

Ministerul Cercetării, Inovării și Digitalizării

Unitatea Executivă pentru Finanțarea Învățământului Superior, a Cercetării, Dezvoltării și Inovării

NATIONAL PLAN FOR RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION FOR THE PERIOD 2022-2027, NCDIP IV

Challenges Programme Strategic Agenda Partnerships Centres of Excellence

sub-programme

Information package 2024

CUPRINS

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CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE Identifier: PN-IV-PRO-CoEx-2024 - 1

1. Purpose

Strengthening Romanian scientific research through the establishment of partnerships in areas of proven scientific excellence of research organisations, in order to form the critical mass of researchers and interdisciplinarity needed to address some of the challenges of the Strategic Research Agenda.

2. Specific objectives

- ✓ Organising research activities in centres of excellence that are developed around a common research agenda and that aim to achieve ambitious, clearly defined scientific objectives by building institutional partnerships (collaboration) and securing long-term funding;
- ✓ The formation of Centres of Excellence as scientifically first-class research communities within research organisations with outstanding achievements in the proposed research areas, which are already or have the potential to reach a level of excellence;
- ✓ Achieve outstanding, high-impact scientific results that advance frontier research internationally;
- ✓ Conduct highly creative, original research with major potential for innovation;
- ✓ Create an incentive environment for research that will attract and retain young researchers in the national research and innovation system, including those from the diaspora or abroad;
- ✓ Making efficient use of existing research infrastructures and ensuring access to the research and technology services they offer to the public and private users;
- ✓ To develop and strengthen scientific and technical skills of importance for economic and social development, including through the training of talented researchers for the Romanian research, academic and innovation system;
- ✓ Focus academic and research resources to strengthen knowledge and development cores in advanced and emerging technologies of interest for scientific advancement and collaboration with the private sector;
- ✓ The objectives and activities proposed by the projects must be measurable and in line with the indicators defined in Annex 1 of the SNCISI 2022-2027, approved by HG 933/2022.

3. Conditions for participation and implementation

- ✓ The Centre of Excellence is a research unit, set up on the basis of a partnership between research teams from at least 4 research organisations (public or private), with a common research and innovation agenda and plan;
- ✓ The partnership set up must ensure complementary and synergistic research capacities (resources and know-how); The number of partners and their contribution must be balanced and adequate to achieve the objectives of the common research agenda; A partnership as compact as possible is recommended to ensure a concentration of resources and interdisciplinarity;

✓ The Centre of Excellence is set up in an area of societal impact in an area defined in the extended Strategic Research Agenda of ^{Romania1} as follows:

1. Digitalisation, industry and space:

- 1.1 Open strategic autonomy in digital and emerging technologies and their humancentricity;
- 1.2 Regionally and globally attractive, secure and dynamic, data agile economy;
- 1.3 Clean industry and security of supply of raw materials;
- 1.4 Open strategic autonomy in the development, deployment and use of global space infrastructures, services, applications and data;
- 1.5 Circular economy.

2. Climate, energy and mobility:

- 2.1 Transitioning the energy sector towards climate neutrality and resilience;
- 2.2 Accessibility, supply and efficient use of energy;
- 2.3 Towards climate-neutral, climate-resilient and environmentally friendly mobility;
- 2.4 Intelligent mobility systems;
- 2.5 Behavioural changes to reduce climate footprint.

3. Food, bioeconomy, natural resources, biodiversity, agriculture and environment:

- 3.1 Increasing the relevance of forests in reducing pollution;
- 3.2 The contribution of agriculture to climate neutrality and resilience;
- 3.3 Recovery of biodiversity, conservation and sustainable restoration of ecosystems and ecosystem services;
- 3.4 Circular bioeconomy;
- 3.5 Management of water resources and sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture;
- 3.6 Food and nutrition security;
- 3.7 Sustainable, balanced and inclusive development of urban, rural and coastal areas;
- 3.8 Innovative governance models that encourage sustainability and resilience.

4. Health:

- 4.1 Healthy living in a fast-changing society;
- 4.2 Living and working in a health-promoting environment;
- 4.3 Managing disease and reducing disease burden;
- 4.4 Access to innovative, sustainable and high-quality healthcare;
- 4.5 New tools, technologies and digital solutions for a healthy society;
- 4.6 Developing an innovative, sustainable and competitive health industry.

5. Culture, creativity and inclusive society:

5.1 Reinvigorated democratic governance;

¹According to GD 933/2022 on the approval of the National Strategy for Research, Innovation and Smart Specialization, 2022-2027, <u>https://uefiscdi.gov.ro/legislatie-cdi</u>

- 5.2 Development of cultural heritage, arts, cultural and creative sectors;
- 5.3 Social and economic resilience;
- 5.4 Inclusive growth and reducing vulnerabilities.

6. Civil security for society:

- 6.1 Reducing losses caused by natural, accidental and man-made disasters;
- 6.2 Facilitating the mobility of passengers and the legal transport of goods, as well as preventing illicit trade, piracy and other criminal acts;
- 6.3 Manage crime and terrorism more effectively and improve the resilience and autonomy of physical and digital infrastructures;
- 6.4 Increasing cyber security and maintaining a safer online environment.
- ✓ Each project proposal must fall within a primary impact area (e.g. Area 6, impact area 6.1) and may fall within up to two secondary impact areas (e.g. 5.4 and 2.5); Inter and multidisciplinary research is encouraged;
- ✓ The joint research and innovation agenda and plan addresses a broad range of topics of interest, aiming at achieving high impact, creating new research initiatives, developing creative research and innovation teams and training talented new researchers for the Romanian research, academic and innovation environment;
- ✓ The programme funds primarily the human resources involved, with an emphasis on interdisciplinarity, collaboration and critical mass;
- ✓ Centres of Excellence are institutional, performance poles, including for attracting and retaining researchers from abroad;
- ✓ The project proposal (grant application) is submitted by a public law research organisation, as coordinator, together with at least 3 research organisations (public or private law), as partners, with complementary scientific expertise;
- ✓ The Centre of Excellence is coordinated by a Director, an internationally recognised scientific personality with proven leadership (including in research management) within the coordinating institution, capable of forming and coordinating an advanced research team; the Director of the Centre of Excellence is the project proposal manager;
- ✓ The research team leaders from each participating institution are researchers with international experience and scientific expertise relevant to the research topics addressed by the Centre of Excellence;
- ✓ The Director of the Centre, at the time of submission of the project proposal, has an employment contract of indefinite duration with the institution coordinating the Centre. He/she must devote a significant proportion of his/her time, min. 50% of a full time (min. 4h/day), to the activity of the Centre of Excellence throughout the funding period;
- ✓ The research team leaders, at the time of submission of the project proposal, from each partner institution have an employment contract with the institution. Each of them must devote a significant percentage of his/her time, min. 50% of a full time (min. 4h/day), to the work of the Centre of Excellence, during the whole funding period;
- ✓ Each institution in the partnership may nominate a maximum of. 5 key persons with international scientific expertise and experience relevant to the research topics addressed in the project proposal; each key person must devote min. 25% of his/her time to the project.

full-time (min. 2h/day) activity of the Centre of Excellence, for the entire funding period;

- ✓ Participating institutions provide the facilities necessary for the Centre of Excellence to carry out its activities, such as research infrastructure, laboratories, equipment (including IT equipment) and other resources;
- ✓ An International Scientific Council (ISC) composed of 5 members from abroad, researchers with internationally recognised achievements in the areas of primary and secondary impact (if applicable), will be set up at the Centre of Excellence within a maximum of 3 months from the signature of the grant contract. The ISC provides recommendations on the Centre's strategy, the content of the research agenda and research plan (including for their updating), provides feedback on the results of the Centre, supports the Centre in disseminating its results and linking it to relevant international initiatives in the field, etc. Other tasks of the ISC are determined at the time of its constitution.
- ✓ The Centre of Excellence benefits from the experience of an internationally recognised scientific personality (*highly cited personality*, *Nobel winner*, etc.) as a high-level mentor. The mentor must dedicate up to 60 days/year to the mentoring activity; the mentor's scientific work is not evaluated and does not contribute to the final score of the project proposal;
- ✓ The minimum funding score is 85 points;
- ✓ A maximum of 20 Centres of Excellence will be funded, distributed at the level of each area of the Strategic Research Agenda, as follows:
 - ➤ Digitisation, industry and space max. 5;
 - Climate, energy and mobility max 3;
 - *Food, bioeconomy, natural resources, biodiversity, agriculture and environment max 4;*
 - ➢ Health max. 4;
 - Culture, creativity and inclusive society max 2;
 - Civil security for society max. 2.
- ✓ At the level of an impact area (framed as a core area), a research organisation can participate in a single partnership (Centre of Excellence) as coordinator or partner;
- ✓ At the level of an impact area (core area), a maximum of one Centre of Excellence can be funded;
- ✓ A person may participate as project leader, partner leader or nominated key person in only one project proposal;
- ✓ At the level of a Centre of Excellence, the state budget funding requested by the coordinating institution of the Centre must be at least 40% of the total amount requested from the state budget;
- ✓ The participants in the implementation of the Centre of Excellence will benefit from the right of ownership or use of the results under the terms of the Partnership Agreement, as set out in Annex 4, which identifies and establishes the distribution between the partners of the ownership and exploitation rights over the results obtained during the project, as well as clauses on the mutual access of the partners to the equipment and technologies necessary for the implementation of the project; the method of dissemination of the results, etc. The Partnership Agreement must

concluded prior to the formulation of the offer and assumed by all partners. The document is uploaded in the submission platform, in the dedicated section;

- \checkmark The principle of portability of the research project is not applicable to this competition;
- ✓ Members of the advisory bodies may participate in the competition, provided that they have not been involved in the modification of any elements of the information package submitted for endorsement, subject to the legal provisions in force.

Note: Given the long-term funding, the programme is also an incentive for risk-taking and new research initiatives.

4. Budget

The budget for a project is min. 50.000.000 lei and max. 100.000.000 lei. The funding requested from the state budget for a project must reflect the real, domain-specific research costs.

The budget of the competition can be a maximum of 1.600.000.000 lei, for a period of 60 months, within the limits established by normative acts.

5. Duration

The projects will run for an initial period of 60 months. During the implementation period, projects are evaluated at mid-term and at the end. The results of the mid-term evaluations determine whether or not funding will continue.

Projects may benefit, on the basis of the evaluation, from an additional phase of max. 24 months with a specific budget. Funding from the programme budget for the additional period may cover up to 80% of the total budget necessary for the operation of the Centre of Excellence.

The programme leader will monitor the funding contracts in relation to the objectives assumed in the funding application and the indicators set out in Annex 1 of the National Strategy for Research, Innovation and Smart Specialisation approved by Government Decision No 933 of 2022.

6. Eligibility criteria

- ✓ Participating institutions (research organisations):
 - have legal personality and operate in Romania;
 - are not declared by law to be in default;
 - do not have their accounts frozen by a court order;
 - have fulfilled their obligations to pay taxes, duties and social security contributions to the component budgets of the general consolidated budget (state budget, special budgets, local budgets), in accordance with the legal provisions in force;
 - the legal representative has not been convicted within the last three years by a final judgment of a court of an offence concerning professional ethics or of committing a professional misconduct;
 - are not subject to an outstanding recovery order following a previous decision of the European Commission, national courts or the competition authority declaring an aid illegal and incompatible with the internal market;
 - did not provide misrepresentations with regard to the information requested by UEFISCDI for the selection of contractors;
 - they have not breached the provisions of another funding contract previously concluded with a contracting authority.

- ✓ Project Manager/Centre of Excellence:
 - has a PhD with internationally relevant expertise in the project topic;
 - may participate in a single project proposal as project leader, partner leader or key person in this competition.
 - ✓ Partner manager / key person:
 - has a PhD with internationally relevant expertise in the project topic;
 - may participate in a single project proposal as partner responsible, project leader or key person in this competition.
 - ✓ The structure of the partnership, the budget requested and the duration of implementation comply with the conditions imposed by this Information Package.
 - ✓ In order to avoid double funding, it is forbidden to submit projects which aim to carry out activities already funded or being funded, in part or in full, from other budgetary sources.
 - ✓ The grant application complies with all technical formatting and drafting specifications set out in this Information Package.

All project proposals not meeting these criteria will be declared ineligible.

7. Ethics

The project leader is responsible for ensuring that the project proposal complies with the rules laid down in Law No 206/2004 on good conduct in scientific research, technological development and innovation, as amended, the standards of research integrity set out in the ^{ALLEA2} European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, and other legislative ethical regulations specific to the research field of the project. In addition, where the scope of the project requires specific approvals and accreditations to be obtained, the project leader will ensure that these are obtained prior to submission of the grant application.

8. Equal opportunities

Equal opportunities, as well as gender equality, will be ensured for all participants, both in the implementation of the programme and at project level, in accordance with national legal provisions and European practices.

In the preparation and implementation of the grant application/project, project leaders must take all measures to promote gender equality. As far as possible, there must be a gender balance for all posts foreseen in the grant application/project, including at management level (partner team leader).

Also, as far as possible, during the implementation of the project, mechanisms should be foreseen to try to recognise the types of gender bias, when it occurs and the forms it takes and how to recognise and prevent it. In addition, attention should be paid to how gender equality is integrated into the content of the research and into any processes, mechanisms or deliverables set out in the grant application.

²<u>https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/</u>

9. Eligible expenditure3

9.1 Direct expenditure:

- *Staff costs* (experienced researchers, young researchers, PhD students, MSc students, engineers, technicians and other staff involved in the Centre's activities, employed during the research project in accordance with the legislation in force). A person responsible for ensuring adequate administrative and financial management may also be nominated in the project team at the level of the Centre. This category of expenditure may also include salary costs for members of the ISC. This expenditure includes legal contributions related to salaries and related ^{income4};
- *Logistics expenses* including:
 - *capital expenditure (max. 25% of the project value);*
 - *expenditure on stocks* (materials, consumables, inventory items and similar products needed to carry out the project);
 - *expenditure on services provided by third parties* (financial audit services relating to the project, publication costs, costs of access to libraries, archives, databases and other information sources, maintenance services for equipment used in the project, services for tests, measurements and the like, etc.). Project activities may be subcontracted up to a maximum of 5% of the project value (subcontracting costs).
- *Travel expenses* related to national and international travel of members of research teams and members of the Scientific Council. Travel expenses of national or international collaborators or participants in scientific events organised in the framework of the project may also be funded, subject to legal provisions.

9.2 Indirect expenditure

- *Overheads* (indirect) are calculated as a maximum of 20% of direct costs, less subcontracting and equipment costs.
- ✓ During the project, reallocations may be made between budget categories: staff costs, logistics costs and travel costs, up to a maximum of 15% of the total project budget, with notification at the reporting stage and in compliance with the provisions of the grant contract concluded with the Contracting Authority (does not imply the conclusion of an additional act to the grant contract). If the necessary reallocations exceed the 15%, there must be prior approval of the Contracting Authority (the contract is amended by an additional act).

10. Project evaluation

10.1 Submission

Projects are submitted in a single step using the online submission platform https://uefiscdidirect.ro. Submission of a project proposal is mandatory from an account

³ The categories of eligible expenditure are set out in GD no. 134/2011 for the approval of the Methodological Rules for establishing the categories of expenditure for research and development activities and for stimulating innovation, financed from the state budget.

⁴ Staff costs are subject to the regulations in force regarding the maximum limit of income earned by a person for participation in one or more projects cf. Annex 2 to GD no. 1188 of 29 September 2022 on the approval of the National Plan for Research, Development and Innovation 2022-2027.

created by the project manager (the login details for creating an account on the platform must be those of the project manager).

The grant application shall be written in English, as per *Annex 1*. It shall be uploaded to the submission platform as an unprotected *.pdf* file (document generated from a PDF text file).

10.2 Eligibility check

Project proposals are administratively checked by UEFISCDI staff to ensure compliance with the eligibility criteria. The result is: ELIGIBLE/NON-ELIGIBLE.

Projects with an ELIGIBLE rating enter the evaluation process. The list of project proposals declared eligible will be posted on the UEFISCDI website, https://uefiscdi.gov.ro.

Appeals concerning the fulfilment of the eligibility criteria can be sent by email to <u>centredeexcelenta@uefiscdi.ro</u> or by fax to 021/311.59.92 within 3 working days from the date of publication of the results.

If, during or after completion of the evaluation phase, it is found that any of the eligibility criteria have not been met, the project proposal will be declared ineligible and will be excluded from the competition.

10.3 Evaluation

Projects are evaluated by internationally recognised foreign experts with PhDs and at least 10 years' experience in scientific research. They have not had a contractual relationship with any institution involved in the evaluated project proposals during the last 5 years.

Each evaluator will declare in writing his/her impartiality and competence in the field of the project proposal under evaluation, as well as confidentiality. The evaluator undertakes, at any time during the evaluation process, to notify the UEFISCDI in writing if he/she discovers that one of these conditions is not met or that he/she is in a conflict of interest. If the UEFISCDI discovers or is informed of the existence of a conflict of interest or of a misconduct, it will take the necessary steps to replace the evaluator concerned.

Evaluations are anonymous, ensuring the confidentiality of the expert evaluators.

Individual assessment

Each project proposal is independently assessed for scientific quality online by five expert reviewers from abroad (3 experts with expertise in the primary impact area and one expert for each secondary impact area, if applicable). They complete the evaluation sheet (*Individual Evaluation Report*), awarding scores and identifying strengths and weaknesses in the form of lists for each evaluation criterion/sub-criterion, according to the evaluation sheet presented in *Annex 3* to this Guide. After completion of all individual evaluations for a project, each evaluator will have access to the comments and scores of the other evaluators. Each evaluator may adjust his/her comments and initial score if deemed necessary.

The expert evaluators are requested to provide, in the Individual Evaluation Sheets, possible questions to the Centre Director regarding possible clarifications needed to ensure the successful implementation of the project and the achievement of excellent scientific results.

Building consensus

Each project proposal has a nominated rapporteur, selected from the list of expert evaluators approved by MCID for this competition. The rapporteur did not participate in the individual evaluation of the assigned project.

The task of the rapporteur is to facilitate and mediate consensus between individual expert assessments (comments and scores for each assessment criterion/sub-criterion). Once consensus on the assessment has been reached, the rapporteur completes the *Consolidated Evaluation Report* which will contain, for each criterion/sub-criterion, the score awarded and the supporting comments, organised in the form of a list of strengths and weaknesses as appropriate. The other five expert evaluators will express their agreement or disagreement with the *Consolidated Evaluation Report* on the evaluation platform ("*agree/agree*" or "disagree/disagree" vote). If the *Consolidated Evaluation Report*, drafted by the rapporteur, is validated unanimously ("*agree/agree*" vote), consensus is considered to have been reached for that project.

If consensus is not reached, an online meeting is organised between the rapporteur and the expert evaluators for discussion and final decision. If consensus is not reached at this meeting, two additional expert evaluators are allocated. They complete the evaluation sheet (*Individual Evaluation Report*). The rapporteur then draws up a new *consolidated Evaluation Report*, taking into account all the individual evaluations and discussions. The *Consolidated Evaluation Report* is submitted to the evaluators for a vote and is validated by majority vote. If consensus is still not reached after this stage, the evaluation process for that project proposal is restarted.

Project Director's response

Once consensus has been reached, UEFISCDI staff make the *Consolidated Evaluation Report* available to project leaders in the accounts of the online project proposal submission platform, with an invitation to provide a written opinion on the evaluators' comments and notes.

The project leader's response, limited to 9,000 characters (including spaces), must be completed using a form available on the online submission platform within 3 working days from the date of the initial request for a response. The Project Director's point of view will be written in English and will consist strictly of a response to the critical comments of the evaluators as they appear in the *Consolidated Evaluation Report*, without introducing new elements to the project proposal. The Project Director's response is not mandatory and its absence does not affect the evaluation of the project.

Consensus report (after the *Project Manager's response* stage)

The evaluators and the rapporteur will be automatically notified of the online platform of the response given by the project manager. Through the forum interface, the evaluators and the rapporteur will discuss *the Project Manager's response*.

Following these discussions, the rapporteur may amend the *Consolidated Evaluation Report* by drafting *Consensus report*.

Panel evaluation

For each area, an interdisciplinary panel of rapporteurs and experts involved in the evaluation of project proposals is established.

All project proposals are considered at the panel meeting. In preparation for the panel meeting, each panel member has access to all project proposals, the project manager's response (if any) and the evaluation reports.

During the panel meeting, for each project proposal, the project manager is invited to present the project proposal (aim, objectives, partnership, expected results, etc.). Afterwards, the rapporteur presents the results of the evaluation process associated with the respective project, summarised in the *Consensus Report*.

The project manager is also invited to answer the panel's questions on specific issues. He/she can be accompanied by up to 3 people from the project team (partner managers or key persons).

Following these discussions, the panel members determine the final score awarded to each project by drawing up the *Final Evaluation Report and the* funding recommendation.

As far as possible, the panel meeting is with physical attendance, at the UEFISCDI headquarters.

10.4 Publication of evaluation results

The list of project proposals with the scores obtained in each field will be published on the UEFISCDI website, https://uefiscdi.gov.ro.

Project leaders are informed of the presence of *the Final Evaluation Report* in the accounts of the submission platform, https://uefiscdi-direct.ro, by sending a notification by email to the address specified in the project proposal.

Project proposals scoring less than 85 points are declared ineligible.

10.5 Disputes

Project leaders may submit appeals within 3 working days after the publication of the preliminary results. Appeals must be written in English and may only concern procedural flaws which the applicant considers not to be in conformity with the specifications in the Information Package. Appeals may only concern the evaluators' scores and comments if the comments clearly contradict the application and thus indicate a possible procedural flaw.

Appeals can be sent by email to <u>centredeexcelenta@uefiscdi.ro.</u>

10.6 Competition results

- ✓ The list of project proposals, at the level of each field, with the score established after the resolution of the appeals, is published on the UEFISCDI website.
- ✓ A project proposal can be recommended for funding if the final score obtained is at least 85 points.
- ✓ If there are two or more project proposals with identical final scores, they will be ranked according to the score obtained for each evaluation criterion, in the order of the final evaluation report.
- ✓ The list of project proposals recommended for funding, as well as the Reserve List, is submitted to the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitisation for decision.
- ✓ Once the competition has been finalised, UEFISCDI will publish the list of experts used in the evaluation process on the website <u>https://uefiscdi.gov.ro.</u>

10.7 Negotiating the budget and signing financing contracts

For project proposals accepted for funding, a funding contract is concluded between two parties: the Contracting Authority - UEFISCDI and the Contractor - the project coordinator. The funding contract will also include the Firm Cooperation Agreement between the institutions involved in the implementation of the project.

Winning project directors will negotiate with UEFISCDI the amount and structure of the requested budget. The basis for discussion is the comments in the final evaluation report on the degree of correlation between the objectives set and the budget requested. The negotiated budget may not exceed the amount of the budget initially requested in the Grant Application. The grant contract is signed after the negotiation process.

If funds are available due to non-contracting or reduction of the budget proposed for the projects accepted for funding or due to an increase in the budget initially allocated to the competition, the negotiation and contracting of projects included in the Reserve List will be initiated, in the order of the score obtained, up to the approved amount.

10.8 Main obligations of the parties

Coordinating Institution/Project Leader and Project Partners:

- They are responsible for the implementation of the project, respecting the deadlines and budgets allocated;
- Prepare and submit to the Contracting Authority scientific progress reports during the project and a final report, at the time and in the format established by UEFISCDI. The deadlines for the interim reports are proposed by the Project Director, in accordance with the work plan set out in the grant application, approved and may be revised by additional act;
- Publicise activities and advertise vacancies in the research project (including on the websites <u>www.jobs.mcid.gov.ro</u> and www.euraxess.ro);
- Ensures that the staff involved in the project have created and updated their scientific profile in the IT platform, https://brainmap.ro;
- Provides up-to-date information on the project's progress (at least the project summary, aims and objectives, partnership, team members and project results) on a web page;
- The institutions involved ensure the access of the project team to the existing research infrastructure and administratively support them in the implementation of the project;
- The project partners shall establish, by agreement, the intellectual property rights resulting from the project.

UEFISCDI:

- Provides financing and monitoring of the project, according to the terms of the grant contract, as required by law.
- Processes personal data in accordance with the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR 2018) and Law 190/2018 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, https://uefiscdi.ro/protectia-datelor-cu-caracter-personal.

11. Research failure

Research failure corresponds to situations where, following the proper execution of the activities foreseen in a research project, with the achievement of the deliverables assumed according to the funding contract, the results obtained do not agree with the preliminary ones (working hypotheses stated in the project proposal are not confirmed, the functionality preliminary in the project proposal is not validated).

For an ongoing project, research failure can be identified by evaluation and monitoring committees, set up for this purpose by the Contracting Authority (according to the provisions of art. 87 of GC no. 57/2002 with subsequent amendments and additions and chap. 11 and 13, letter r, of GD 1188/2022 on the approval of the National Plan for Research, Development and Innovation 2022-2027).

During evaluation and monitoring, the committees will determine whether:

- ✓ The project research team has respected the funding contract, carrying out the planned activities in good faith, even if the results are not the preliminary (expected) ones. This case falls under the research risk as defined by law.
- ✓ The project's research team did not carry out the activities foreseen in the grant contract properly or did not carry them out without notifying the Contracting Authority of the reasons for this situation. In these circumstances, the Contractor is responsible for the non-performance and the Contracting Authority may request the return of funds used inappropriately.

The process of identifying and certifying situations that fall within the scope of research risk involves examination:

- ✓ The way in which the project activities will be carried out in accordance with the grant application, annexed to the grant contract (compliance with the content and timetable);
- ✓ How the results (theoretical or experimental) will be achieved, including the achievement of deliverables associated with the objectives/activities, even if they differ from those preliminary in the grant application;
- ✓ the method of communication with the Contracting Authority regarding any discrepancies between the results obtained during the project and those initially foreseen in the grant application.

On the basis of the reports of the evaluation and monitoring committees, the Contracting Authority accepts the failure in the research, without there being any obligation to recover the funds spent from the state budget.

If the evaluation and monitoring committees find that, due to the Contractor's own fault, the stages/activities and objectives set out in the implementation plan for which funding was received have not been achieved, the project shall be interrupted and the share of funding allocated from the programme budget shall be returned to the Contracting Authority, in accordance with the legal provisions.

12. Competition calendar

ACTIVITY	TERM
Launch Competition	31 January 2024
Receipt of funding applications	22 April 2024, 16:00
Evaluation process	April - September 2024
Final results	October 2024

13. Statements⁵

- Declaration of compliance with the definition of research organisation Annex 5.1
- Declaration on the eligibility of the research organisation Annex 5.2
- Declaration of non-funding from other sources, certification of the legality and accuracy of the information contained in the grant application and the information filled in the submission platform Annex 5.3
- Affidavit of the host institution certifying acceptance of the implementation of the project in the institution Annex 5.4
- Declaration of consent to the processing of personal data Annex 5.5

⁵ Declarations to be completed, signed and uploaded to the submission platform, scanned in .pdf format

Funding Application - PN-IV-PRO-CoEx-2024-1

The document, including CVs, is in A4 format, uses Times New Roman font, 11 - point font size, 1.15 line spacing and 2 cm margins. Any modification to these parameters is forbidden. It is permitted to use 9-point font size for the figures and their captions. For each section the text marking the information (explanatory text) and the mandatory sections of the application must be maintained.

The funding applications that do not comply with these rules will be declared ineligible and will be disqualified from the evaluation process.

This document must be uploaded imperatively as an unprotected PDF file (document generated from a word processor file to a PDF, no scanned document allowed) on the submission platform.

A. Identification information (will be filled in the platform)

A.1. Coordinator

Name							
Legal representative							
Position							
Registration Year				CUI		Main CAEN code	
MCI-UEF-ID (Organization's unique https://brainmap.ro/organisations)		registra	ation code				
Address				Town / District			
Website							
Project Director /Centre Direct	or						
First name			Last name			NOC	
UEF - ID (identification number https://brainmap.ro)			Position				
Phone			Email				

A.2. Partners

Name						
Legal representative						
Position						
Registration Year			CUI		Main CAEN coo	de
MCI-UEF-ID (Organization's un code https://brainmap.ro/organis	ation					
Address				Town / District		
Website						
Leading partner						
First name		Last name	e		NOC	
UEF -ID (identification number <u>https://brainmap.ro)</u>		Position				
Phone		Email				

A.3 Project Information

- Project title:
- Summary (a brief overview of the objectives, research methodology, expected research results and impact) *max. 1,500 characters including spaces:*
- Acronym:
- Domain:
- Main Societal Impact Zone:
- Secondary Societal Impact Zone (optional):
- Secondary Societal Impact Zone (optional):
- Keywords (list 5-10 scientific keywords for the proposed centre).

The section **B** will be uploaded into the platform as a single document!

B. Project description

The explanatory text must be maintained.

Maximum 40 pages, using 11- point font size, 1.15 line spacing and 2 cm margins, will be at the applicant's disposal to address the following aspects:

B.1 Excellence

- Describe the project research objectives related to the main and secondary (if applicable) societal impact zone(s);
- Describe the initial common research agenda reflecting the needs, competences and resources identified at national and international level;
- Provide the strategy for addressing the challenges associated to the selected research domain / main/secondary societal impact zone(s) that will have an impact on international/national research themes and/or research methods;
- Describe how the proposed research will lead to an advance in research in the chosen main/secondary impact zone(s) compared to the current "state of the art" by referring to:
 - its dimension of novelty and originality;
 - novel and sound concepts and approaches;
 - novel and rigorous methodology to achieve the scientific goals of the Centre;
 - added value compared to state of the art;
 - o interdisciplinary character;
 - potential for groundbreaking results.

Describe the existing research infrastructure (the link to the platform<u>*https://eertis.eu/*</u> will be indicated) which will support addressing the research objectives.

B.2 Performance of the research groups

B.2.1 Centre Director

- Describe the ability of the Centre Director to conduct ground-breaking research;
- Describe the expertise and capacity of the Centre Director to successfully lead the Centre, including the leading of large research and innovation projects;
- Describe the sound leadership of the Centre Director in training and mentoring of young scientists.

B.2.2 Responsible persons from the partners (Group Leaders) and Key Members

- Describe the ability of the responsible persons (Group Leaders) from the partner/Key Members to conduct ground-breaking research;
- Describe the scientific expertise and capacity of the responsible persons from the partner in coordination and implementation of national and international competitive research projects.

B.2.3 Collaboration Networks

-Describe how the previous collaborations among research group partners (projects, patents, co-authored publications etc) establish a creative and dynamic partnership.

B.2.4. High - level Mentor

-Attach a letter of commitment (upload).

B.3 Implementation

B.3.1 Centre organisation

- Describe how the Centre will be organized, the management structures and governance (including the scientific advisory board);
- Describe the competencies/capabilities of the organisations involved in the implementation, including the roles of each partner and how they complement each other; what is it achieved through this collaboration;
- Describe if the Centre plans to attract international researchers;
- Describe how the Centre will build a creative environment capable to attract and train new research talents (the PhD candidates or postdoctoral researchers).

B.3.2 Work plan and schedule

- Describe the work plan and responsibilities of the persons involved including the necessary new staff positions/duration;
- A Gantt diagram or timeline related to the research agenda, deliverables and milestones;
- Describe the complementarity of the existing research infrastructure with the proposed equipment to be procured and justification of their use;
- Describe how the research agenda will be updated based on public consultation with industry, NGOs, citizens and public authorities as potential users of the research results;
- Describe how open science practices (e.g. Open Access to ^{publications6}, research data management, citizen science, and ^{other7}) are implemented and show how their implementation is adapted to the nature of work, therefore increasing the chances of the project to deliver on its objectives. *If applicants believe that none of the open science practices apply to their project, please provide a justification*;
- Describe the practices for research data management (RDM)⁸ used in the project in line with FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable). Should the proposal be funded, a plan for data management (DMP Data Management Plan) will be developed in the consortium within the first 6 months of implementation;
- Describe how the gender equality, inclusion and diversity is to be implemented within the project. Please indicate the web link to the Gender Equality Plan of the partners' institutions.

B.3.3 Budget

The size of the requested budget must take into consideration the real specific costs of the research activities, according to the scientific domain.

The types of expenses on which the budget is distributed are: personnel expenses, logistics expenses, travel expenses and indirect expenses (overheads).

The following aspects will be presented in detail:

(1) distribution of the budget by types of expenses and by project years must be indicated and justified; For the personnel expenses the total number of PM (Person Months) for each personnel category (senior researchers, PhD students, postdoctoral researchers etc) must be detailed.

(2) justification of the purchase of major equipments by referring to the already existing research infrastructure and project objectives/activities;

(3) workload of the Centre Director (min. 4 h/day), Group Leaders (min. 4h/day) and Key Persons (min.2 h/day) must be specified;

⁶<u>https://uefiscdi.gov.ro/news-cartea-alba-a-tranzitiei-catre-stiinta-deschisa-2023-2030</u>

⁷ https://www.unesco.org/en/open-science/toolkit

⁸ <u>https://scienceeurope.org/our-priorities/research-data/research-data-management/</u>

(4) the total budget of the Coordinator must be at least 40% of the total project budget.

Pre-calculation estimate (in lei, per calendar year):

Budget chapter	Year 1 (lei)	Year 2 (lei)	Year 3 (lei)	Year 4 (lei)	Year 5 (lei)	Total budget (lei)
Staff expenses						
Logistics expenses						
out of which the value for the equipment expenses						
Travel expenses						
Indirect expenses						
Total						

Pre-calculation estimate (in Euro, at the project level):

Budget chapter	Total budget (euro)
Staff expenses	
Logistics expenses	
Out of which the value for the equipment expenses	
Travel expenses	
Indirect expenses	
Total	

B.4 Impact

- Describe the expected research results and their anticipated scientific impacts and potential for scientific breakthroughs and identify the indicators according with SNCISI;
- Describe the expected impact of the research on long and medium term;
- Describe the potential areas of utilization and application of the research results beyond the scientific community;
- Describe how the Centre will contribute to the development of an internationally leading research environment in Romania;
- Describe the quality and scope of dissemination, communication and engagement activities with different target stakeholders.

B.5 Research ethics

If the project involves ethical issues, briefly describe how they are planned to be addressed in line with Law no. 206/2004 regarding the good conduct in scientific research, technological development and innovation, with subsequent amendments and additions, the European Code of Conduct for Integrity in Research from ^{ALLEA9}, as well as other legislative ethics regulations specific to the research field of the project.

B.6 Bibliography

⁹ <u>https://www.alleageneralassembly.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/European-Code-of-Conduct-Revised-Edition-</u> 2023.pdf

B.7 Our Peers

The Centre Director must indicate 3 - 5 internationally recognized research groups in the domain(s) of the Centre, and the most relevant scientific journals/publishers (max.10).

C. Research Teams (this section will be completed into the platform)

Please list the members of the research team: Centre Director, Group Leaders, and Key Persons - no more than 5 for each partner-, covering the interdisciplinary areas (members who, with their high-level scientific competences within their respective research domain, contribute substantially to the research and play an active and critical role in the success of the proposed endeavor).

	First name and last name	Position in the project (Centre Director/ Group Leader/ Key Person)	PhD year	Gender (M/F)	CV+track record (upload)
Project promoter (CO)					
Partner 1					
Partner n					

For each nominated person, please present the CV (uploaded as a single document of maximum 6 pages (saved with the name of the member), using the template from Annex 2 (A4 format, Times New Roman font, 11-point font size, 1.15 line spacing and 2 cm margins).

Annex 2 - CV template

C.1 CURRICULUM VITAE

Personal information

Name, Surname:		
Date of birth:	Se	ex:
Nationality:		
Researcher unique identifier(s) (ORCID, Researcher ID etc.):		
URL for personal website (if case):		

Education

Year	Faculty/department - University/institution - Country
YYYY (dissertation defended)	Ph.
YYYY	Master

Positions - current and previous

(Academic sector/research institutes/industrial sector/public sector/other)

Year	Job title - Employer - Country
YYYY	
уууу-уууу	

Career breaks (if case)

Year	Reason
уууу-уууу	

Project management experience

(Academic sector/research institutes/industrial sector/public sector/other. Please list the most relevant.)

Year	Project title - Role - Funder - Budget - link to project webpage
уууу-уууу	

Other relevant professional experience

(e.g. institutional responsibilities, organisation of scientific meetings, membership in academic societies, review boards, advisory boards, committees and major research or innovation collaborations, other commissions of trust in public or private sector)

Year	Description - Role
уууу	

C.2 Track record of the last 10 years

A list of the ten most important scientific outputs (publications, patents, technologies etc).

C.3 Narrative CV

A narrative summarizing which work has had the greatest importance and impact.

Annex 3 - Evaluation sheet

(30%)

Evaluation Criteria for Centres of Excellence

(CoEx 2024)

Criterion 1:Excellence

See sections B.1, B.6, B.7 from the funding application!

To what extent:

- *the project proposal is coherent with call objectives and fits with the main/secondary impact zone(s);*
- the proposed research addresses important research challenges that will have great impact on international/national research themes and/or research methods;
- the objectives are ambitious and beyond the state-of-the-art (e.g. novel concepts and approaches, development of novel methodology or development between or across disciplines); they are clear, realistic, and measurable;
- the proposed research has the potential to achieve ground-breaking results;
- *the outlined scientific approach is feasible;*
- *the proposed research methodologies are appropriate to achieve the scientific goals of the centre by the end of the project;*
- *the combination of scientific elements put forward in the proposal is crucial to address the scope and complexity of the research question;*
- *the proposed strategy and research methodology are interdisciplinary (if case);*
- *the existing research infrastructure is complementary/useful/innovative and adequate for the implementation of the project.*

Criterion 2: Performance of the research groups

See section B.2 from the funding application and CVs for all nominated persons!

To what extent:

Centre Director

- *the Centre Director has proven the ability to conduct ground-breaking research;*
- the Centre Director has the required scientific expertise and capacity to undertake the task of successfully leading the centre;
- the Centre Director has demonstrated sound leadership in training and mentoring young scientists.

Responsible persons from the partners (Group Leaders and Key Members)

- the Group Leaders and Key Members have demonstrated the ability to conduct ground-breaking research;
- the Group Leaders and Key members have the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project;
- the Group leaders and Key members have adequate experience in coordination and/or implementation of national and international competitive research projects.

Collaboration Networks

• the partnership is sound and suitable, based on previous collaborations among research group partners (projects, patents, co-authored publications etc);

(35%)

See sections B.3 and B.5 from the funding application!

To what extent:

Organisation centre

- the proposal goes beyond what the individual partners could achieve alone;
- the group successfully demonstrates in the proposal that it brings together the elements such as skills, knowledge, experience, expertise, disciplines, methods, approaches, teams necessary to address the proposed research question;
- *the management structures and governance (including scientific advisory board) are appropriate;*
- partner organisations have a valid role in the centre and adequate competencies/capabilities to carry out their role;
- the Centre has a strategy for dynamic international collaboration in the selected domain, for the entire duration of the project;
- the organisation of the Centre is optimal for the scientific collaboration and a fertile environment for attracting and training new research talents (PhD candidates or postdoctoral researchers).

Work plan and schedule

- the expertise level of researchers nominated in the project team is good and well-correlated with their contribution in the project;
- the proposed activities, deliverables and milestones are well structured and ensure the achievement of the proposed objectives and expected results, with adequate means of verification and contingency plans;
- *the responsibilities of the people involved are adequately described, including new necessary staff positions;*
- *the Gantt diagram is realistic;*
- the research agenda is updated based on public consultation with industry, NGOs, citizens and public authorities as potential users of the research results;
- *the Open Science practices are well demonstrated;*
- the research data management is convincing and in compliance with the FAIR principles;
- Throughout the project implementation, gender equality, inclusion and diversity are ensured by all organisations involved in the consortium;
- the ethical issues are appropriately addressed (if applicable).

Budget

- the requested budget is well justified and adequate in accordance with the proposed research activities, taking into consideration real costs of research activities according to the scientific domain;
- the requested equipment purchases are justified and relevant;
- the involvement of the Centre Director is significant and sufficient for a proper implementation of the project. in line with the call requirement at least 50% of FTE (min. 4 h/day);
- the involvement of the Group Leaders (responsible persons of Partners) is significant and sufficient for a proper implementation of the project, in line with the call requirement at least 50% of FTE (min. 4 h/day);
- the involvement of the Key Persons is sufficient for a proper implementation of the project, in line with the call requirement at least 25% of FTE (min. 2 h/day).

See section B.4 from the funding application!

To what extent:

- the Centre will contribute to the development of an internationally leading research environment in Romania;
- the quality and scope of dissemination, communication and engagement activities with different target audiences are adequately presented;
- the proposal can lead to significant scientific results (scientific breakthroughs);
- *the research results provide valid solution(s) to the challenge(s), with wide potential applications;*
- other medium- and long-term impacts are adequately justified.

Recommendations for Evaluators/Reporters:

1. Propose a score **only after** consensus has been reached on the comments; make sure that the comments are **concrete**, **complete** (i.e. address all questions) and **consistent** with the semantics of each score, namely:

0	INSUFFICIENT	The proposal does not address this criterion under examination, thus it cannot be assessed due to <i>missing or incomplete information</i> .
1	POOR	The proposal addresses this criterion improperly, or there are <i>serious weaknesses</i> .
2	FAIR	The proposal <i>broadly addresses</i> the criterion, but there are <i>significant weaknesses</i> .
3	GOOD	The proposal addresses the criterion <i>well</i> , although <i>improvements would be</i> A number of weaknesses/shortcomings are present.
4	VERY GOOD	The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although <i>improvements are</i> A small number of weaknesses / shortcomings are present.
5	EXCELLENT	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

- 2. When scoring each criterion use the full scale, from 0 to 5. The half point is allowed in the scores.
- 3. Each strength and weakness must be reflected only once in the report and the scores, i.e. there is no double penalty, no double reward.

Note: The final score will be calculated as a weighted sum of the scores for each subcriteria multiplied by 20 (final score between 0 and 100);

Final grade = 20*[(s.1*30/100 + s.2*35/100 + s.3*20/100 + s.4*15/100)] where s.i is the score for criterion i.

✓ In anticipation of the discussion with the project director, the expert evaluators are requested to provide, within the individual evaluation form, possible questions addressed to the project director, for further clarification necessary to ensure the implementation of the project and the achievement of excellent scientific results.

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT between the participants in the consortium

(Annex without a fixed format)

The collaboration agreement must include:

- 1. Partners' technical and administrative responsibilities;
- 2. Objectives, milestones, activities, expected results, monitoring documents, deadlines and responsibilities of partners, total amount needed from budget and co-financing;
- 3. The actual contribution of each partner in terms of financial, material and human resources at each stage of the project;
- 4. Categories of results, by stages and how partners use them;
- 5. How the partners identify, assign and exploit the property rights to the expected results (intellectual, production, broadcasting, marketing rights, etc.);
- 6. Termination clauses between partners;
- 7. Sustainability of the consortium and ways of institutional strengthening and prospects for the evolution of institutions with potential for recovery;
- 8. Confidentiality obligations;
- 9. Methods of dissemination of results.

It must be concluded before the offer is made. Must be assumed by all partners.

Annex 5.1 - Declaration of compliance with the definition of research organisation

Statement on whether the research organisation meets the definition of a research organisation

- It is an ^{entity10}, regardless of its legal status (public or private law organisation) or funding modality, whose primary objective is to independently conduct basic research, industrial research or experimental development, or to disseminate widely the results of such activities, through teaching, publication, or knowledge transfer.
- If the entity also carries out economic activities, the financing, costs and revenues of those economic activities shall be accounted for separately.
- Undertakings which can exercise decisive influence over such an entity, for example as shareholders or associates, cannot benefit from preferential access to the results generated by it.

Affidavit under penalty of perjury

Date: Legal representative

Function: Name and surname Signature

 $^{^{10}}$ universities or research institutes, technology transfer agencies, innovation intermediaries, physical or virtual research-oriented collaborative entities, including research cores established within hospitals or museums, that meet the criteria contained in the definition of research organisation

Annex 5.2 - Declaration on the eligibility of the research organisation

Affidavit on the eligibility of the research organisation

This declaration will be completed by all project partners

We declare on our own responsibility that(*full name of the organisation*) is not declared according to the law, in a state of inability to pay, has fulfilled its obligations to pay taxes, duties and social security contributions to the component budgets of the general consolidated budget (state budget, special budgets, local budgets), in accordance with the legal provisions in force and does not have its payments / accounts blocked according to a court decision.

The legal representative has also not been convicted in the last 3 years by a final court decision for an act prejudicial to professional ethics or for committing a professional misconduct.

At the same time, the unit is not guilty of:

- misrepresentation with regard to information requested by the Contracting Authority for the selection of contractors;
- serious breach of the provisions of another grant contract previously concluded with a Contracting Authority;

Affidavit under penalty of perjury

Date:

Legal representative

Function: Name and surname Signature

Declaration on non-financing from other sources, certification of legality and regularity the information contained in the grant application the information filled in the submission platform

I also confirm that the information included in this project proposal, as well as the details presented in the attached documents and the information filled in the submission platform are legal and correct.

I understand that if the grant application is not complete in all required details and aspects, including this statement, the project proposal may be rejected.

Affidavit, under penalty of elimination from the competition or the penalties of forgery of public documents.

Date: Legal representative

Full name (Signature)

Project Manager:

Full name (Signature)

Annex 5.4 - Sworn declaration by the host institution certifying acceptance implementation of the project in the institution

Affidavit from the coordinating/partner institution certifying acceptance of the implementation of the project in the institution

Affidavit under penalty of forgery of public documents.

Date: Legal representative

Function: Name and surname Signature

Annex 5.5 Declaration of consent to the processing of personal data

Declaration of consent to the processing of personal data

This declaration will be completed by all project partners

The undersigned, having the position of inframework...... declare that:

- I have been informed of the provisions of Regulation (EU) 679/26 April 2016 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data.
- I have been informed that I have the right of access, the right to intervene on my data and the right not to be subject to an individual decision.
- I have been informed that my personal data will be processed and stored within UEFISCDI.
- I have been informed that the processing of my personal data is necessary for the purposes of the legal obligations incumbent on UEFISCDI and for the purposes of my interests and rights.
- I have been informed that my personal data are communicated to the public authorities and other authorized institutions (e.g. ANAF, ANFP, ITM, ANI, at the request of the courts or criminal investigation bodies, etc.).
- I have been informed that in order to process my personal data accurately, I am obliged to inform UEFISCDI of any changes to my personal data.
- I have been informed that I have the right to withdraw my consent at any time by submitting a written, reasoned, dated and signed request to the UEFISCDI office, unless the processing of my personal data is necessary in connection with the employment/service relationship.

Accordingly, I consent to the processing, transmission and storage of personal data by UEFISCDI.

Date:

Legal representative / Project manager: (Name and surname) *Signature:*