

SPECIAL CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL MAX PLANCK CENTERS IN ASIAN COUNTRIES

Deadline: 30 November 2024

1. General

As part of a strategy to deepen cooperation with Asian countries, the Max Planck Society is launching a special call for proposals to establish International Max Planck Centers with partners in Asia.

International Max Planck Centers are the most prestigious and visible element of the Max Planck Society's international strategy. They constitute platforms for collaboration far beyond a standard bilateral cooperation project, thus significantly increasing the added value of the collaboration, raising its overall visibility and attractiveness and enhancing its scientific potential. As Centers of Excellence with a duration of maximum 2 x 5 years, Max Planck Centers aim at promoting scientific cooperation at the very highest level between Max Planck Institutes and world-class partners outside Germany. A strong focus of the Max Planck Center should be on the joint training of junior scientists, ranging from doctoral and postdoctoral researchers to group leaders in accordance to the requirements of the scientific project.

In general, Max Planck Centers must be excellent in scientific terms and at the same time contain a strategic element with overarching added value for the Max Planck Society. The main goal of the Center Program is to attract outstanding minds (e.g. from top universities and research organizations) to the Max Planck Society (Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, MPG).

Furthermore, added value can be generated as follows: Max Planck Centers

- take collaborations to a new level, where the cooperation is on a broader thematic basis within the framework of a structured program;
- support unique, multilateral collaborations between partners which did not previously exist to this extent and with this visibility (significant added scientific value);
- increase international competitiveness by establishing sustainable structures for excellent research;
- help establish clusters of excellence and the sharing of new technology & infrastructure;
- lead to joint high-level publications;
- increase the awareness and attractiveness of the research partners and the research field for potential junior scientists, even beyond the parties directly involved with the Max Planck Center.

The added value results in

- an increase in the attractiveness of research locations to attract excellent scientists on all levels, but with particular emphasis on junior scientists;
- an increase of the talent pool: joint training of junior scientists;
- brain circulation instead of brain drain;
- the establishment of a network by bringing together leading scientists of the field with highly motivated junior scientists;

- an increase in both regional and international visibility;
- an increased acquisition of extramural funds.

Some examples of instruments that might be used to set up a research program with a Max Planck Center are PhD training in International Max Planck Research Schools, postdoctoral training programs, the establishment of research groups, Max Planck Partner Groups, the exchange of researchers, workshops, conferences, summer school, joint use of infrastructure etc..

2. Duration

Max Planck Centers are established for a fixed period of five years with an option for a one-time extension of five years after successful evaluation.

3. Partners

The establishment of a Max Planck Center requires the involvement of a lead Max Planck Institute and one research partner from abroad. Further Max Planck Institutes and international research partners can participate. **No more than one Center per Max Planck Institute should be operated.**

4. Funding

The Max Planck Society and all foreign partners each carry equal amounts of the costs of up generally 0.5 million Euro per year and per partner. If there is more than one foreign partner, each must separately match the Max Planck Society's contribution, i.e. a Center with one foreign partner would have a budget of generally 1 million Euro per year, one with two foreign partners a budget of generally 1.5 million Euro per year and so on.

Additional funding in budget beyond the generally 0.5 million Euro per year each can be made available by the participating Max Planck Institutes and the partner institution(s).

The approved total budget of the Max Planck Society (i.e. 50% of the overall budget including the funds from the participating MPI(s)) must be spent at the MPI(s) according to the rules on public funding law. A transfer of very limited MPG funds to the foreign partner organization is only permitted in exceptional and scientifically justified cases. MPG funds spent at the foreign partner institution come on top of the budget provided for by the foreign partner institution, and do not replace them. Any applicable value added tax (VAT) that may occur due to MPG-funds spent abroad must be covered by the participating Max Planck Institute on top of its 33% share of the total MPG funds.

Requests for transfer of funds abroad will be reviewed by the respective Section Vice-President of MPG for a final decision by the President.

5. Legal Capacity

A Max Planck Center does not have legal capacity in its own right. A Center is set up solely based on an agreement regarding the research program, the measures to be implemented, the financial, personnel and infrastructure resources available to the partners and other details to be specified.

6. Organizational Structure

Each Max Planck Center is headed by an active Max-Planck-Director, whose retirement age is beyond the funding period of the Max Planck Center applied for, and a colleague from the foreign partner institution, jointly called Co-Directors. The two Co-Directors form the "leading team", which constitutes the decision-making body of the Center. Both Co-Directors have a deputy Co-Director each.

At least one scientific coordinator should be appointed to support the “leading team” in its daily business. He or she provides administrative support for the collaboration of the Center partners and deals with organizational issues.

Location:

Max Planck Centers always have two locations minimum: At the lead MPI and the partner institution(s) abroad.

7. Implementation of the scientific program:

The Co-Directors are free to decide on how they will implement the joint scientific program. They are expected to establish joint training and exchange of junior scientists, to organize workshops and conferences, to attract leading scientists either through fellowships or as associated partners, to jointly submit funding applications to third-party funds and to grant mutual access to their research facilities, equipment etc..

8. Publications

In publications of research results generated in the frame of a Max Planck Center, a reference must be made that the research results were obtained within the framework of the Max Planck Center. This serves not only to raise awareness for the individual Center, as required by the Center program, but also to improve the general perception of the Center program.

A reference to the Max Planck Center can be made either in the acknowledgements or in the affiliations of the publication.

9. Extension of a Max Planck Center

Max Planck Centers can be extended upon successful evaluation for another funding period of five years provided the availability of funds. The Max Planck Society and the foreign partner(s) still have to carry equal amounts of the budget, whereas the share of the participating MPI(s) will rise from 33% to 50% of the total share of the Max Planck Society.

10. Application modalities

The director of the lead Max Planck Institute submits the proposal via email to the President of the Max Planck Society: praesident@gv.mpg.de (in copy to Dr. Michaela Hergersberg: see below):

The proposal must contain the following information:

1. A research program containing an abstract, a short introduction, the goals and the approach, and a work plan with contributions of all partners, based on their expertise (overall length incl. references max. 10 pages).
2. A succinct description of the expected synergies and the added value for both partners and of actions taken to provide international visibility to the Max Planck Center (1 page)
3. A short description (and justification) of the implementation of the research program, such as new research groups and personnel, joint training measures, conferences etc.
4. A description of the tools to be implemented, e.g. through exchange of PhD students and/or Postdocs, creation of group leader positions, joint training, e.g. through IMPRS, etc.
5. A description of the financial contribution of the partners to the Center and the expected distribution of funds as well as the MPG financial data sheet

(<https://ohb.mpg.de/Seiten/SearchResultsV2.aspx#k=finanzdatenblatt&mode=Standard>; Anlagenordner Finanzcontrolling, Annex Folder Financial Controlling)

If applicable, please mention how shared extramural funds will be acquired and how necessary access to research facilities and infrastructure is granted.

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6. A list of names of six experts (of which at least must be from abroad) who can judge the application. Please confirm that there are no conflicts of interest.

The deadline for the submission of proposals to the President (in copy to Dr. Michaela Hergersberg see below) is on 30 November 2024.

12 Review of the Proposal

The proposal is reviewed in accordance with the standard review procedures of the Max Planck Society. Next to scientific excellence, a special focus is put on **the significant added scientific value of the Max Planck Center for both parties, which needs to be clearly and well defined in the proposal.**

The decision on whether to establish a Max Planck Center is taken by the President of the Max Planck Society in the Präsidentenkreis in February 2025 on the basis of external reports and after hearing the relevant Section's Vice-Presidents.

13. Approval of Proposal

Upon the approval of the proposal, an agreement is drawn up between the Max Planck Society and the international partner(s) on the basis of a standard format provided by the Administrative Headquarters.

14. Evaluation

After approximately four years the Max Planck Center will undergo a comparative and competitive in-depth evaluation by internal and external experts, which forms the basis for a decision to continue the Max Planck Center for another five years (availability of funds provided).

CONTACTS IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE HEADQUARTERS

For further advice or in case of questions, please refer to:

Dr. Michaela Hergersberg, Programme Officer, Division for International Relations

Administrative Headquarters of the Max Planck Society

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