

Call for Exploratory Research and Education Projects, Thematic Schools, Research Seminars, and Secondments of Early-stage Researchers

20 February 2026

AURORA



Co-funded by
the European Union



EXPECTED PROPOSALS

Moving forward from the successful Incentive Research collaboration calls conducted in 2024 and 2025¹, this new call launched by the Aurora universities adds further possibilities to address the nexus between research and education. It incentivizes the formation of original collaborative research actions and research-driven educational actions in Aurora’s six thematic hubs of transdisciplinary research and education:

- 1) Sustainability and Climate Change,
- 2) Digital Society and Global Citizenship,
- 3) Health and Wellbeing,
- 4) Culture: Identities and Diversities,
- 5) Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and
- 6) Peace Education.

Three types of key actions (KA) can be proposed within this Call:

KA 1	Exploratory and collaborative research projects <u>or</u> projects that are built at the interface between research and education
KA 2	Thematic Schools and Intensive Research Seminars
KA 3	Short-term secondment for research and/or training of R1 / R2 researchers ² (up to 3 months).

The goal of these actions is to build societally impactful scientific communities in transdisciplinary research and at the intersection between research and education among Aurora universities.

In order to do so, successful proposals must promote **collaborative** research and research-intensive learning. They **create new** scientific relationships within the Aurora universities and/or **consolidate existing** ones. Successful proposals will establish scientific and scholarly **communities** that are able to make a noticeable difference in international debates. They **strengthen Aurora’s thematic hubs**.

¹ More than 80 proposals submitted, by more than 200 research groups

² R1: **First Stage Researcher** (up to the point of PhD), R2: **Recognized researchers who** are PhD holders or researchers with an equivalent level of experience and competence.

Proposals from all disciplines are welcome: Health Sciences, Humanities, Social and Economic Sciences, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

Key Action 1 – Exploratory and Collaborative Research and Education Projects

The proposals that will be funded should:

- contribute to the increase of knowledge and address societal challenges, and
- develop long-term scientific / scholarly communities within Aurora, creating perspectives for seeking large scale funding opportunities in the future.

Projects that are built at the interface between research and education should explain in detail the expected synergy.

The project duration is **2 years**.

Eligibility:

- Proposals need to include researchers from at least three Aurora 2030 member universities. At least two research groups must come from universities with full membership³, and one of the groups may come from an associated university⁴. For each participating institution, the principal investigator needs to have a permanent (or similar) position at their university.⁵ Note that an associated university cannot receive any funding through this action, and is expected to contribute through its own funds.
- The researchers must apply as a group, describing their mission and vision. They should put forward the mutual gains of the expected collaboration, in terms of complementarity of competences and approaches. Teams can be formed both within a single discipline or they can be multi-disciplinary.
- Projects that are built at the interface between research and education can

³ Aurora 2030 full members: University of Iceland, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, University of Duisburg-Essen, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Université Paris-Est Créteil, Palacký University Olomouc, Universität Innsbruck, Copenhagen Business School, University Federico II of Naples.

⁴ Aurora associated members: Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, University of Tetova, South-West University Neofit Rilski (Bulgaria), Simon Fraser University (Canada).

⁵ Assistant & Associate professors being on tenure track are eligible, but not postdocs.

propose design measures for the creation of blended intensive programmes⁶ or can aim at the design of micro-credentials, in accordance with recently published guidelines.⁷ Proposals establishing a preliminary working group on joint programmes aiming to take the first design and implementation steps will receive high attention.

- It is intended that most of the projects match the transdisciplinary themes put forward by one of the Aurora thematic hubs (see above). Nevertheless, projects without contribution to any hub are also considered. Proposers may contact the relevant thematic hub before submission (via the coordinator of the hubs Zohra Hassan-Pieper – aurora.hubs@uni-due.de).
- Proposers can find collaborators using the [Aurora Connect Gateway](#) and/or make use of shared [research Aurora infrastructures](#). These tools have been established in order to help building scientific communities.

Key Action 2 – Thematic Schools and Intensive Research Seminars

This action generally funds intensive training for **students who are close to graduation** (Master) and **early-stage researchers** (PhD students and postdocs mainly). The events should serve as a career development opportunity, a knowledge sharing hub and a network/community building activity for the group of participants and lecturers.

Thematic schools should cover a specific research theme for a short period of time (generally 1 or 2 weeks) and consist of lectures, practical work, or conferences **given by 5 to 10 (or more) experts from at least three Aurora 2030 full member universities**.³

Research seminars are in general shorter (about 2 to 3 days). They must include contributions of researchers from more than two Aurora universities and should include hands-on, theory-driven field work, community engagement as well as student research.

The **focus of this key action is disciplinary and multi-disciplinary training** rather than training of general transversal skills (such as communication, grant writing, etc). For both types of events, a preliminary list of lecturers must be included in the proposal.

Experts or lecturers from higher education or research institutions outside the Aurora 2030 community can be invited too, but should represent a minority among the invited

⁶ [Aurora BIP Handbook](#)

⁷ [Aurora Guidelines for Setting Up Micro-credentials](#)

lecturers (<30%). Proposers need to hold permanent (or similar) positions at Aurora full member universities.⁵

Key Action 3 – Short-term secondments for research and/or training of R1 / R2 researchers

This action enables early-stage career researchers (Master, PhD, post-docs) to go on short-term mobility in a research laboratory or unit of an Aurora 2030 full member university.

The short-term research secondment can last up to 3 months. The research to be conducted in the host laboratory/unit **should be well defined with a clear work plan** and give the candidate important skills that are needed for his/her future research. The work programme can include training on specific scientific methods not covered by the sending institution. Research topics can be from all disciplines, likewise Key Action 1.

Master, PhD and post-doctoral researchers are eligible for this type of mobility. Candidates and host laboratory or research unit must be from an Aurora 2030 full member university.

A Master student, PhD candidate or post-doctoral scholar may be the applicant. However, both the supervisor and the host researcher must agree with the applicant's proposed research project (signatures from both are required).⁸

BUDGET

Key Action 1. Exploratory and collaborative research and education projects will be granted up to 20,000 € in total and are expected to last 2 years. The budget can be used to facilitate travel and networking, information sharing, gaining access to data, field work, conducting preliminary research and course design exercises, and for preparing future responses to calls for larger research projects. We intend funding of about 10 projects.

Key Action 2. Thematic schools can receive funding of up to 20,000 €, and research seminars up to 10,000 €. These funds can be used to cover operating costs or co-fund

⁸ Since this type of mobility must take place in a research laboratory/unit, a Master student should already be working on his/her Master thesis project.

travel of lecturers and/or participants. We intend funding of about 5 schools/seminars.

The total amount of funding allocated to key actions 1 and 2 is 240,000 € in this call.

Key Action 3. Short-term training and mentoring secondments for early-stage researchers will be supported by Aurora mobility funds managed at each Aurora member university (up to a maximum of 3 months). They are free to use other Erasmus+ financial resources. The exact grant amount will be aligned to the local mobility policy. [Please find the expected funding amount of “sending” University here](#). Please note that Università Federico II of Naples (UNINA) does not provide any mobility support under this action.

This action will support at least 10 short term secondments every year.

HOW TO SUBMIT A PROPOSAL?

The deadline for submission of proposals is 17 April 2026 at 12:00 (noon) Central European Summer Time (CEST).

For proposals and applications for the three key actions, please fill out the respective forms available on the [Aurora website](#).

[Application for Key Action 1 - Exploratory and Collaborative Research and Education Projects](#)

[Application for Key Action 2 - Thematic Schools and Research Seminars](#)

[Application for Key Action 3 – Short-term Training and Mentoring Secondments for Early-stage Researchers](#)

Please send them to the following e-mail address: aurora.arc.office@gmail.com , as a pdf file.

The subject line of the email and file name should read:

[2026_AURORA_CALL_\[PI NAME\]_\[UNIVERSITY\]_\[PROJECT ACRONYME\]_\[KA123\]_\[OPTION\]](#)

([OPTION] is **ER** for Exploratory and collaborative research project and **CRE** for Combined research and education project, **TS** for Thematic schools and **IRS** for Intensive research seminars.)

Please also fill out a form with basic information on your project under the following link:

[Call for Incentive Research & Education Collaboration - 2026](#)

EVALUATION PROCESS AND CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS

Proposals for the three key actions will be evaluated by the Aurora Research Council (ARC). This Council includes representatives from all Aurora universities and the Aurora transdisciplinary hubs, representing diverse research fields. Depending on their complexity, received proposals may be sent to external experts for peer review. The ARC will make recommendations for funding to Aurora Vice-rector panels who are in charge of the final decision for funding.

The schedule for submission and evaluation is the following:

- Release of the call: 20 February 2026
- **Deadline for the submission of proposals: 17 April 2026 at 12:00 CEST**
- Decision on funding: July 2026
- Funding period: September 2026 to September 2028 (Key Action 1). Thematic schools and research secondments (Key Actions 2 and 3) must be completed by December 2027.

General criteria for selection of proposals are:

- A clear description of project goals, in line with the call text, their originality as well as their scientific (and, where applicable, their educational) quality.
- A convincing argumentation of the **Aurora added value**: collaboration, in particular for community building, meeting societal challenges, ability to respond to large scale calls during the project duration (Key Action 1), or, in the case of projects that seek to innovate teaching and learning, and the ability to design innovative research-driven educational projects.
- A credible description of the provisional budget and eventual co-funding resources.

- The inclusion of three partners from Aurora 2030 member universities (Key Actions 1 and 2).

REPORTING

Reporting on project outcome will be solicited 3 months after the end of the project, the summer school or the research secondment, respectively. For Key Action 1, a short intermediate report is due 15 months after the project's beginning. A reporting form will be made available in due course. Reporting will include a list of scientific publications (submitted/or prepared), proposals (or intentions) to respond to European calls, and new common Aurora teaching activities proposed.

The funding will be awarded as a lump sum which can be used as described in the proposal and as needed for the project.

COMMUNICATION, DISSEMINATION AND SYNERGIES WITH THE AURORA HUBS

Project leaders will be asked to give oral presentations of the outcome of their project at Aurora annual conferences in order to illustrate their efforts to foster scientific collaboration and community building within Aurora.

Project leaders must comply with the communication charter specified in the grant agreement they will sign.

Grant holders are requested to interact with one or more of the 6 Aurora thematic hubs. Once selected, they will receive invitations to participate in hub specific meetings where attendance is mandatory.

QUESTIONS

Please address all your inquiries concerning eligibility, the application process and evaluation procedures, or any other concern, to: aurora.arc.office@gmail.com.