



**Earth and Life Sciences**

**Call for proposals**

**ALW Open Programme**

The Hague, November 2017  
Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This document describes whether, and how, you can apply for a grant for research in the earth and life sciences with respect to the ALW Open Programme of NWO's Domain Science.

The ALW Open Programme is a responsive mode grant programme based on open competition without thematic or programmatic preselection for the whole field of research of the earth and life sciences with the innovative nature and scientific quality of the submitted research proposal in the forefront.

The field of research covered by the earth and life sciences comprises the earth, the seas, the atmosphere and the organisms living in the biosphere, as well as the interactions between and within them. An application within the ALW Open Programme should address a research question related to earth or biological sciences. A fundamental biological question is a question aiming at an answer about the functioning of a living organism in its natural environment.

Proposals of a biomedical nature should be submitted to the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMw), unless the main objective relates to research with a fundamental biological question. Proposals of a chemical nature should be submitted to the discipline for chemical sciences (CW).

We recommend that you visit our [website](#) before submitting your application, to check that you have the latest version of these guidelines, and that you read the entire document carefully before applying for a grant.

## 1.2 Available budget

For applications submitted in the ALW Open Programme between 1 November 2017 and the deadline for submitting on 1 May 2018, the NWO Domain Science has a budget available of approximately 8.7 million euros.

## 1.3 Validity of the call for proposals

This call for proposals is valid from 1 November 2017 onwards and replaces the previous version. The deadline for submitting an application is Tuesday 1 May 2018, 14.00 h. Until the deadline, proposals can be submitted at any time.

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## 2 Aim

### 2.1 Aim of the Open Programme

The primary aim of the Open Programme is to promote innovative high-quality scientific research over the full spectrum of the earth and life sciences.

### 2.2 NWO encourages knowledge utilisation

NWO annually invests over 675 million euros of public funds in academic research. Such research ranges from fundamental to applied and may be either responsive mode or part of a thematic programme. Use of the results of scientific research by the public and private sector can increase the prosperity and well-being of the nation, as well as helping the Netherlands to achieve its ambition of becoming a knowledge society. For this reason, NWO asks all grant applicants to elucidate the potential utilisation of knowledge resulting from their proposed research. This information will be taken into account when assessing their proposals.

NWO defines knowledge utilisation as: *a process that promotes the use of the outcomes of scientific research both outside academia and by other academic disciplines. This process frequently requires interaction between the researcher and the potential knowledge user and such interaction may occur at any stage of the research, from the formulation of the research question right through to the dissemination of the results.*

Knowledge utilisation is in general not the main concern for recipients of NWO responsive mode grants. However, such research can make a valuable contribution to developments in society, if only in the long run. NWO encourages researchers to achieve wider knowledge utilisation by asking them to reflect in advance on the potential for it and to develop concrete action plans in this respect.

# 3 Guidelines for applicants

## 3.1 Who can apply

**a** - Researchers from the following knowledge institutions can submit proposals:

- Dutch universities;
- NWO and KNAW institutes;
- the Netherlands Cancer Institute;
- The biodiversity centre NCB Naturalis
- the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen;
- researchers from the DUBBLE Beamline at the ESRF in Grenoble;
- Advanced Research Centre for NanoLithography (ARCNL);
- Prinses Maxima Centrum.

**b** - Researchers from the following knowledge institutions can submit a proposal provided that the institution cooperates with a Dutch university in the project for which a grant is being applied for, apparent from a contribution to the project by the university in terms of personnel or material:

- Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute;
- UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education.

**c** - Other Dutch knowledge institutions in the field of earth or life Sciences can submit a request to the NWO Domain Science board to be admitted to the ALW Open Programme. Please refer to the 'NWO Regulation on Granting' for this. The domain board may impose additional conditions on the embedding of the research, in a financial, logistical, or substantial sense. Only after admission can applications be submitted.

**d** - Applicants must hold a doctorate and/or be professor.

**e** - Applicants must have a paid appointment for at least the duration of the application process and the research for which the grant is requested.

**f** - Applicants with a temporary position which ends before the end of the proposed research project, can only apply in case the knowledge institution guarantees the position of the applicant for the entire research period. The form for this statement can be requested via [alwopenprogramma@nwo.nl](mailto:alwopenprogramma@nwo.nl).

**g** - Employees who have a 'zero-hours' contract (0-aanstelling) or a contract as an unpaid guest researcher cannot apply.

**h** - Applicants may not apply for a position for themselves.

**i** - Per applicant only one application can be processed in the ALW Open Programme at any given instance. As soon as an application is awarded or rejected, a new application may be submitted.

**j** - An application may be resubmitted once, provided that a substantial correction or addition was made in reaction to the previous assessment.

**k** - Applicants who have received a grant under the Innovative Research Incentives Scheme may not submit a proposal to the ALW Open Programme for 2½ years after the decision date of that grant.

**l** - A grant is always applied for by a single applicant; co-applicants are not permitted.

**m** - When applying for a PhD student (AIO), the research group must have a promotor. The promotor does not need to be the applicant.

### **3.2 What can be applied for**

Under the Open Programme, one scientific personnel post can be requested for the purposes of a research project. Either a PhD student, who can be requested for a period of 4 years, or a postdoc for a period of up to 3 years.

In addition, grants can be requested to cover all non-infrastructure costs necessary for the research, such as materials (instruments, consumables) and fieldwork and its associated travel costs. Each cost category should be accompanied by a brief explanation.

The application should fit within the area of the earth and life sciences. This comprises the earth, the seas, the atmosphere and the organisms living in the biosphere, as well as the interactions between and within them. An application within the ALW Open Programme should address a research question related to earth or biological sciences. A fundamental biological question is a question aiming at an answer about the functioning of a living organism in its natural environment.

Proposals of a biomedical nature should be submitted to the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMw), unless the main objective relates to research with a fundamental biological question. Proposals of a chemical nature should be submitted to the discipline for chemical sciences (CW).

### **3.3 When can applications be submitted**

The deadline for submitting an application is Tuesday 1 May 2018, 14.00 h. Until the deadline, proposals can be submitted at any time.

Applications that are submitted after the deadline will not be included in the procedure.

The NWO office processes application in order of arrival. If your application is declared admissible NWO strives to inform you within 5 months about the award or rejection of your proposal. After approximately 2 to 3 months, you will receive the reviewers comments for your reaction.

An application you have submitted cannot be modified during the processing. You do have the right to withdraw your proposal.

### **3.4 Preparing an application**

Your grant application has two parts: an on-line section and the research grant application form.

- You complete the on-line section directly in NWO's electronic application system.
- The research grant application form can be found on the grant page for this programme on the NWO website. As soon as you have completed it you can upload this form in the on-line system as a PDF file.

Both parts should be completed in English. The total research proposal may not exceed 14 pages. If the application form is not completed in full or the maximum number of pages is exceeded, your application may be rejected as inadmissible. Additional documents - other than a statement of appointment or a letter of

commitment from a stakeholder (see 'who can apply' paragraph 3.1f and 'knowledge utilisation'; paragraph 3.4: element 7C) - are not permitted.

It is possible to indicate which referees you do not consider appropriate to assess your proposal (also known as 'non-referees', no more than three per proposal). The names of these non-referees can be entered in the electronic system.

Below you find an elucidation concerning the questions on the research proposal application form:

### **1a. Details of proposal**

The ALW Open Programme operates with one committee. When necessary the assessment can be divided over two committees. When two committees are operational they get a different emphasis.

*Geosphere and Biosphere*: This committee concentrates on applications in the field of earth sciences (deep underground, earth's surface, oceanography and meteorology), ecology, biodiversity and evolution.

*from Molecule to Organism*: This committee concentrates on life sciences applications in the field of molecular biological processes, microorganisms, plant sciences, zoology, human biology and biophysics.

Besides the title of your proposal, you can indicate which committee should preferably assess your proposal if two committees are used.

### **1b. Research fields**

For all applications it is compulsory to fill out one or more research fields that correspond to the subject of your research proposal. You can only refer to the codes and descriptions from the NWO research field list. Please find the full list via: <http://www.nwo.nl/en/funding/funding+process+explained/research+fields>

### **1c. Details of applicant**

Details of the main applicant, the research institute and the research school. Also, state the name and address of the responsible person at your institution (for example the scientific director of the institute or dean of the faculty). When you submit a proposal, NWO assumes that you have informed your institution and that it agrees to provide all the infrastructure required for this research, including the associated costs not requested from NWO. If your application is granted, a copy of the granting decision will be sent to this person.

### **1d. Alternative contact**

Please state the name and address of the person who can provide further information about the application in the applicant's absence.

### **1e. Renewed application**

Applications which have previously been assessed and rejected, are only eligible in case they have been substantially revised. If you have previously submitted an application for this research project which was rejected in the ALW Open Programme or in another NWO programme, please indicate which points of the application have been changed. Please also state the previous file number.

### **1f. Applying for**

Please indicate whether you are applying for a PhD or postdoc position.

### **2a. Composition of the research group**

Please indicate the who will be verifiably involved in carrying out the proposed research, including the personal support requested. Please give their surnames with initials, titles and specialisation. You should also state the nature of their involvement, such as day-to-day supervision, technical support, promotor, or advisor. When applying for a PhD position the 'promotor' (doctoral advisor) must be indicated here.

## **2b. Top 5 publications of the applicant and research group related to the proposed research**

Give a summary of no more than 5 publications of the applicant and the research group involved, which are relevant to the proposed project. This list plays an important role in verifying the international status of the research group involved.

## **3a. Scientific summary**

Please provide the scientific summary of the fact sheet with up to 250 words. This summary will be used to invite reviewers to assess your proposal, it should therefore have sufficient scientific content.

## **3b. Summary for the broad scientific committee**

Please provide a summary of approximately 250 words aimed at the division-wide committee (Earth and Life sciences). This summary may focus more on background and motivation than the scientific summary.

## **3c. Summary for the general public**

Please give a catchy title and a summary with a maximum of 100 words, in Dutch, of your application for the general public. This should preferably come in the form of a press release. If your application is awarded, this summary will be used for publicity purposes.

## **4. Description of the proposed research**

Please describe the proposed research in no more than 4 pages including figures and address the following aspects:

- Objective: state the scientific objective or objectives of the project proposal and the scientific background.
- Approach: indicate how the research is to be conducted and which methods and equipment will be used.
- Preliminary data.
- Innovation: describe the originality and the innovative aspects of the research question and the proposed approach.
- Impact: indicate the scientific importance of the project both within and beyond the relevant specialist area.

Furthermore, not within the 4 pages but within the 14 page limit:

- References: include full bibliographical details, such as authors, title, journal.

## **5. Timetable of the project**

Indicate the schedule of the entire project, in time periods (no more than half a page). Specify the activities to be carried out as part of the project. Which tasks can be distinguished as those of the researcher requested, and how will they be timetabled? For a PhD position: when will the doctoral thesis be defended? It is important that doctoral research should be completed within the 4 years available. This is why there should be a realistic timetable. NWO requires the work plan to be framed in such a way that the experimental phase is completed after 3½ years and the writing of the thesis is started in good time, to enable the doctoral thesis to be defended at the end of the grant period.

Details about the proposed experiments do not belong in this section; they should be described under point 4 in the application.

## **6. Scientific embedding of the proposed research**

Describe the relationship with national and international research programmes and the collaborations relevant to this project.

## **7. Knowledge utilisation**

*Please note that the score for the assessment criterion 'knowledge utilisation' will be determined at the NWO office based on your answers to the questions per aspect. The reviewers and the committee do not score this criterion.*

There are eight facultative aspects which will be scored for the assessment of the knowledge utilisation of the research project. All questions are binary; for question

7A one knowledge user suffices and for question 7C one letter of commitment suffices. You do not get a higher score when you send in more letters.

Please answer the questions for all eight aspects. Please do not use more than 600 words in total. Answering these questions is not compulsory; please see paragraph 4.2 for the assessment and the associated scores of the criterion knowledge utilisation.

- **7A: Beneficiaries identified:** Please specify which other scientific disciplines and/or companies/organisations can benefit from the results of the proposed research (who are the potential knowledge users?). In case you specify a scientific discipline, this discipline may not be related to your own research area (i.e.: the specified discipline should in any case belong to a different research field. Please see for the possible research fields: <http://www.nwo.nl/en/funding/funding+process+explained/research+fields.>) In case you mention a company or organisation, please specify it with its name.  
Knowledge users should be external parties and cannot be members of the research team (as described under point 2a of the application).
- **7B: Stakeholder feedback:** Are stakeholder meetings or other forms of feedback planned with the under 7A identified potential knowledge users?
- **7C: Beneficiaries confirmed:** Which potential knowledge users are involved in, and have committed themselves to the research project? A signed letter of commitment indicating the nature of the involvement is required (in order to receive a positive score for this question). The letter should be from one of the under 7A identified potential knowledge users and should include a real contribution to the project. This can be matching in cash or in kind. A letter in which one only expresses interest in the project is not enough to answer this question positively (because the interest is covered under 7A).  
*NB: the signed letter is only required in order to receive a positive score for question 7C, the letter is not required in order to submit an application; it is not compulsory to answer question 7C. The letters will stay behind at the NWO office and will not be sent to the referees and the committee.*
- **7D: Education:** Will the researcher applied for in this project receive an education? If yes, please specify how.  
*NB: the usual (lab)trainings in order to become familiar with the techniques/equipment which will be used during the research period do not fall within the education to be followed.*
- **7E: External access to data:** How can externals get access to the data during the project?
- **7F: Data distribution or integration:** In which international data center will the data be deposited after the project is finished? Please mention the website of the data center and, in case there are conditions to use this data center, indicate how you will meet these conditions.
- **7G: Outreach method identified:** Do you have a plan to communicate the results of the proposed research to the under 7A identified potential knowledge users or the general public? If yes, please specify your plan. Please consider actions like a patent application and all publication routes not aimed at your peers. Also the under 7B described stakeholder meetings you may possibly organise, can be mentioned here. *NB: the usual scientific publication routes and the press releases you may publish as a result of these publications, as well as presenting of your results at scientific meetings, are seen as the usual scientific work and are not considered to be knowledge utilisation in the sense of this question.*
- **7H: Outreach time schedule and budget:** Please indicate the timetable for the actions of the under 7G described knowledge utilisation plan. Also describe who will bring in the financial and/or material resources (e.g. scheduled time from which research team member) that are necessary to achieve the knowledge utilisation objectives of the research project. Please also explicitly indicate this if no financial resources are needed.  
*NB: you may enter a financial contribution in the consumables budget of the project in order to cover for example stakeholder meetings.*

## 8. Data management

For the collection/generation of data and the analysis of this data timely measures need to be taken to ensure the storage and later reuse of the data. Please answer the following 4 questions about data management:

8.1: Will data be collected or generated that are suitable for reuse?

- If yes: answer questions 8.2 to 8.4.

- If no: explain why the research will not result in reusable data or in data that cannot be stored or data that for other reasons are not relevant for reuse.

8.2: Where will the data be stored during the research?

8.3: After the project has been completed, how will the data be stored for the long-term and made available for the use by third parties? To whom will the data be accessible?

8.4: Which facilities (ICT, (secure) archive, refrigerators or legal expertise) do you expect will be needed for the storage of data during the research and after the research? Are these available?\*

*\*ICT facilities for data storage are considered to be resources such as data storage capacity, bandwidth for data transport and calculating power for data processing.*

After a proposal has been awarded funding, the researcher should elaborate the data management section into a data management plan; please see paragraph 3.5 and [www.nwo.nl/datamanagement](http://www.nwo.nl/datamanagement).

## 9a. Budget

*Personnel (in research months)*

In the table, state the number of research months for which the PhD or postdoc is requested. PhDs must be requested for 4 years (48 months), postdocs for up to 3 years (36 months).

Personnel costs are funded in accordance with the most recent "Approval of funding for scientific research 2008 NWO - VNSU" (*Akkoord bekostiging wetenschappelijk onderzoek*), which you can find on <http://www.nwo.nl/financiering/hoewerkt-dat/Salaristabellen>. The maximum amounts are: PhD 4 years - €217 563; post-doc 3 years - €215 095 (amounts as of 1 July 2017).

*Equipment (in k€)*

Equipment can be requested up to a total of k€110. If the total amount of equipment requested is less than k€25, the equipment is funded in full. If the total amount is more than k€25, the equipment is funded at the rate of 75%; the remaining 25% should be covered by the relevant research institute. Funded equipment will be included in the standard payment schedule and needs to be justified in the financial final report. Equipment can only be requested in conjunction with an application for a PhD or postdoc position. Within the scope of the Open Programme, it is not possible to apply only for equipment.

In the table, please state for each year the total amount of equipment requested in k€ (the amount including the required minimum matching of 25%). Dutch VAT and any import duties payable should be taken into account. You should describe the relationship with the conduct of the proposed research and the intensity of use (hours per week).

*Consumables (in k€)*

Only if these are very specific to this research. The applicant should argue why this expenditure is necessary for the research and why it cannot be paid by the relevant institution as part of the 'standard facilities package'. Standard office or laboratory equipment is not funded.

You may enter a financial contribution in the consumables budget of the project in order to cover the knowledge utilisation goals of your project (e.g. stakeholder meetings).

#### *Fieldwork (in k€)*

Under this section, budget can be requested for the collection of research data on a location other than the own institution, or for visiting another research group. Only funding to cover the travel and lodging expenses of the PhD student or postdoc can be requested. Travel and lodging expenses of assistants, PIs, or foreign advisors will not be funded. Please note that the fieldwork budget does NOT cover funding for the travel to and attendance of conferences.

The sums requested for consumables and fieldwork expenses combined should not exceed €50,000 for the entire grant period.

#### *Bench fee*

An additional budget of €5000 is available for each project. This budget is referred to as bench fee in the "Approval of funding for scientific research NWO - VNSU 2008". It is intended to provide a stimulus for the scientific career of the PhD/postdoc working on the project and can for instance be used to pay the costs of thesis defense, travel to and attendance of conferences, and publication costs.

For the expenses of equipment, consumables, and fieldwork, insufficient justification will result in the requested funds not being awarded.

Funding cannot be requested for permanent staff, student assistants, analysts or technicians, 'overhead' costs, standard office or laboratory equipment, general computer equipment, and maintenance and insurance costs.

NWO pays a yearly contribution to the NIOZ in order to facilitate the use of seagoing research facilities by researchers of other eligible research institutions, such as the universities. Therefore, the costs for the use of these facilities cannot be included in the project budget.

#### **9b. Financial assistance from other sources to this project**

Please indicate whether, and to what extent, you have requested or intend to request financial support from other authorities (such as EU programmes) for this research, and when a decision can be expected on those applications. Failure to provide this information will constitute grounds for suspending the processing of your application.

It is not permitted to submit an identical application simultaneously to multiple NWO granting rounds.

You should also indicate how much your own institution will contribute in terms of consumables, equipment and other costs of this research. Please keep in mind that a guarantee letter may be requested from your faculty board, or from a comparable financial authority, as a condition for the possible granting of your application.

#### **10. Statements by the applicant**

NWO endorses the "Code Openness Animal Experiments" and the "Code Biosecurity". Applicants need to check for the possibility that these codes have relevance to their application. If this is the case NWO requires applicants to endorse the code(s) and act according to them. For more information, please see the website of the KNAW ([www.knaw.nl](http://www.knaw.nl)).

NWO endorses the nationally and internationally accepted standards for scientific conduct. When submitting a proposal, applicants need to endorse and act according to the "Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice 2012". For more information, please see the website of the VSNU ([www.vsnu.nl](http://www.vsnu.nl)).

### 3.5 Specific conditions

General guidelines and conditions:

The '[NWO regulation on granting](#)' and the '[Agreement on Payment of Costs for Scientific Research](#)' are applicable to applications. After a proposal has been awarded funding, NWO designates the applicant as project leader; the project leader receives the instructions for project and programme leaders.

NWO Code of Conduct regarding Conflict of Interests:

The '[NWO Code of Conduct regarding Conflict of Interests](#)' applies to all persons and NWO personnel involved in the assessment and decision-making procedure for this call for proposals.

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).

Data management:

Responsible data management is part of good research. NWO wants research data that emerge from publicly funded research to become freely and sustainably available, as much as possible, for reuse by other researchers. Furthermore NWO wants to raise awareness among researchers about the importance of responsible data management. Proposals should therefore satisfy the data management protocol of NWO. This protocol consists of two steps: 1. Data management section: the data management section is part of the research proposal. Researchers should answer four questions about data management within their intended research project. Therefore before the research starts the researcher will be asked to think about how the data collected must be ordered and categorised so that it can be made freely available. Measures will often need to be taken during the production and analysis of the data to make their later storage and dissemination possible. Researchers can state which research data they consider to be relevant for storage and reuse.

2. Data management plan: after a proposal has been awarded funding, the researcher should elaborate the data management section into a data management plan. The data management plan is a concrete elaboration of the data management section. In the plan the researcher describes whether use will be made of existing data or a new data collection and how the data collection will be made FAIR: Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable. The plan should be submitted to NWO via ISAAC within a maximum of 4 months after the proposal has been awarded funding. NWO will approve the plan as quickly as possible. Approval of the data management plan by NWO is a condition for disbursement of the funding. The plan can be adjusted during the research. Further information about the data management protocol of NWO can be found at [www.nwo.nl/datamanagement](http://www.nwo.nl/datamanagement).

Nagoya Protocol:

The Nagoya Protocol became effective on 12 October 2014 and aims to contribute to an honest and reasonable distribution of benefits emerging from the use of genetic resources (Access and Benefit Sharing; ABS). Researchers who make use of genetic sources from the Netherlands or abroad for their research should familiarise themselves with the Nagoya Protocol. NWO expects that researchers will take all necessary actions with respect to the Nagoya Protocol.

**Modifications:**

The NWO Domain Science Board reserves the right to require an application to be amended on scientific, policy, or budgetary grounds as a condition of a possible award. If an application is granted.

**Start:**

The research must start within half a year of the award of the application, with the appointment of the PhD or postdoc. If it is not possible to achieve this, the awarded research grant will be withdrawn.

### **3.6 Submitting an application**

An application can only be submitted to NWO via the electronic application system ISAAC. Applications not submitted in this way will not be admitted to the selection procedure. An applicant is obliged to submit his/her application via his/her own account. If the applicant does not have an account yet then this should be created at least one day before the submission.

For technical questions, please contact the helpdesk (see 5.2).

Download the research proposal application form either from the electronic application system ISAAC or from NWO's website (on the grant page for this programme). You can complete the application form off-line. Save this completed application form as a PDF file. A grant-application consists of two parts: (1) an on-line part for the key details of both the applicant and the application, and (2) the completed research proposal application form. When you complete the on-line form, you can upload the research proposal in PDF format.

# 4 Assessment procedure

## 4.1 Procedure

The first step in the assessment procedure is to determine the eligibility of the application. On behalf of the NWO Domain Science Board, the NWO office will assess whether or not the application is complete and fitting in the programme. If the application does not satisfy the criteria, stated in Chapter 3 of this call for proposals, then the application will not be processed. Applications are processed starting from the date of receipt in the NWO office. If your application has been declared admissible, we aim to inform you within 5 months about the award or rejection of your proposal.

Depending on the amount of applications, submissions are divided between one or two assessment committees. If it is possible to operate with two committees, each has a different emphasis (see the explanation under '1a Details of proposal' in paragraph 3.4).

To enable it to draw on specific disciplinary information in assessing the quality of research proposals, the assessment committee uses international experts (referees). Every grant proposal will be evaluated by at least two referees. The total number of referees per application can vary, depending on the speed of response of the referees and the quality of the referee reports. The referees assess the application against the assessment criteria 1 to 3 ('originality/innovative nature', scientific quality of the proposal', and 'scientific quality of the group'). The reports are rendered anonymous and sent to the applicant for the purposes of a written rebuttal.

Subsequently, a package of no more than 25 applications will be prioritized by an assessment committee. In the assessment meeting, the committee discusses the proposals in comparison with each other, based on the referees' reports and the rebuttals. Although the committee members will be obliged to act as 'generalists' with respect to virtually all applications, the committee as a whole is also expected to include an assessment of the content and quality of the referees' reports in its considerations. With respect to the assessment criteria 1 to 3, the committee responds to the application with a reasoned assessment supported by numerical scores.

The committee uses the referees' arguments and the applicant's rebuttal to arrive at an independent opinion on the application. The committee's role differs in this respect from that of the referees, because:

- the committee takes account of the applicant's rebuttal, while the referee does not see it so cannot take it into account;
- the committee can take all applications, reports and rebuttals into account, while the referees, as a rule, never see more than one application and the referees do not coordinate their opinion between themselves.

This means that the committee may arrive at a different assessment than the referees did.

The referees and the committee do not judge assessment criterion 4 ('knowledge utilisation'). The score for this criterion will be defined at the NWO office based on the checklist described under paragraph 3.4.2. At the same time with the possibility to write a rebuttal to the referees' reports, applicants have the possibility to send in updates of the 8 knowledge utilisation questions. If necessary, the NWO office defines a new score for the assessment criterion 'knowledge utilisation'.

At the end of the assessment meeting, the committee determines, based on the final scores, the ranking of the proposals. The unrounded numerical order of the final scores is leading. In case the assessment committee believes that the scores differ too little to give a ranking advice, there is an ex-aequo ranking. The order within this group of applications will then be determined based on the partial score for the first assessment criterion ('originality/innovative nature').

With the ranking, the assessment committee advises the NWO Domain Science Board on the scientific quality of the research proposals submitted. On the basis of that advice and on the basis of the available funding, the Domain Board issues a decision to grant or reject the applications.

The data management section in the application is not evaluated and hence not included in the decision about whether or not to award funding. However the committee can issue advice with respect to the data management section. After a proposal has been awarded funding, the applicant should elaborate the data management section into a data management plan. Applicants can make use of the advice from the committee when they write the data management plan. The project can start as soon as the data management plan has been approved by NWO.

NWO 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.

The NWO Code of Conduct on Conflicts of Interest applies to all persons and NWO staff involved in the assessment and/or decision-making process.

## 4.2 Criteria

The proposals within the scope of the ALW Open Programme are assessed on the basis of 4 assessment criteria. The criteria 'originality/innovative nature' and 'scientific quality of the proposal' both count for 1/3 in the calculation of the final score of a proposal. The criteria 'scientific quality of the group' and 'knowledge utilisation' both count for 1/6 in the calculation of the final score of a proposal.

To be eligible for funding, the final score of the application should be very good or higher.

### **Criterion 1: Originality/Innovative nature** **weighting: 1/3**

The potential innovation with respect to the broader field of the research theme must be elucidated. By definition, all research results shift the boundaries of knowledge. However, this point relates to research with a more innovative contribution to the discipline(s) in which it is intended to take place, as distinguished from more routine research based on traditional methods. Aspects which may be considered are the research question, the proposed research methods and the potential result of the research.

### **Criterion 2: Scientific quality of the proposal** **weighting: 1/3**

The scientific quality of the proposal must be apparent through the objectives, scientific approach, methodology, and the effect of the study, as they are described in the application.

The research question and objectives must make it sufficiently clear where the focus of the research will be and whether there is a substantial objective that appeals to the imagination. The application should clearly show that the formulated objectives are of recognisable scientific importance.

With respect to the scientific approach and methods the assessment will be whether the methods and techniques chosen are clearly defined and whether the working plan is of a sufficiently high standard in the light of the research question and the

objective of the research. The assessors may also look at the extent to which the proposed research relates to research being carried out internationally in this field. In order to assess the effect of the research, the potential broadening/deepening of knowledge is taken into consideration: which avenues are opened up both within and beyond the relevant specialist area, by solving the described problem? What is the relevance of the proposal to the development of the area in question? If the intended research results are useful to other research groups/disciplines in carrying out their research, thus encouraging better and innovative research in those fields, there may be a knock-on effect.

**Criterion 3: Scientific quality of the group**

***weighting: 1/6***

When assessing this criterion the main applicant weighs significantly heavier than the other members of the research group. The prominent international status of the research group will have to be demonstrated by, among other things, publications in peer-reviewed top journals. In addition, the ability of the research group to carry out the proposed project will be evaluated. Does the group have sufficient expertise, the right collaborations and access to the necessary equipment?

**Criterion 4: Knowledge Utilisation**

***weighting: 1/6***

For the ALW Open Programme, the former ALW board has decided to assess the criterion knowledge utilisation on the basis of the presence of eight facultative elements in the knowledge utilisation part of the proposal. The score for this criterion will be defined at the NWO office based on the checklist described under paragraph 3.4.2 (7. Knowledge utilisation). The referees and the committee do not give a judgement on the criterion knowledge utilisation.

It is not compulsory to answer questions 7A to 7H. For every answered question, the ALW office determines whether the question has been sufficiently positively or negatively answered. If the question is not answered, it is considered negative.

NWO uses scores on a scale from 1 (excellent) to 9 (unsatisfactory). In case none of the questions have been positively answered, the score for the assessment criterion knowledge utilisation will be 3,5: this is still good enough to be potentially eligible for funding. If all eight questions have been positively answered, this leads to the highest possible partial score of 1,0. When 1 up to 7 questions have been positively answered, the score will be proportional between 3,2 en 1,3.

All questions are binary; for question 7A one knowledge user suffices and for question 7C one letter of commitment suffices. You do not get a higher score when you send in more letters.

# 5 Contact

## 5.1 Substantive questions

For substantive questions about the ALW Open Programme and this call for proposals please contact:

Dr Kirsten de Bruijn-Spoorendonk, telephone: 070-344 07 76

Drs Erik van Aert, telephone: 070-344 06 38

E-mail: [alwopenprogramma@nwo.nl](mailto:alwopenprogramma@nwo.nl)

## 5.2 Technical questions about the electronic application system ISAAC

For technical questions about the use of ISAAC, please contact the ISAAC helpdesk. 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 CE(S)T 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.

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