

**Instructions for preparing application
and realization of stipend in the**

START 2026

programme of the Foundation for Polish Science



On the photo: Scholarship holders of the START FNP programme/ FNP archive

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1. WHO CAN APPLY FOR THE STIPEND

STATUS OF CANDIDATES

A START stipend is dedicated to PhD students at Polish scientific institutions and persons (including PhDs) conducting R&D work (scientific research or development work) in Poland at scientific institutions (e.g., in research institutes, companies, or foundations) that have the conduct of scientific research and/or development work as one of their statutory purposes.

R&D WORK (research and development) is systematically conducted creative work undertaken with the aim of increasing the resources of knowledge, including knowledge of mankind, culture and society, as well as with the aim of finding new applications for such knowledge. R&D covers three types of work:

- Basic research – theoretical and experimental work generally not aimed at obtaining specific applications
- Applied research – research work undertaken with the aim of obtaining new knowledge with specific applications
- Experimental development – work consisting of applying existing knowledge to development of new products, services and processes, or significant improvement of existing ones.

NOTE: The Foundation does not require that the candidate hold an employment contract for an unlimited period – other forms of employment under which the candidate conducts scientific research are also acceptable: a contract for a specific work (*umowa o dzieło*), a contract of mandate (*umowa zlecenia*), participation in a research project, part-time employment, etc. The basis for paying out the stipend is a trilateral agreement among the Foundation, the stipendee, and the Polish educational institution or institution in which the stipendee conducts scientific research or development work.

CANDIDATES' SCIENTIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Only persons with scientific accomplishments documented by publications, patents or conference papers may take part in the competition for a START stipend. Patent applications should not be included in the list of scientific accomplishments, but may be presented in the description of scientific achievements.

CHANGE IN LOCATION OF RESEARCH OR DOCTORATE DURING THE COURSE OF THE COMPETITION

If during the course of the competition the candidate changes the location where he or she is conducting R&D work or the location where he or she is pursuing a doctorate, the stipend agreement— if the candidate wins a stipend—may be signed with another Polish scientific institution where the candidate will continue research work or doctoral studies.

AGE OF CANDIDATES

The calendar year is used to determine candidates' age. The date of the candidate's birthday within the given calendar year is irrelevant. The age limit of 30 means that candidates born in 1995 or later qualify for the 2026 competition.

The age limit of 30 may be extended:

- By a maximum of 2 years for interruptions in research work. For interruptions lasting a total of no less than 12 months candidate can seek an extension of one year. For interruptions lasting a total of no less than 24 months candidate can seek an extension of two years. The extended age limit of 32 means that candidates born in 1993 or later can participate in the competition.

NOTE: Documented interruptions in research work include for example unpaid leave, if the candidate did not conduct research work during that period, leave connected with parenting, leave caused by sickness, work in the R&D sector without participation in scientific research, work in other sectors of the economy, etc.

- For giving birth to a child (for female candidates) or for adoption of a child (for all candidates regardless of sex), by one year for each child, regardless of the date of birth or adoption of the child.

NOTE: The grounds for extension set forth above cannot be combined. An age extension can be obtained only on the basis of one of them i.e. for a interruptions in research work or for birth/adoption of a child.

Documents confirming that the candidate is entitled to an age extension should be enclosed with the application.

2. REGISTRATION AND FILING OF APPLICATION

HOW TO REGISTER

Registration of candidates applying for a START stipend is conducted online via electronic system (database) made available by the Foundation at <https://wnioski2023.fnp.org.pl/>

ATTENTION: The candidate's login should contain the last name.

The application in the START program consists of the application form and attachments.

Before beginning registration please review carefully the *Rules for Award of Stipends in the START Programme* and following Instructions.

BEFORE YOU START TO FILE YOUR APPLICATION

Before you begin to complete the online application form, you should:

- Prepare all attachments required by the competition rules in electronic form (pdf format).
- Determine who in your case will act as the applicant's representative (in the case of universities this should be the rector or vice-rector, and in the case of other institutions, the director or authorized representative). The online application should provide the name, position, and academic degree/title of the person acting as the applicant.

NOTE: After final closing of the application (after clicking "Finish editing data") there is no possibility to change the data concerning the applicant's representative.

STAGES OF FILING APPLICATION

1. Filling in the on-line application form available in the database at <https://wnioski2023.fnp.org.pl/>;
2. Attaching in electronic form the attachments listed in the *Rules for Award of Stipends in the START Programme* and these Instructions.
3. Closing the completed online application data edition;
4. Downloading and printing out the PDF application form;
5. Signing the application form by the candidate and the applicant;
6. Scanning the signed and stamped application form only (without attachments) and uploading the scan to the database by sending it to the FNP server as a single PDF file;
7. Submitting the electronic version of the application not later than on the **5th of November 2025**, which is going to be confirmed by e-mail;
8. Delivering the printed version of application by post (or by hand) to the Foundation's office at **I. Krasickiego 20/22 str., 02-611 Warsaw, on or before the 5th of November 2025**.
Receipt of the application will be decided by the date of the postmark.

ATTENTION: The electronic submission of a properly signed application form and sending it in printed form to the Foundation's address within the required deadline decides about the acceptance of the application for the competition. The printed application should contain the application form with the seal (if hand-signed) and original signatures of the applicant's representative and the candidate. All the attachments should be submitted in electronic form only.

3. COMMENTS CONCERNING PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS

LANGUAGE

The application form and attachments can be prepared either in Polish or in English.

NOTES CONCERNING THE APPLICATION

The application form is generated automatically by the <https://wnioski2023.fnp.org.pl/> system after completing the data and uploading the required attachments in the "Attachments and Declarations" tab. The application form (without attachments) must be printed and signed with appropriate signatures. A digital version of the signed application should be uploaded to the system, and the paper version should be sent or delivered to the Foundation's headquarters (also in the case of applications signed electronically). More information in the chapter: **FINAL CLOSING OF ONLINE APPLICATION**

MODIFICATION OF DATA ONLINE

The application may be modified or supplemented (including after logging off and logging back into the system again) up until the point of final closing of the online application by the candidate.

COMPLETING THE ONLINE APPLICATION

CANDIDATE

You should not use ALL CAPS. First names, last names and proper nouns should be capitalized. Be sure not to enter your first name in the field for last names. Use abbreviations for academic titles and degrees such as PhD (Polish examples: mgr, mgr inż., dr, dr inż., lek., dr n. med. etc).

The form contains two fields for providing an email address. We will use the email address in the first field for contact. Providing the second email address is optional. We decided to include this option because work email addresses often change, for example, when changing employers or changing positions within the same institution (defending a doctorate and starting work at the same place).

In the "Affiliation" subsection, please specify the location of your research or doctoral studies. In the "Institution" field, provide the name of the university, Polish Academy of Sciences institute, research institute, research company, or other entity conducting scientific research. Individuals affiliated with universities should also complete the "Unit" field, providing the name of their department or doctoral school.

SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

A description of research achievements is a mandatory element of the application. A full, two-page version is provided in the "Attachments and Declarations" section (read more: [REMARKS CONCERNING ATTACHMENTS AND DECLARATIONS](#)). A shortened version of this document, no longer than 2,000 characters, should be provided in the "Scientific Achievements and Publications" section.

Starting with the 2026 call, we have introduced a system module that allows you to generate a list of publications. This module is located in the "Scientific Achievements and Publications" subsection. After entering information about publications in the appropriate fields, you can generate a standard PDF with the required information, which should be submitted to your scientific supervisor for signature, and a scan of the signed document should be uploaded to the "Attachments and Declarations" tab.

The list should contain a maximum of up to five original publications of international or nationwide reach which the candidate regards as the most important of his or her scientific accomplishments. The texts of a maximum of three of these publications, patents or conference papers, in whole or in part (depending on size), should be enclosed with the electronic version of the application (read more in: [REMARKS CONCERNING ATTACHMENTS AND DECLARATIONS](#)). If the most important original publications of the candidate include collective works, i.e. those with more than one author, in each instance the candidate's contribution to the work should be indicated in the form of a description (1–2 sentences) of what the candidate's contribution consisted of. If the candidate is the corresponding author, this should be indicated in the list of publications. Do not give a percentage contribution to the collective works.

NOTE 1: The list of scientific accomplishments CANNOT include patent applications, only patents. Information about patent applications may be included in the description of the research achievement.

NOTE 2: The list of publications must be signed by the candidate's scientific supervisor.

NOTE 3: The quality, not the quantity, of publications is assessed, so please limit yourself to presenting the 5 best publications in the appropriate attachment and do not include a list of all your publications in other attachments.

The lists of winners of the START programme published on the Foundation's website contain lists of publications by the winners of the competitions, which can help candidates assess their own scientific accomplishments. The Foundation encourages candidates to review the lists of publications by previous winners in their field to compare their own scientific accomplishments with those of previous winners in the programme and determine what chance they may have in the competition.

Works accepted for publication may be included in the list of scientific accomplishments only if a document from the publisher is enclosed confirming acceptance of the work for publication. We do not define the form of confirmations of acceptance of a work for publication. **We accept both a signed document from publisher as well as copies of email**, however, it must be clear from the statement that the work has been accepted and will be published. If the publication is already available in an electronic version and has a DOI number, it may be regarded as published.

Confirmations of acceptance for publication should be scanned into one file and attached in Attachments and Statements tab.

It is **not** recommended for candidates to provide an Impact Factor and ministerial points, because **it is not a criterion for evaluation of the candidates' scientific accomplishments**.

We prefer APA style writing. Below are examples of such notation:

Journal article:

Surname, X., Surname2, X. Y., Surname3, Z. (year). Title of the article. Name of the Journal, value(issue), beginning page—end page.

Kowalski, M., Nowak, P. (2009). Narzędzia komunikacji w XXI wieku, *Studia socjologiczne* 1(3), s. 19-43.

Book:

Surname, X., Surname, X. Y. (year). Title of the book. Place of Publishing: Publishing house.

Kowalski, M., Nowak, P. (2009) *Narzędzia komunikacji w XXI wieku*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

Chapter in a book:

Surname, X. (year). Title of the chapter. In: Y. Surname, B. Surname (red.), Title of the book (p. beginning page—end page). Place of publishing: Publishing house.

Kowal M., Walczak P. (2009) *Narzędzia komunikacji w XXI wieku*. In: A. Kowalski, (eds.), *ABC komunikacji* (p. 120-156). Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

AGE LIMIT

Information on the age criterion and the reasons for extending the age limit are included in Chapter 1 of these instructions, in the subsection [Age of candidates](#).

A new feature in the 2026 edition of the competition is the request to attach documents justifying the extension of the age limit at the application stage.

APPLICANT

In the START competition, the Applicant is the institution with which the candidate is affiliated. This may be a university, an institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a research institute, a research company, or a foundation whose purpose is scientific research.

In the Institution Authorities tab, enter the person who will sign the application. In the case of universities, this is the Rector or Vice-Rector, and in rare cases, it may be a person with appropriate power of attorney from the Rector. To determine who will sign the application, contact the university administration. For other institutions, the application is signed by the head of the institution or their deputy (based on appropriate power of attorney).

Incorrectly specifying the institution's authorities will result in disqualification of the application. If in doubt, please consult the competition coordinator.

SCIENTIFIC SUPERVISOR

For doctoral students, the PhD supervisor PhD or co-supervisor (only one of these two) should be designated as the scientific supervisor. In other cases, it should be the head of the research department or the immediate supervisor.

In exceptional cases, if the candidate has recently changed employment (within the last few months), the opinion of the previous supervisor may be cited if the new supervisor is not yet familiar with the candidate's research work.

The supervisor is required to prepare an opinion about the candidate and sign the list of p max. 5 publication. The third document that the supervisor should sign is the Scientific Supervisor's Declaration. A template for this declaration can be found in the "Scientific Supervisor" tab.

OUTGOING STIPEND

Candidates for the START stipend may, but do not have to, apply for a outgoing stipend. Please complete the "Outgoing stipend" tab only if you are applying for such a scholarship.

An Outgoing Stipend can be received only by winners of the START competition. The application for an Outgoing Stipend must be completed and filed together with the application for the START Stipend. However, it is independent of the START stipend amount and is paid out additionally. The amount is determined individually, depending on the location and duration of the visit. The amount awarded is paid out by the Foundation to the stipendee's account provided in the stipend agreement.

You can apply for a trip to one or two research institutions. The maximum total length of the trips is four weeks.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE CHOICE OF THE INSTITUTION AND THE PLAN OF THE VISIT

The attachment containing a justification for the choice of institution together with brief information about the nature of the programme for the planned visit should not exceed 2 pages.

INSTITUTION / INVITING PERSON

Information about the foreign institution the candidate plans to visit should contain the full name of the institution and its exact address, as well as the address of its website. The name, place of employment, position and scientific accomplishment of the person inviting the candidate (based on the person's scientific CV) should be included. The attachment should not exceed 2 pages.

LETTER OF INVITATION

The letter inviting the candidate to visit should include an invitation or confirmation of acceptance of the candidate for a scientific visit at the foreign institution. Letters of invitation may be prepared in any form and transmitted to the candidate in a hard copy or electronic form.

CRITERIA FOR AWARD OF OUTGOING STIPENDS

The main criterion for award of an Outgoing Stipend is the substantive justification for the planned visit. The scientific standing of the institution and the scientific potential of its personnel are also important, and particularly the originality of the scientific accomplishments of the person inviting the stipendee.

Please note that the aim of the Outgoing Stipends is to get to know NEW research centres and establish NEW cooperation with the research staff at those centres. It is not FNP's intention to support visits to centres where the candidate has already stayed or at the request of persons with whom there is existing cooperation or joint projects are already being conducted, and in particular jointly published works. FNP's intention is for research visits under the START programme to help further the stipendees' careers.

Stipendees, who are often currently at a crucial stage in their scientific development, may take advantage of study trips for example to form new research partnerships, or establish mentoring relationships with the person indicated in the application. The visit to a particular centre may also serve as verification or preparation for a longer visit in the nature of a doctoral fellowship. Most importantly, the aim and assumptions of the study visit should arise directly from the individual needs of the stipendee, and not for example the needs of the team in which the stipendee is currently working, or a product of an existing relationship with the given centre (via a superior or academic adviser). In this respect, the Foundation encourages stipendees to take independent action and consciously shape their growth as researchers. Consultations with their mentors may prove particularly helpful in this respect.

REPORT ON OUTGOING STIPENDS

Within two months after realization of the Outgoing Stipend, the stipendee is required to submit a report to the Foundation (according to the form provided), together with a confirmation of the visit from the foreign institution. Financial settlements are not required.

SELECTION OF REVIEWERS GROUP

Applications in the START competition are evaluated within review groups. The reviewers receive a package of applications related by field (i.e. assigned to the same reviewers group), evaluate each of them, and then compare the applications. The candidate's own choice of the reviewers group is intended to enable the best possible choice of the review group for the candidate's application. Some fields are assigned to more than one review group. In that case, the candidate selects one group—the

one that in his or her view best corresponds to the specifics of the research (in making a choice, the other fields included in the same group should be considered). At the panel's request, the Foundation may change the reviewers group for the candidate's application, if it determines that the change would be advantageous to the candidate. Interdisciplinary research that do not fit into one reviewer group may be reviewed in two groups. The interdisciplinary nature of the application should be described in the description of the scientific achievement and a request for evaluation in two groups should be submitted by e-mail to the program coordinator.

The list of review groups and the fields assigned to them is available on the Foundation's website in a separate file.

REMARKS CONCERNING ATTACHMENTS AND DECLARATIONS

TECHNICAL GUIDELINES

All attachments to the application should be prepared in PDF format and enclosed to the application form electronically only. Polish characters should not be used in the names of files enclosed with the electronic application. Attachments should be uploaded to the <https://wnioski2023.fnp.org.pl/> system in the "Attachments and Declarations" tab.

Attachments requiring a signature can be signed by hand and scanned, or signed with an electronic signature. You should not paste photos of signatures into digital documents.

Following documents has to be attached to the online application (in electronic version only):

1. Candidate's CV

The CV should not exceed 3 pages. The CV should contain in order:

- Personal details and address/contact details
- Course of education
- Professional experience (locations where the candidate has conducted scientific research)
- Most important foreign internships (place, dates, duration)
- Candidate's most important research projects (title, name of programme, awarding institution)
- Up to 5 most important scientific conferences with information of the manner in which the candidate appeared at the conference
- Most important awards and distinctions received by the candidate.

NOTE: A list of all the candidate's publications should not be attached to the CV.

2. List of max. 5 publications

Beginning with the 2026 competition, a list of up to five publications should be generated in the "Scientific Achievements and Publications" tab. The file should be signed by the supervisor and uploaded to the system. Read more about preparing the publication list in: [Scientific achievements and publications](#)

3. Confirmation of acceptance to the print publishing

Papers accepted for publication may only be included on the list of scientific achievements if they are accompanied by a document from the publisher confirming their acceptance for publication.

Acceptance certificates can be written in any format, and the content should clearly indicate that the work has been accepted and will be published. If the publication is already available in electronic form and has a DOI number, it can be considered published.

4. Description of the originality of the research achievement(s)

The description of the originality of the research achievement(s) should be prepared with respect to the list of most important publications of the candidate. The entire description should not exceed 2 pages. You can include a bibliography on the third page.

When describing a research achievement, it is worth answering the following questions: What did I research or discover? Why is my discovery important? What's innovative about it? What significance can it have for the field of science pursued? Can the discovery have applications outside science?

This description is fundamental for evaluation of the application, because the reviewers place particular weight on the **substantive** importance of the candidate's research achievement(s). Therefore candidates should pay particularly attention to a precise description reflecting the substantive and cognitive value of their research. In the description it is recommended to refer directly to the specific publications of the candidate however it should be noted that the description of the most important research achievement is not the same as the separate description of the individual publications of the candidate. You should NOT include a list of all your publications in the description.

NOTE 1: It is not a research achievement to, for example, receive a grant, award or stipend, or to receive an invitation and deliver a paper at an important scientific conference. However, the results of the candidate's own research, which might be the subject of a grant project or a paper at a conference, or might be published, are a research achievement. Similarly, obtaining a doctorate is not a research achievement; rather, the research achievement is the innovativeness and the substance of the discovery or results presented in the doctoral dissertation.

In the case of the humanities and social sciences, an achievement could be a creative work published in a significant scholarly journal, particularly a foreign one, or an important publication in book form. However, the substantive value and originality of the work should be demonstrated in the description.

NOTE 2: Please describe your research achievement **in the first person**, that is, as you would describe YOUR OWN research, not research by another person.

NOTE 3: Candidates who believe that the research they have conducted stands out for boldly crossing borders between different fields of science, opening up new research perspectives, and creating new values in science may address this issue in the description of their most important research achievement, also indicating which of the publications or parts thereof involve research of this nature. In that case, the candidates should also:

- Expressly indicate what this interdisciplinary nature of the work consists of, what it derives from and what is the added value of this type of R&D work
- Specify which additional review groups should—in their opinion—review the application (see also [Selection of reviewers group](#)).

Whether the given application can accurately be regarded as crossing borders between different fields of science, opening up new research perspectives and creating new values in science will be

decided by the panel of experts. The Foundation will make all efforts to ensure that all applications deemed by the panel of experts to be interdisciplinary in the foregoing sense and qualified for further stages of the competition are evaluated during subsequent stages by an appropriately selected group of reviewers representing different areas and fields of science specific to the given application, also as indicated by the candidate.

Applications regarded as interdisciplinary may be considered in the **competition for the Prof. Barbara Skarga Honorary Fellowship**, awarded each year to one of the winners of the START programme.

5. Description of the research plans for the next year – 2026

The description of scientific plans concerns calendar year 2026 and may include information about plans arising out of realization of a research grant obtained from an institution funding scientific research other than the Foundation (such as the National Science Centre or the National Centre for Research and Development). The description should not exceed 2 pages.

6. Opinion of scientific supervisor

Opinion of the candidate's scientific supervisor or director of the research team in which the candidate conducts research. The opinion electronic version must contain the scientific supervisor's signature. The scientific supervisor must be the candidate's immediate supervisor or the director of the candidate's research team (in the case of PhDs), or in the case of PhD students, the PhD supervisor (*promotor*) or PhD co-supervisor.

7. Declaration of the scientific supervisor

A form for the declaration is enclosed in the documents for download. After signing, a scan should be enclosed.

8. Texts of the 3 most important publications of the candidate

The texts of a maximum of 3 works chosen by the candidate as his or her most important achievements should be enclosed with the electronic version of the application. They may include works in the process of publication, if confirmation of acceptance for publication is attached. The maximum size of files is 20 MB. In the case of lengthy publications, or books, please submit only the table of contents, introduction and conclusion, or those passages on the basis of which the reviewers can evaluate the importance of the publication.

NOTE: After attaching the attachments to the form, it should be checked whether the files with publications open correctly and are not encrypted or corrupted.

NOTE 2: Publications attached to the application must be listed in the List of Publications.

9. Declaration on change of name

Declaration on change of name applies only to persons who have changed their name and have scientific accomplishments under their previous name. A form for this declaration is included in the files for downloading as well as "Attachments and Declarations" tab. It should be filled out, signed, and attached as a scan.

OTHER ATTACHMENTS

Other attachments not listed above, such as multiple opinions, letters of recommendation, testimonials etc., should not be attached to the application.

DECLARATIONS THAT WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE APPLICATION FORM

The application form for Start stipend is generated by the system in the “Application Verification and Submission” tab. It includes declarations by the Candidate and the Applicant. If you wish to acknowledge it earlier you can find it in *Documents for download* section of the online form.

In the case of the **Candidate** the declarations concern among other things:

- Declaration on fulfilment of the formal conditions for candidates in the competition
- Declaration on review of the rules for the competition and compliance with the rules
- Consent to processing of personal data by the Foundation for Polish Science
- Consent to provide access to the application to experts and reviewers conducting evaluations in the competition
- Consent to providing information for the purposes of evaluations conducted by the Foundation for Polish Science or other authorized entities, regardless of the result of the competition
- In the case of candidates exceeding age 30 in the year of filing of the application, a declaration confirming interruptions in scientific work or a declaration concerning birth or adoption of a child
- Consequences of filing false data or declarations.

In the case of the **Applicant** the declarations concern among other things:

- Declaration on review of the rules for the competition and compliance with the rules
- Consent to processing of personal data by the Foundation for Polish Science
- Consent to provide access to the application to experts and reviewers conducting evaluations in the competition
- Consent to providing information for the purposes of evaluations conducted by the Foundation for Polish Science or other authorized entities, regardless of the result of the competition
- Applicant’s declaration that if a Stipend is received the entity will seek all approvals from the ethics commission or other permits required by law necessary for conducting the research in question and that research will not begin until the relevant approvals and permits are obtained.

FINAL CLOSING OF ONLINE APPLICATION

By selecting the "Application Verification and Submission" tab, you can verify whether all required forms have been completed and whether all required attachments have been attached. In the event of an error, a report will be displayed, allowing you to quickly identify the missing element. If all elements have been correctly entered into the system, you can proceed to closing and submitting the application. Before completing the data editing process, we recommend clicking the "Generate the

Application" button to create a trial version of the application and verify the data. If the application is correct, select the "Finish Data Editing" button and then generate the final version of the application (click the "Generate the Application" button again).

It should also be borne in mind that after the candidate finish editing date, the data included in the application will be accessible as read-only, without the possibility of making further changes. If you need to edit it again, you should contact the programme coordinator.

WHO SIGNS AND STAMPS THE APPLICATION

The stipend application must be signed by:

1. The candidate
2. The applicant's representative (i.e. the rector or prorector of the university, or in the case of another entity its director or authorized representative).

The hand-signed application should bear the individual named seal of the person representing the applicant – the rector (or prorector) in the case of a university, or in the case of another scientific institution, the director of person authorized to represent the institution externally

3. Digitally-signed applications do not require seals.

NOTE: Applications from candidates without the aforementioned signatures and seal will not be accepted. Applications do not need to be initialled on every page.

USE OF ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES

Qualified electronic signatures are equivalent to handwritten signatures and does not require the seal. Starting from the 2026 competition, we also accept "Podpis zaufany" on applications. We recommend verifying the validity of submitted digital signatures on the appropriate website before uploading them to the system. We also recommend saving the original file on your device. Digitally signed applications should be submitted both in digital form and in the form of a printout sent or delivered to the Foundation's headquarters. You cannot combine digital and handwritten signatures on one application form (however, you can use different type of signatures on attachments).

SUCCESSFUL SUBMISSION OF AN APPLICATION

Applications must be submitted in two forms: electronic and paper, regardless of the type of signature used. Electronically signed applications should be uploaded to the system, printed, and sent in hard copy to the Foundation. Hand signed applications should be sent to the Foundation, as well as scanned, and then uploaded to the system.

The electronic application should be attached to the "Application Verification and Submission" tab. The paper application should be sent or delivered in person to the Foundation's office **by November 5, 2025**. The date of filing of the application will be determined by the postmark. We recommend keeping proof of mailing in case your package is lost.

TIME AND PLACE FOR FILING HARD COPY OF APPLICATION

Applications for the START programme competition (2026 edition) should be submitted in hard copy by post or in person at the Foundation's offices: **I. Krasickiego 20/22 str., 02-611 Warsaw, by November 5, 2025**. The date of filing of the application will be determined by the postmark.

CONFIRMATION OF RECEIPT OF APPLICATION BY FNP

Due to the large number of applications in the competition, the Foundation will not send candidates confirmation of receipt of the hard copy of the application. To obtain such confirmation, the application should be submitted by registered mail, return receipt requested.

4. STAGES AND CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS

STAGES OF EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS

1. Stage I: formal evaluation of applications

The formal evaluation is made by the Foundation employees. Applications that do not meet the formal requirements—not signed by the applicants or sent after the deadline—will not be considered. The formal defects listed above cannot be made up. Otherwise, candidates whose applications require supplementation will be notified accordingly by the programme coordinator. Those applications can be supplemented within 7 days after receipt of the relevant notice.

If an electronic file attached to the online form is found to be damaged, or in the case of typographical errors, the programme coordinator may request supplementation at any stage in the competition.

2. Stage II: evaluation of applications by experts

Every application is evaluated by at least two experts. Experts receive applications from specific review groups (see also: [Selection of reviewers group](#)) representing the same field of science. The experts will assign each application to one of the three groups listed below (depending on the quality and originality of the candidates' scientific accomplishments and the importance of their achievements):

Group A – highest recommendation for the next stage of evaluation: the best applications, submitted by outstanding and distinguished candidates, with original and innovative scientific accomplishments of international scope as well as significant research achievements.

Group B – conditional recommendation for the next stage of evaluation: applications of candidates with good scientific accomplishments and research achievements, but less significant than the best candidates.

Group C – no recommendation for the next stage of evaluation: applications of candidates whose scientific research is at a beginning level. These are candidates who cannot demonstrate significant scientific accomplishments; the results of their work are of local reach; their publications are predominantly brief post-conference reports or works of a popular science nature.

The results of evaluations by experts undergo discussion and consultation at panel meetings of experts in specific fields of science. Panel participants can compare the level of the assessed applications. The applications found by the panel of experts to be the best are qualified for the third stage of the

competition. The rest of the applications do not participate in the subsequent stages of the competition.

3. Stage III: evaluation of applications by reviewers

Applications qualified for the third stage of the competition are evaluated within specific review groups. Each group is evaluated by at least three reviewers.

The task of the reviewers is to rank the application, in order from the best to the weakest and to justify the assessment indicating the originality of the scientific achievements, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the application.

The reviewers' assessments are composed of:

- A. A grade on a 7 point scale (the best applications according to the merit criteria receive 7points, the weakest – 1point)
- B. a rank, being a result of the ranking of all the applications from the best to the weakest one.

The reviewers also provide opinions on Outgoing Stipends for candidates applying for them (see [Outgoing stipend](#)).

4. Stage IV: selection of competition winners

The final selection of winners is made by the Foundation Board on the basis of a detailed analysis of all evaluations of candidates and applications. The Board's decision is confirmed by the Foundation Council.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS

START stipends are awarded in recognition of the scientific accomplishments to date of young researchers. The purpose of these stipends is to encourage the most outstanding scientists at the beginning of their research careers to pursue further growth in the field of science.

QUALITY AND ORIGINALITY OF SCIENTIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Under the rules for the START programme, the basic criterion for evaluation of applications is the scientific quality and originality of candidates' accomplishments. This is evaluated by reviewers in particular on the basis of:

- The list of up to five publications, patents or conference papers enclosed with the online application
- Copies of up to three of the foregoing publications, patents or conference papers enclosed with the online application which the candidate regards as his or her most important research work to date
- The description of the originality of the candidate's most important research achievement(s) enclosed with the online application.

The reviewers consider only substantive value—the originality and innovativeness of the scientific achievement. Even a single work, representing a serious contribution to research in the candidate's field, may be sufficient to receive a stipend. Thus when evaluating candidates' achievements,

reviewers pay particular attention to whether the works they present are original and contribute new ideas, methods and the like to their scientific discipline.

In the case of post-conference works, the reviewers assess whether they are innovative works prepared at the request of the organizers, or rather brief items in the nature of summaries or reports. In the case of evaluation of collective works, on the basis of information provided by the candidates the reviewers consider how the candidate's individual work contributed to the publication.

The quality, not the quantity, of publications is assessed, so please limit yourself to presenting the 5 best publications in the appropriate attachment and do not include a list of all your publications in other attachments.

CANDIDATE'S MOST IMPORTANT RESEARCH ACHIEVEMENT

When filing an application in the competition, candidates present their most important research achievement(s), arising directly from their scientific accomplishments.

This description is fundamental for evaluation of the application, because the reviewers place particular weight on the **substantive** importance of the candidate's research achievement(s). Therefore candidates should pay particularly attention to a precise description reflecting the substantive and cognitive value of their research.

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA

The candidate's research plans for the upcoming year presented in the stipend application will also be taken into consideration in the evaluation of applications. However, they are not the fundamental subject of evaluation of applications as they would be in the case of grant competitions. The START stipend is awarded for what the candidate has already achieved.

CRITERIA APPLIED IN AWARD OF OUTGOING STIPENDS

The main criterion for award of an Outgoing Stipend is the substantive justification for the selection and need for the visit to a foreign institution. The standing of the institution selected by the candidate, including the research potential of its staff and in particular the persons inviting the candidate, will also be considered. The evaluation of the appropriateness of the selection of the institution in terms of the topic of the candidate's research is also important (see also [Outgoing stipend](#)).

4. ANNOUNCEMENT OF COMPETITION RESULTS AND ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

A list of the winners is published on the Foundation's website. Information about the results is also sent to all candidates—first to the winners and their applicants, and then (within three months after announcement of the results of the competition) to the other candidates. The results of the START 2026 competition are expected to be announced in May 2026.

If after reviewing these instructions and the rules for the START programme any questions arise which are **not answered** in the instructions or the rules for the START programme, please contact the START programme coordinators:

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Good luck in the competition!