (not mandatory) to write a free text on the strengths of the institution and any relevant information worth communicating to the AXA Research Fund for the considered campaign.

Please note that for the first round none of the applicants' names will be expected.

The day of the launch of the second round, the institutions will be informed of the number of applicants they may propose for the second round (between zero and two).

Step 2: Second round of the Campaign

The AXA Research Fund relies on the Institution Representative to select candidate(s) on behalf of the institution by filling-in his/her name & email address online (<http://researchfund-platform.axa.com/>).

Once the candidate(s) is (are) validated by the Institution Representative, an e-mail is sent directly to him (them), enclosing the necessary details to access the application form (URL, username and password). The candidate(s) are responsible for completing the application form online.

The application form is made up of 4 main sections. The applicant has to fill in all the required fields and to upload some documents, among which:

Section 1: Information on the institution and the laboratory hosting the PhD candidate

- A letter by the director of the institution or of the laboratory briefly describing the Doctoral Program and its strengths, and information highlighting the quality of the research environment (international reach, academic networks, availabilities of research equipments/facilities, organization of the teams etc.).

Section 2: Information on the thesis director:

- A detailed CV
- A list of publications of the past 5 years
- A description on how the project is part of the agenda of the laboratory (max 20 lines)
- A recommendation letter (**to be uploaded by the thesis director himself**), which should include:
 - An engagement of the Ph.D. advisor to supervise the Ph.D. candidate (why a PhD and not a Post-Doc, organization to manage the PhD etc.)
 - The number of fellows/trainees to be supervised by the Ph.D. advisor during the fellowship

Section 3: Information on the PhD candidate

- A detailed CV
- A reference letter preferably by the applicant's Master's thesis advisor if applicable (**to be uploaded by the previous advisor himself**)
- Previous research studies: additional materials illustrating the applicant's research work are highly recommended, such as abstracts from any publications or releases, agenda (organization or schedule to show how you will proceed with your proposal), etc.

IMPORTANT: If the total length of these additional documents exceeds **20 pages**, they will not be considered.

Section 4: Research Project

- A detailed description of the Ph.D. project (max 4 pages)
- An executive summary of the proposed work (long term objectives, specific aims, preliminary studies, research design and methods, budget – max 4800 characters including spaces)

In order to ensure the robustness of our application process, recommendation or reference letters are sent directly to us by both advisor and referent via our platform. They are not sent by the candidates, neither are they accessible to them.

IMPORTANT: Please note that recommendation/reference letters should be posted before the campaign closing date.

Please indicate the advisor and referent's names and contact details in the platform soon enough so that they have time to post their letters within the deadline.

We kindly ask you to liaise with them in order to ensure that the letters are posted on time.

Step 3 Review and selection

The review and selection of applications is a multi-phase process:

1. An initial review of all applications is made to ensure that submissions are complete and that applications meet the eligibility criteria.
2. A second review of applications is then conducted by 2 to 3 independent readers to assess scientific quality.
3. A final review is done by the Fund's Scientific Board.

Step 4: Publication of results

As soon as the applications for funding have been reviewed by the Scientific Board, the Fund will contact all applicants as well as Institution Representatives in their institutions to inform them about the results and will announce those selected for funding on its website (<http://researchfund.axa.com/publication-of-results>).

6 Contracting and follow-up

6.1. Contracting with the host institutions of selected applicants

Once the applications have been reviewed and fellowships have been granted, the AXA Research Fund will liaise with the Institution Representatives of the host institutions of the selected applicants to set in motion the contracting process.

Grantees will be kept up-to-date by their Institution Representative throughout the contracting process.

6.2. Follow-up

At the end of the first two years, a progress report should be sent by the Institution Representative to the AXA Research Fund.

At the end of the Doctoral fellowship, the laboratory should fill in an Executive Summary Report to inform the AXA Research Fund on the results of the grantee's research.