



Vlaanderen
is wetenschap

SBO call 2024

Information session

22/06/2024

fwo

Preface



▶ What you should learn from this presentation

- Understand the characteristics of the SBO programme
- Grasp the scoring and evaluation procedure
- How to prepare an application that **meets** the evaluation criteria



▶ This presentation

- serves as applicant's “**quick start guide**” (key topics only)
- more details: SBO webpage

<https://www.fwo.be/nl/onderzoeksfianciering/onderzoeksprojecten/sbo-projecten/> (NL)

<https://www.fwo.be/en/fellowships-funding/research-projects/sbo-projects/> (EN)

▶ **DISCLAIMER**

- Official & binding documents: regulations (in Dutch) on FWO website
- English regulations have no legal status

Outline

- 1. Characteristics of the SBO-programme**
- 2. Submission of an SBO project proposal**
- 3. Evaluation process and framework**
- 4. Practical recommendations**
- 5. Further reading & contact**



1. Characteristics of the SBO-programme

What is SBO?

► Use-inspired basic research

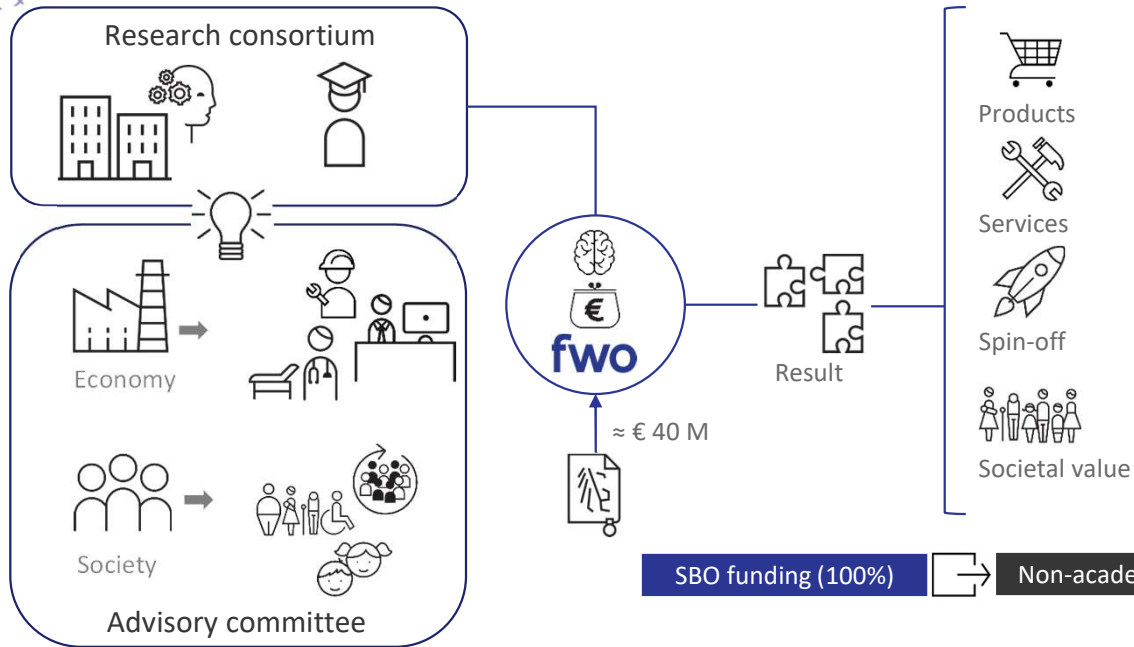
→ Innovative scientific research that has a clear relationship with practice, starts from the needs of the field and is aimed at a sustainable implementation of the results

research



utilisation

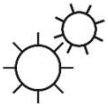
The SBO framework



Strategic research



- Open to all scientific disciplines and fields of application (bottom-up)
- High-quality **basic research** with focus on challenging and original research
- Research is **not a goal** but an essential **mean** for new knowledge utilisation
- Clear **vision** about the potential for translation into **concrete applications**



- Clear **plan** on how to bring innovation to the **field**
- **Engagement** by economic and/or societal actors in Flanders to ensure **effective transfer** to and exploitation by these actors
- Two finality parts: **economic (E)** or **societal (M)**, defined by the main type of actors who embrace the applications

Routes for utilisation

▶ **Economic utilisation strategies (leading to employment, investments)**

→ Transfer results to **existing companies** → follow-up R&D activities

× Requirement for an industrial advisory committee



→ Transfer to a to be founded **spin-off company** → follow-up R&D activities & development of business strategy

× Optional industrial advisory committee

▶ **Societal utilisation strategies: societal value creation**

→ Transfer results to existing organisations → follow-up R&D & implementation activities



× Requirement for a societal advisory committee

Basic research

- ▶ **SBO research is still far away from the market**
 - successful SBO project should initially result in follow-up (R&D and/or translational) activities
- ▶ **Applicants remain owners of the project results**
 - Transfer of valuable results to be carried out at prevailing market conditions and open to all companies in the European Union, including those that are not a member of the advisory committee

Attention point: EU state aid rules

- No indirect aid to enterprises through publicly funded research organisations
 - × Applies also to IP sharing and knowledge transfer/licensing
 - × No pre-agreed licensing agreements or disproportional clauses
 - × knowledge transfer is open to all companies in the European Union at the end of the project
 - × All transfers (exclusive and non-exclusive) should be made at prevailing market conditions.
 - × IP transfers cannot take place during the lifetime of the SBO project
- In case of **transfer of the research results to existing companies**
 - × detail your utilisation intentions already in the project proposal
 - × don't go beyond negotiating a right of first negotiation
 - × The applicability of the project to **several** companies must be demonstrated.
 - × Research that exhibits selectivity to a single company or is strongly embedded in the product range of a specific company, it is not eligible for FWO-funding *

* project might be suitable for financial support as an industrial R&D project (by the Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship vlaio.be).

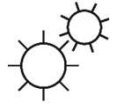
Two challenges for the SBO applicants



1. Science: demonstrate innovation, scientific added value, feasibility, appropriate research approach, adequate project management, expertise, ...



Two challenges for the SBO applicants

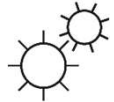


2. Utilisation: demonstrate utilisation **potential** and utilisation **approach**

- Clear **vision** on the **potential** for utilisation
- Clear **plan** on how to bring innovation to the **field**
- Involvement of the utilisation partners: Requirement of reciprocal **cooperation** across institutional boundaries
 - × Requires an investment in **meaningful interactions** and network building during the preparation phase of the SBO project with users in the field.
 - **Substantiated early & meaningful interactions and cooperation** between researchers and the 'users' of the intended applications



Two challenges for the SBO applicants



→ Involvement of the societal/economic community in the SBO project cycle to facilitate a smooth transition between the end of the SBO-project and the further development and implementation pathway within the user organisations

→ Advisory committee



→ Active effort to enable the effective transfer to and commitment for utilisation of research results by these actors

- Engagement for follow-up R&D activities and implementation efforts by members of Advisory committee
- SBO-E: Mandatory contribution by all companies of the advisory committee (Monetary/ substantiated in kind contribution – not for spin-off earmarked projects)
- Substantiated in Letters of Intent



Advisory committee (FAQ)



- ▶ **Compulsory for SBO-E (transfer to existing companies) and SBO-M**
→ optional in case of a spin-off earmarked project
- ▶ **Open to all interested companies or societal actors, including those outside the Flemish region**
- ▶ **Covers entire utilisation chain:** elaborate on the role of each individual user
- ▶ **Elaborate on active involvement and commitment of user organisations (pre-, intra-, post-project)**
- ▶ **Dynamics of the advisory committee & members' expectations:** elaborated vision on intellectual property rights/transfer of project results

Advisory committee attention points



- ▶ **Spin-offs:** importance of early interactions with interface and transfer services, potential customers and capital providers
- ▶ Mention **parallel** R&D collaborations, **follow-up** R&D activities and implementation efforts
 - beneficial for feasibility/likelihood of the utilisation approach after the SBO-project
- ▶ **SBO-M: Application oriented activities** from the third project year onwards to bridge the gap between SBO-results and societal implementation (potential advantage in selection process!).
 - Activities to be performed **by the societal actors** – no FWO funding



Substantiated in letters of intent



Advisory committee SBO-E



▶ **Monetary contribution mandatory for all commercial members of the advisory committee**

→ Amount:

- × SME: €250/year
- × Large enterprise and other organisation: €1,000/year
- × Higher contribution is not obligatory but may be positively assessed in the evaluation of the proposal

→ “In kind” contribution can be accepted provided the added value for the project and its intrinsic value is well **substantiated**

→ scientific institutions, governments or societal actors: No hard requirement for financial contributions

▶ **Contribution needs to be confirmed in the “letters of intent” of companies**




Eligible applicants



→ Eligible partner organisations: all **Flemish Research institutions***:



- × Universities
- × University colleges ("Hogescholen")
- × University Hospitals
- × Strategic research centres
- × Other research centres with Flemish office 
- × IMEC, VITO, VIB, Flanders' Make, Flanders Marine Institute, and scientific institutions with a government grant and an establishment in the Flemish Region
 - obliged to submit the proposal **together** with at least one other Flemish research institution
- × Optional involvement of **non-Flemish Research institutions**: maximum 20% of the project budget
 - useful **knowledge transfer** towards Flanders ("missing links" in essential expertise) & clear **added value** for the SBO-project (including utilisation objectives)
- × If there might be any doubts about a participating organisation meeting the definition, compliance with this definition should be argued! Please contact the FWO administration for further assistance via SBO@fwo.be beforehand.



* Definition of a 'research and knowledge-dissemination organisation' as stated in Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation 2022/C 414/01

SBO programme budget & duration



▶ Programme Budget

→ circa 40 M€ (excl. 2,5M€ is earmarked for ERA-net)

▶ Project duration

→ Max. 4 years of workload

→ Project-related costs made for 2 additional years following the end of the official project period are acceptable at the final financial verification

SBO project budget



- ▶ **Support: 100% of acceptable costs**
- ▶ **Acceptable costs**
 - Overhead costs should not be included in the project budget submitted to FWO
 - Max. requested budget is €425,000 (excluding overhead) per project year per participating legal entity with a share of at least 15% of the total project budget
 - Eligible costs: Research and 'utilisation preparing' staffing*, consumables, equipment, subcontracting
- ▶ **Non-binding guideline on the magnitude of a consortium's project budget: about € 1,7M (excl. overhead)**

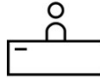
* Directly integrated into the relevant research teams of the SBO project consortium, excluding individuals employed in interface services or research coordination services and for whom another form of funding is already available



2. Submission of an SBO project proposal

Two steps: pre-notification & submission

▶ Submission via FWO “[E-loket](#)”



▶ Pre-notification



→ transfer of application to host institution in FWO e-portal: deadline **13/09** at 5 PM

- × Importance of timely interactions with TTO offices & a smooth start-up of the evaluation procedure
- × Preliminary application should contain at least:
 - project consortium members
 - summary of scientific & utilisation goals
 - Info on peer review (incl. experts to be avoided (max. 3))
 - i.e. tabs general, summary, applicants-requested funding (excl. project budget), peer review should be completed
- × Other parts: if not finalised, uploading is not necessary

▶ Final submission

→ **27/09** 5 pm by the main applicant's institution



→ **Mind your institution's internal deadlines!**

The online submission: the tabs



- ▶ **GENERAL:** title, project duration, ...
- ▶ **SUMMARY:**
 - non-confidential summary for communication purposes
 - innovation goal(s) for inclusion in FWO contract (when funded)
- ▶ **APPLICANTS-REQUESTED FUNDING:**
 - organisations (i.e., not research units!) that are part of the consortium
 - consortium = “main applicant” or “main applicant + co-applicant(s)”
 - the person who fills in the information in the e-portal = supervisor. They are the contact person for the main applicant.
 - co-supervisors = representatives from the different research units in the consortium. For each co-applicant, 1 co-supervisor appointed as contact person

The online submission: the tabs



▶ APPLICANTS-REQUESTED FUNDING:

→ BUDGET:

- × Rules are explained in the 'Cost Model' on the website.
- × Sub-budget for each applicant.
- × Budget has to be prepared in the excel template (available via the e-portal), and should (XLS w/o macros) be uploaded in the e-portal afterwards.
- × Quotes for large subcontractors have to be uploaded in the e-portal as well.
- × Next to the uploading of the Excel-sheet, an overview of the total costs should be entered in the e-portal

The online submission: the tabs



▶ PEER REVIEW:

- Select your expert panel, main (& secondary) topic for your proposal and provide some keywords
- If you have a good reason why FWO should not contact certain external peer reviewers for the evaluation of your proposal, you may provide their names + motivation). The list should be limited (max. 3)!

▶ ETHICS:

- indicate whether your study involves ethical aspects that require approval by an ethical committee



The online submission: the tabs

▶ **SCIENTIFIC PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

- Template downloadable in e-portal, to be uploaded as PDF
- In English
- Max. 15 pages

▶ **INTENDED UTILISATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER:**

- Template downloadable available in e-portal, to be uploaded as PDF
- In English
- Max. 15 pages

▶ **EXPERTISE AND TRACK RECORD:**

- Template downloadable available in e-portal, to be uploaded as PDF
- In English
- Max. 1,5 page per **research unit** in the consortium

The online submission: the tabs



▶ DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

- Info available on FWO website (see SBO manual)
- Contact persons within several organisations

▶ DECLARATIONS

- **Letters of intent** of the advisory committee members **ONLY**
- will be transferred to external experts
 - × in English
- uploaded when submitting the project
 - × no additions can be made afterwards

The online submission: the tabs



▶ EXTRA DATA

→ Intellectual property

× You have the choice:

1. To accept the [model cooperation agreement](https://ttoflanders.be) as agreed upon by the Tech Transfer Offices Flanders (<https://ttoflanders.be>), which is made available on the FWO-SBO website
2. **Not to agree** with the standard template used by universities and most research organisations.
3. To indicate that you have not **yet settled an agreement** on the main principles of the consortium agreement.
 - In case of a tailor-made cooperation agreement (**option 2**) or of a currently unsettled collaboration agreement (**option 3**): **provide a short motivation**
 - **Full cooperation agreement** is requested **after granting the project proposal**. This cooperation agreement & any changes to it during the execution of the agreement is **subject to approval by the FWO**.



→ **Seek timely advice with your Tech Transfer office!**

Declarations by applicants



► Declarations per **participating legal entity** on authorisation of inquiries, absence of double financing & declaration of status of research organisation

→ For applicants **with** e-portal back office:

- × Checkbox in e-portal (done by research coordination offices after transfer of the application to FWO) e.g. universities, strategic research centres, ITM, ...

→ For organisations **without** e-portal back office:

- × **Declaration** (verbatim from template) of these organisation(s) **signed by a legal representative of the organisation** should be uploaded in e-portal together with the project application.



3. Evaluation process and framework

Evaluation process

▶ **Score grids** available on website SBO



▶ **Peer review** of the scientific quality & utilisation quality by **four international experts**, selected by FWO



▶ **Rebuttal** (January 2025)



▶ Expert recommendations and written feedback from the applicants are followed by a **two-stage internal peer review**



→ A **thematic SBO-expert panel** assigns a consensus score on the scientific and utilisation dimension of a limited set of SBO-proposals. The panel members act as generalists with respect to the set of proposals to be evaluated within the panel.



→ **SBO steering committee** reviews, amends, modifies, and ratifies the evaluation reports and then ranks the proposals



▶ **Decision on support by the FWO board of directors** (May 2025)

Evaluation criteria

Science



- **Innovative value**
- **Quality of the scientific approach**
- **Research planning & resources**

Utilisation



- **Relevance/ strategic importance**
- **Utilisation approach**
- **Contribution to SDGs**

Competence & infrastructure



- **R&D competence & infrastructure**
- **Competence & track record utilisation**

Scientific evaluation criteria

▶ **S1: Innovative Value of the basic research**

- × Added value to the international state-of-the-art? Basic research, high scientific quality with good level of risks, challenges and inventiveness?

▶ **S2: Quality of the research approach**

- × Research approach well-described and adjusted to the realisation of the research objectives, no significant shortcomings?

▶ **S3: Project planning & resources**

- × Elaboration of work programme (clear objectives, performance levels, milestones and deliverables) and project management, allocation of tasks, mutual interactions, Balance between the workload and the requested resources.

Utilisation evaluation criteria

▶ **U1: Relevance/Strategic importance and applicability**

- × Relevance of the research approach for the anticipated utilisation, utilisation potential (socio-economic/societal value), predominant value chain in Flanders

▶ **U2: Utilisation approach and knowledge transfer**

- × Substantiated and realistic/feasible utilisation plan dealing with bottlenecks, utility and relevance of the advisory committee (involvement & interaction with the advisory committee: evidence for a preparatory phase with clear impact on the scientific activities and utilisation approach, interaction during proposal execution, proposal creates prospects for follow-up R&D(&I) activities by the users, commitment (see: Letters of intent) to participate in follow-up projects)
- × For SBO-E Spin-off: concrete and viable business concept

▶ **U3: Added value for sustainable development (where appropriate)**

- × The sustainable development objectives that are tackled are eligible socio-economic SDG challenges. The application contains an implementation plan and an assessment of the significance of the expected effects. See the "sustainable development manual" for more information.

R&D capacity, competence and infrastructure

▶ C1: R&D capacity and competence; infrastructure

- × Overall scientific or technical expertise and infrastructure present, synergy within the consortium

▶ C2: Competence and track record with regard to transfer and utilisation

- × Competence and track record with regard to utilisation
- × Past utilisation activities
- × Concrete impact from utilisation of previous SBO projects

Sustainable development



- × SBO projects with an elaborated focus on **particular sustainable development goals** may be granted an excellent score on the sustainable development criterion U4.1. Others will receive a neutral score.
- × The ‘distance to the SDG 2030 targets’ in Belgium (<https://dashboards.sdindex.org>) is used to delineate research topics that are eligible for an excellent score.
- × Each project proposal with an elaborate focus on SDGs must
- × Mention the eligible IAEG-SDGs indicator for which it seeks to offer a solution (fit within SDGs),
- × Present an SDG implementation and utilisation plan with intense collaboration between the academic ecosystem and socio-economic partners such as industry, non-governmental and intermediary organisations and the government.
- × Include a quantitative, or, if not possible, at least a very thorough qualitative assessment of the expected direct effects, the significance and the sustainability of these effect, indicators for monitoring the change, and the added value compared to alternative approaches.
- × See website for more background, **information** and for the **eligible SDG indicators**

Score grid



Scientific dimension S ¹	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
S1 Innovative value of the basic research	Serious shortcomings in at least two, or critical shortcomings in at least one of the three characteristics. Potential critical shortcomings may include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The proposal contains structural flaws or offers virtually no added value to the international state-of-the-art. or <input type="checkbox"/> The project involves almost no real scientific challenges that may be expected from projects of this nature/size. or <input type="checkbox"/> Reaching any of the scientific goals is evaluated as conceptually unrealistic within the boundaries of a single project. 	Minor shortcomings in at least two, or serious shortcomings in at least one of the three characteristics. Potential serious shortcomings may include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The added value to the international state-of-the-art and to ongoing research is limited. or <input type="checkbox"/> The proposal shows a limited level of scientific challenges and its high-risk/high-gain nature is on the low side. or <input type="checkbox"/> The majority of the scientific goals are conceptually unrealistic within the boundaries of a single project or are not formulated clearly enough to allow full assessment. 	Minor shortcomings in one of the three characteristics. Potential minor shortcomings may include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The added value to the international state-of-the-art and to ongoing research is less pronounced or elaborated. or <input type="checkbox"/> Part of the project is characterised by a lower level of scientific challenges or less inventive ideas, concepts and strategies. or <input type="checkbox"/> The majority of the scientific goals are clear and conceptually realistic within the boundaries of a single project. Some of the goals are less realistic, or lack clarity. 	The proposal fully fits the three characteristics of innovative, high-risk/high-gain basic research, i.e. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The scientific goals build upon and offer substantial added value to the international state-of-the-art and to ongoing research. and <input type="checkbox"/> The proposal qualifies as basic research with a clear high-risk/high-gain profile. and <input type="checkbox"/> The scientific goals are clear and, given the currently available background knowledge and substantiation of the project's rationale, sufficient evidence is available to believe that the scientific goals are conceptually realistic within the boundaries of a single project, irrespective of the approach, planning and track record of the applicants. 	The proposal fully fits the three characteristics of innovative, high-risk/high-gain strategic basic research and, in addition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The proposal is highly innovative and unique. It distinguishes itself in an outstanding manner from ongoing strategic research efforts at the international level ("pioneering project"). and <input type="checkbox"/> The proposal, if scientifically successful, has the potential to highly accelerate international research activities. 					
(criterion weight: x2)										

- ▶ For each evaluation criterion a numerical score is assigned (1-10)
- ▶ The descriptor corresponding with scores 7-8 is considered baseline for a SBO project without shortcomings.
- ▶ All other scores are assigned on the basis of minor (5-6) or serious shortcomings (1-2, 3-4), or on the basis of additional worthy elements (9-10).



Evaluation process and framework

▶ Minimal requirements and ranking mechanism

- **Double weight** to criteria **S1** (innovative value of basic research), **S2** (quality of the research approach), **U1** (Relevance/Strategic importance and applicability amongst which in Flanders), **U2** (Utilisation approach and knowledge transfer)
- Minimal **eligibility requirement**: at least a score of **6** for each criterion
- **Ranking** is based on **total score**
- In case of equivalent scores at cut-off: **diversity of application** areas can be aimed for by **steering committees**
- The highest ranked project proposals are **supported** within the limits of the **available budget**

The overall appreciation score

→ Assigned by the panel/steering committee



→ **A**

- × Application is eligible for support, but may not be funded because of insufficient budget.
- × No restrictions on resubmission.



→ **B**

- × Application does not meet the minimum quality requirements and cannot be supported in its current form.
- × Shortcomings in the current application are relatively easy to remediate.
- × Project may be resubmitted in the next call
- × Applicants must explain how the research and/or utilisation plan has been revised




→ **C**

- × Application clearly does not meet the minimum quality requirements for support.
- × Project is excluded from being resubmitted in the next SBO call: a call year must be skipped.
- × The individual researcher(s) with a C-project is (are) not prohibited from submitting a project proposal.



Refrain from submitting proposals that are prematurely elaborated on scientific and/or utilisation level. You may waste an additional year



4. Practical recommendations

Some recommendations



- ▶ **Process of creation** of an SBO-proposal is different from a “classic” academic research proposal
- ▶ **Be prepared to invest adequate time and effort in the proposal preparation process**
 - Key importance of meaningful **two-way dialogue and interaction** between researchers and economic or social/societal users from the early project conception onwards and over the entire project life cycle. Discuss project scope + cooperation principles + utilisation intentions.
 - **Interact** early with university interface or tech transfer services.

Some recommendations (2)



- ▶ **Think beyond the end date of the SBO-project**
 - Let users elaborate on follow-up R&D project implementation, interests and opportunities & sustainable implementation
- ▶ **Utilisation is *not* just “dissemination”**
- ▶ **User involvement is *not* “declaring to be interested”**
- ▶ **Ensure good coherence between the scientific part and the utilisation aims of your proposal**
- ▶ **Write for your peers but make sure that the application is understandable for panel members outside your very specific area of research as well**



5. Further reading & contact

Support of potential applicants



- ▶ Potential applicants may request an **exploratory meeting** (“verkennend gesprek”) with FWO
- ▶ E-mail a short abstract, most important questions (maximally one page A4) and preferred date(s) to sbo@fwo.be

Important dates



- ▶ **Transfer preliminary application by promoter to main applicant (institution):**
September 13, 2024 5 PM
 - Importance of timely interactions with TTO offices & a smooth start-up of the evaluation procedure
 - Tabs general, summary, applicants-requested funding (excl. project budget), peer review should be completed
- ▶ **Main applicant (= organisation) submits final application to FWO: September 27, 2024 5 PM**
- ▶ **Receipt referee reports for rebuttal: January 8, 2025 (7 working days to submit rebuttal)**
- ▶ **Announcement of results: Board meeting end of May 2025**

Further reading and contact



- ▶ For the preparation of a proposal, consult the appropriate SBO-Manual and Application Templates ([FWO e-portal](#))
- ▶ Information and documents are available on:
 - <https://www.fwo.be/nl/onderzoeksfinanciering/onderzoeksprojecten/sbo-projecten/> (NL)
 - <https://www.fwo.be/en/fellowships-funding/research-projects/sbo-projects/> (EN)
 - <https://fwoweb.fwo.be/> (FWO e-portal)
- ▶ SBO contact: SBO@fwo.be



fwo Thank you for your attention

FWO Open Access (OA) policy



→ Why?

- × Publicly funded research should also be publicly available.




→ What?

- × Publications resulting (partly) from FWO funding → Focus: articles;
- × also applies to already ongoing fellowships/projects/grants.



→ How?

- × Published in an OA database (“green” OA) → Minimum requirement;
- × full (“gold”) or partly (“hybrid”) OA journals → Bench fees 



→ When?

- × Green OA selected? Maximum embargo period of 12 months;
- × right implemented in Belgian federal law ([Art. XI.196, §2/1 of the Economic Law Code](#))



→ Further reading?

- × <https://www.fwo.be/en/the-fwo/research-policy/open-access/>
- × FWO General Regulations, article 2, paragraph 2: <https://www.fwo.be/en/general-regulations/>
- × Scientific integrity: <https://thinkchecksubmit.org/>

FWO's ethics approval policy



x

Application stage

→ Complete the ethics checklist ("[E-loket](#)") truthfully

→ For research involving non-human primates: apply for ethical approval & submit approval at the latest with rebuttal or 1 month before panel



x

Project execution phase

→ Never commence ethically sensitive project activities until all necessary approvals are obtained from the ethics committee(s) and/or other regulatory authorities, as appropriate.

→ Legal and/or institutional obligations may apply

→ You can start non-ethical project activities at any time



x

When should ethical approval be sought?

→ Experiments involving human embryos, fetuses, embryonic stem cells or non-human primates: Before the start of the entire research project

→ All other activities & experiments on non-primate animals: At the right time to get them approved before getting started.

x

Monitoring of compliance

→ Sample audits may be carried out at any time during the project period & up to 5 years after its completion.



x

Need help?

→ Contact the relevant ethics committee at your host institution

→ Website: <https://www.fwo.be/en/the-fwo/research-policy/research-ethics/>

→ Manual on ethics checklist: [fwo-manual-ethics-checklist.pdf](#)

