



## Call for proposals

### **Rubicon** **March 2018**

2018 1st round

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The Rubicon is the river that Julius Caesar crossed in 49 BC before the series of victories that prompted his famous words 'veni, vidi, vici' ('I came, I saw, I conquered').

The Rubicon programme is directed at promising new postdoctoral researchers who are still at the start of their scientific careers but whose scientific qualities give them the potential to become established figures in Dutch scientific research. Rubicon is part of the NOW/ZonMw Talent Line and is regarded as a valuable step before a possible Veni application.

The programme offers researchers the opportunity to gain knowledge, skills and experience by spending up to 2 years at a top research institute outside the Netherlands. There is also a limited opportunity to apply for a research period at an excellent Dutch research institute.

## 1.2 Available budget

NWO has reserved 6.835 million euro for three submission rounds in 2018. There is a maximum of 2.28 million euro available for each submission round. For each submission round the budget is divided in proportion to the number of eligible applications between the units (see also paragraph 4.1):

- Applied and Engineering Sciences (AES)
- Science
- Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH)
- Health Research and Development (ZonMw)

## 1.3 Validity of the call for proposals

Deadline for submitting proposals is **March 29, 2018**, 14:00 hours (2 PM) CE(S)T.

## 2 Aim

The aim of the programme is to encourage talented researchers at Dutch universities and KNAW and NWO research institutes who have recently received their PhD to continue in academic research after having gained their PhDs. It offers them the opportunity to enhance their career prospects by spending up to 2 years gaining relevant knowledge, skills and experience at a top research institute outside the Netherlands. For certain scientific disciplines that focus on Dutch topics, e.g. Dutch language, culture and Law, there is an option to apply for a Rubicon at a Dutch research institute.

### 2.1 Promoting female researchers

Female researchers are especially urged to apply. The representation and advancement of women in academia is unfortunately far less than that of men. NWO/ZonMw and the Dutch Ministry for Education, Culture and Science are committed to rectifying this situation and hope that the KNAW, the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) and the Dutch universities will also strive to reach a percentage of female applicants which is at least comparable to the percentage of female researchers in the target group.

NWO/ZonMw strives towards success rates for female applicants both on average and in the medium-term as high as those for male applicants. In case of an ex aequo prioritisation of two or more applications, preference is given to the application of a female researcher.

# 3 Guidelines for applicants

## 3.1 Who can apply

Any postgraduate who is currently engaged in PhD research or who has been awarded a PhD within 12 months preceding the relevant deadline for the submission of applications may apply for a Rubicon grant.

*NWO/ZonMw can extend the deadline of 12 months after the formal award of a PhD, if the applicant has taken extended sick, parental, maternity or care leave within that period. The deadline may also be extended if the applicant has undertaken training in a clinical specialism recognised by the Royal Dutch Medical Association (KNMG) or has combined a part-time research appointment with care responsibilities. The maximum period of one year after the PhD can be extended by a maximum of one year, which means that applicants can submit an application up until 2 years after the PhD at the latest. Applicants who wish to be considered for an extension must submit a request to this effect to the Rubicon co-ordinator before they submit their grant application. They can do this by e-mail ([rubicon@nwo.nl](mailto:rubicon@nwo.nl)). More information on the conditions for extension can be found in the document Frequently Asked Questions.*

Applications are only admissible for selection if applicants meet the following formal conditions. Only applications that comply with these conditions will be considered (see also the FAQ-document):

- a. Applications must be submitted by individual researchers.
- b. Each applicant may only submit an application for a Rubicon grant once. An application is considered to have been submitted when NWO/ZonMw decides that it is admissible for the selection procedure.
- c. The PhD date (on the certificate) of an applicant must be within 12 months preceding the relevant deadline for the submission of applications.
- d. Applicants who are still completing their PhD research may only submit an application if their supervisor approves the thesis (by means of a written declaration with the Rubicon application). The researcher may start on the research as soon as the date for the defence of the PhD thesis is formally set, but no later than 1 December 2018.
- e. In the five years directly preceding the submission deadline, applicants must have conducted scientific research, paid or unpaid, in the Netherlands for a provable period at least equivalent to three years fulltime.
- f. Applicants may only apply for a Rubicon grant for a stay in a different country from where they graduated, unless that country is the Netherlands. Graduating means here obtaining the degree which would formally make one eligible to start a PhD project (e.g. a Master degree).
- g. Applicants may only apply for a Rubicon grant for a stay in a different country from where they obtained their PhD, unless that country is the Netherlands.
- h. For applications for research at a Dutch institute applicants may not apply for a Rubicon grant to conduct research at the knowledge institute where they graduated from. Graduating means here obtaining the degree which would formally make one eligible to start a PhD project.
- i. For applications for research at a Dutch institute applicants may not apply for a Rubicon grant to conduct research at the knowledge institute where they obtained their PhD from.

- j. On the submission deadline, applicants may have been conducting research at the host institute after the PhD period (the PhD defence does not have to have taken place yet) for a period equivalent to no more than six months fulltime.
- k. The Rubicon research should be conducted over an uninterrupted period.
- l. The researcher conducts the Rubicon research at a single host institute. Depending on the research subject, external data collection or field research may be approved.
- m. Applications in which the harvesting and use of new human embryos takes place are not admissible. Research that uses existing embryos is admissible on the condition that an ethical committee gives consent to the proposed research. See chapter 3.5.1 for the specific conditions regarding ethical aspects.

## 3.2 What can be applied for

Applicants can apply for a stay of at least 12 months and no longer than 24 months at a top academic research institute outside the Netherlands. There is also a limited opportunity to apply for a research period of at least 12 months and no longer than 24 months at an excellent Dutch research institute (see paragraph 3.2.2.). It is not possible to combine a stay in the Netherlands and abroad.

Eligible costs for funding are salary costs for the researcher including the relevant social fees and taxes, research costs and travel costs. Costs for infrastructure (housing and office equipment) and overhead are not eligible for funding.

### 3.2.1 Research outside the Netherlands

NWO/ZonMw advises the researcher to enter into or remain in the employment of a Dutch know

ledge institute during the project. This institute will manage the grant and second the researcher to the foreign guest institute. The employment conditions of Dutch knowledge institutes are then applicable.

If the researcher opts for an appointment at a foreign institute then the foreign institute will employ the researcher under at least comparable conditions to those that apply to an average postdoc employed at the guest institute. The guest institute must be a recognised institute for scientific research that is (largely) financed by public funds.

The size of the grant depends on the country of where the host institute is situated and the length of the stay and is determined according to a basic payment of 63,000 euro per 12 months and a list of correction coefficients per country. On top of this the grant includes 230 euro per month for research costs and NWO/ZonMw covers travel costs; once if the stay is 12 months and twice if the stay is longer than 12 months. NWO's/ZonMw's standard rates for various destinations can be found in the Rubicon Terms and Conditions.

### 3.2.2 Research in the Netherlands

Rubicon also offers Dutch researchers the option of using the grant to conduct research in the Netherlands, primarily designated for applications that focus on Dutch topics, e.g. Dutch language, culture and law. However, preference will be

given to researchers who apply for a grant to spend time outside the Netherlands, as international research experience is likely to be an advantage at a later stage in the applicant's academic career and in applying for other NWO/ZonMW grants.

The Dutch host institute will be assumed to be the employer and NWO/ZonMW will pay it a grant of 63,000 euro per 12 months. NWO/ZonMW will not act as the employer and the Regeling Overlaten Werkgeverschap will not apply. The following Dutch knowledge institutions are eligible as a host institute for Rubicon:

- Dutch universities;
- NWO and KNAW institutes;
- the Netherlands Cancer Institute;
- the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen;
- NCB Naturalis in Leiden;
- Advanced Research Centre for NanoLithography (ARCNL);
- The Princess Máxima Centre.

### 3.3 When can applications be submitted

The deadline for the submission of proposals is **March 29, 2018** at 14.00 hours (2 PM) CE(S)T.

Applications that are submitted after the deadline will not be included in the procedure. Applications cannot be improved or altered after the deadline.

When you submit your application to ISAAC you will also need to enter additional details online. You should therefore start submitting your application at least one day before the deadline of this call for proposals. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be taken into consideration.

### 3.4 Preparing an application

- Download the application form from the electronic application system ISAAC or from NWO/ZonMW's website (on the grant page for this programme).
- Complete the application form.
- Save the application form as a pdf file and upload it in ISAAC.

The application (to be filled in the form) consists of

- a research proposal written in English (max. 6 pages A4, 2000 words not including references; the word count does include footnotes, figure captions and tables.),
- the applicant's CV (max. 3 pages A4) and a list of publications
- attachment two recommendation forms  
one acceptance form from the intended host institute.
- applications from applicants who have not yet been awarded a PhD must also be accompanied by a form approving their thesis.

The application form, the forms for recommendation, the acceptance form from the host institute and the form for the written statement approving the thesis will be available on the website approximately 8 weeks before the deadline.

### 3.5 Conditions on granting

The Rubicon grants are intended for researchers to acquire knowledge and gain experience by carrying out postdoctoral research and not for acquiring a degree at a foreign university.

The research should start between 1 September and 1 December 2018. If the research is terminated early then NWO/ZonMw will determine whether the grant will have to be paid back by the researcher in full or in part, insofar as the employer of the Rubicon researcher fails to reimburse NWO/ZonMw (on time) for any funds received but not yet used and/or if the funds spent justify this.

After receiving the final instalment the host Institute must recalculate the salary in order to fully spend the Rubicon.

The NWO Grant Rules 2017 and the Agreement on the Payment of Costs for Scientific Research apply to all applications except where it is at variance with the specific terms and conditions of Rubicon research grants (see this brochure and the Terms and Conditions of Rubicon Research Grants November 2017, available on the NWO website: [www.nwo.nl/funding-rubicon](http://www.nwo.nl/funding-rubicon)).

#### **Ethical aspects**

Any research proposals that raise ethical questions must be carefully considered before the scientific research is carried out. Certain research require a statement of approval from a recognised medical ethics review committee or an animal experiments committee. For some research proposals a licence in accordance with the Population Screening Act (WBO) is required. More information on METCs is available at the Central Committee On Research Involving Human Subjects (CCMO), on DEC's the Dutch Association for Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees provides information and for the WBO The Health Council of the Netherlands can provide information.

A Rubicon applicant is responsible for determining whether his/her research proposal might raise ethical questions and for obtaining a statement of approval from the correct ethics review committee and/or obtaining a licence on the basis of the Population Screening Act, if necessary.

NWO/ZonMw subscribes to the Openheid Dierproven (Freedom of Information on Animal Experiments) and the Biosecurity Code. Rubicon applicants must subscribe to and comply with the prevailing codes.

A research project can only start when NWO/ZonMw (if applicable) has received a copy of the approving ethical statement and/or Population Screening Act licence. NWO/ZonMw also expects that the applicants pay due consideration to the timetable of the Rubicon evaluation and the time needed for the assessment by the ethics review committee or the application for a Population Screening Act licence. For complex questions related to ethical issues, NWO/ZonMw reserves the right to consult an external adviser.

If after consulting the applicant, NWO/ZonMw is of the opinion that an ethical assessment is needed for an application then the applicant is obliged to take the necessary measures for such as assessment. If the applicant fails to obtain the necessary statement of approval from an ethics review committee before the starting date of the project, then the grant shall be immediately withdrawn. Applicants can pose any questions they may have to the Rubicon programme coordinator, see 5.1 for contact information.

## Employment

For all Rubicon grants, the host institute should state in the letter of invitation (acceptance form) that it is willing to offer the applicant facilities for at least the duration of the research, and that it shall employ the researcher. A Rubicon grant does not constitute a contract of employment with NWO/ZonMw.

Rubicon research may be conducted on a part-time basis provided that the time the researcher devotes to it amounts to at least 75% of the normal 40-hour working week. If less than 100% of the time is devoted to Rubicon research then the grant shall be proportionately reduced or the grant period extended in accordance with the percentage reduction in the working hours. For example if someone applies for a project of 24 months fulltime, the project may also be conducted in 30 months for 0,8fte. If one wants to complete the project in 24 months working 0,75fte the grant amount will be equal to 18 months fulltime.

Researchers are not allowed to receive any funding from other sources for the research that is financed by Rubicon. Researchers who expect to receive other funding should contact the Rubicon programme coordinator.

NWO/ZonMw guarantees the continued payment of the salary during the pregnancy leave in accordance with Dutch legislation for a maximum period of 16 weeks. If a foreign institute employs the researcher then, in principle, the relevant regulation there applies. If the foreign institute has no provision with respect to pregnancy leave then the regulation stated above will apply. If a person is employed by a Dutch research institute then Dutch employment conditions apply.

## Open Access

All scientific publications resulting from research that is funded by grants derived from this call for proposals are to be immediately (at the time of publication) freely accessible worldwide (Open Access). There are several ways for researchers to publish Open Access. A detailed explanation regarding Open Access can be found on [www.nwo.nl/openscience-en](http://www.nwo.nl/openscience-en).

## 3.6 Submitting an application

An application can only be submitted to NWO via the online application system ISAAC. An exception to this are the applications for Health Research and Development (ZonMw). Applications for ZonMw can be submitted via ZonMw ProjectNet. Applications not submitted via ISAAC/ProjectNet will not be taken into consideration.

A principal applicant must submit her/his application via her/his own ISAAC/ProjectNet account. If the principal applicant does not have an ISAAC/ProjectNet account yet, then this should be created at least one day before the application is submitted to ensure that any registration problems can be resolved on time. If the principal applicant already has an ISAA or ProjectNet-account, then she/he does not need to create a new account to submit an application.

When you submit your application to ISAAC/ProjectNet you will also need to enter additional details online. You should therefore start submitting your application at least one day before the deadline of this call for proposals. This will enable the applicant to report possible problems in time so they can be solved before the deadline expires. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be taken into consideration.

Please note that ProjectNet asks applicants after they submitted their proposal to send in an confirmations of doing so. Please send this confirmation to [rubicon@zonmw.nl](mailto:rubicon@zonmw.nl).

For technical questions please contact the ISAAC helpdesk or the ZonMw helpdesk (see Section 5.1.2).

# 4 Assessment procedure

## 4.1 Procedure

The first step in the assessment procedure is to determine the admissibility of the application. This is done using the conditions stated in Chapter 3 of this call for proposals. Applications that do not meet these requirements will not be considered.

The NWO Code of Conduct on Conflicts of Interest applies to all persons (including NWO/ZonMw staff) involved in the assessment and/or decision-making process. Because Rubicon grants are quite small with a modest budget, article 2.2.4, paragraph 2 of the NWO Grant Rules applies, which means that for certain programmes no external reviews will be used. Therefore the views of external referees will not be sought. This makes the procedure as short as 4 months.

Rubicon applications are submitted in four units:

- Science
- Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH)
- Applied and Engineering sciences (AES),
- Health Research and Development (ZonMw)

For each of the units a multidisciplinary assessment committee will be installed. Because the small number of applications received in the unit Applied and Engineering sciences (AES) each round these applications will be rated together with the applications from Science. Grants will be awarded by the boards of the responsible NWO/ZonMw units based on the basis of priority and available budget.

NWO/ZonMW gives all full proposals a qualification. The applicant is informed of this qualification when the decision about whether or not to award funding is announced.

Only proposals that receive at least the qualification very good will be eligible for funding.

For further information about the qualifications see [www.nwo.nl/kwalificaties](http://www.nwo.nl/kwalificaties).

29 March 2018	Deadline submission of proposals
Mid April 2018	Message on the admissibility
May – June 2018	Meetings of the multidisciplinary assessment committees
Late June 2018	Decision made by the boards of the participating units
Mid July 2018	Announcement of the results to the applicants
1 September 2018	Earliest possible starting date for research
1 December 2018	Latest possible starting date for research

## 4.2 Criteria

All applications will be assessed on the basis of the criteria quality of the applicant, quality of the proposal, quality of the host institute and knowledge exchange and impact. These criteria will weigh 30%, 30%, 30% and 10% respectively in the final assessment.

- *Quality of the applicant*  
NWO/ZonMw will judge whether the applicant is among the best members of his or her generation in the relevant field of study. Evidence for this will be sought in the CV, including publications (number and quality), the 2 letters of recommendation and the acceptance form from the host institute.
- *Quality of the proposal*  
The quality of the proposed research and its significance for the relevant field of study (whether it is innovative and pioneering) and the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of the research plan (the length of the proposed period of research must be in proportion to the work to be done).
- *Suitability of the host institute*  
The host institute, including the research group and direct supervisor should offer the applicant a stimulating research environment and possess good facilities for academic research. The quality of the host institute will be considered in relation to the proposed research. The mobility of the researcher plays an important role in the evaluation and selection process.
- *Knowledge exchange and impact*  
Relevance of the results and/or new insights generated by the proposed research to current economic, societal, cultural, policy-related or technological problems and probability that they will help to solve them.

Since 2009, NWO/ZonMw has pursued a concrete policy that aims to stimulate the transfer of knowledge generated with the help of funding from NWO/ZonMw. This transfer can take place to other scientific disciplines as well as to users outside of science (industry/society). The knowledge utilisation policy is mainly targeted at increasing researchers' awareness of knowledge utilisation. NWO/ZonMw therefore requests all researchers applying for funding to provide an explanation regarding the possible knowledge utilisation of their project by means of answering several questions (for example: how will knowledge utilisation be implemented and how does the researcher intend to facilitate knowledge utilisation?). This explanation is one of the assessment criteria.

During the assessment, attention is paid to:

- a realistic representation of the knowledge utilisation possibilities (or the lack of possibilities);
- the extent to which the action plan is made tangible with respect to knowledge utilisation.

NWO/ZonMw realises that the possibilities for knowledge utilisation differ per discipline and that some research projects have few if any opportunities for (direct) knowledge utilisation. In this case, an applicant should explain why no knowledge utilisation can be expected for his or her project. The selection committee members will still be asked to assess this explanation: if they are convinced that the research project indeed has no knowledge utilisation possibilities and that the applicant has satisfactorily explained this, then this should not negatively influence the overall assessment score.

Examples of knowledge utilisation can be found at [www.nwo.nl/en/policies/knowledge+utilisation](http://www.nwo.nl/en/policies/knowledge+utilisation).

# 5 Contact details and other information

## 5.1 Contact

### 5.1.1 Specific questions

For specific questions about Rubicon and this call for proposals please contact:

Mr. Joris Voskuilen  
Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)  
PO Box 93138  
2509 AC The Hague  
Telephone: +31 70 3440989  
E-mail: [rubicon@nwo.nl](mailto:rubicon@nwo.nl)

### 5.1.2 Technical questions about the electronic application systems ISAAC and ProjectNet

For technical questions about the use of **ISAAC** please contact the ISAAC helpdesk (NWO). Please read the manual first before consulting the helpdesk. The ISAAC helpdesk can be contacted from Monday to Friday between 10:00 and 17:00 hours CET on +31 (0)20 346 71 79. However, you can also submit your question by e-mail to [isaac.helpdesk@nwo.nl](mailto:isaac.helpdesk@nwo.nl). You will then receive an answer within two working days.

For technical questions about the use of **ProjectNet** (ZonMW) please contact the ProjectNet helpdesk. The ProjectNet helpdesk can be contacted from Monday to Friday between 08:00 and 17:00 hours CE(S)T on +31 (0)70 349 51 78. However, you can also submit your question by e-mail to [ProjectNet@zonmw.nl](mailto:ProjectNet@zonmw.nl). Please leave your e-mail or phone number so if necessary you can be contacted.

#### Disclaimer

The Dutch text of this Call for Proposals is the authentic text and it prevails over any translations of them.

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Laan van Nieuw Oost-Indië 300  
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