

# FRIA or FRESH PhD grant application calls from the F.R.S.-FNRS

→ *Writing the application*

→ *Preparing the interview*

# Content

1. [The F.R.S.-FNRS](#)
2. [FRESH and FRIA grants](#)
3. [Regulatory and administrative information](#)
4. [The evaluation and selection process](#)
5. [The application file](#)
6. [The interview](#)
7. [2022 Results](#)
8. [ULiege contacts](#)
9. [Useful links](#)

# 1. The F.R.S.-FNRS

Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique-FNRS

Public foundation (over 90% publicly funded)

They support the development of fundamental scientific research in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels (FWB)

The mission of the FNRS is to develop basic scientific research within the framework of initiatives presented by researchers at all stages of their careers

## 2. FRESH and FRIA grants

**FRESH:** *Fonds pour la Recherche en Sciences Humaines (Human Sciences Research Fund)* : supports basic research projects whose outcomes are likely to improve the understanding or functioning of one sector in the society in the short-medium term at a local, regional, national or international level, from many perspectives such as culture, economy, politics, sociology and psychosociology

**FRIA:** *Fonds pour la Formation à la Recherche dans l'Industrie et dans l'Agriculture (Fund for Research Training in Industry and Agriculture)*: for PhD candidates who aim to develop their research career in industry or agriculture

Candidates cannot introduce applications within both schemes. The choice is imposed by the field of study of the diploma they have completed which gives access to doctoral studies.

However, graduates in the following fields may choose to apply for either the FRESH or FRIA grant (subject to promoter support):

- Public Health Sciences
- Geographic Sciences
- Psychology and Educational Sciences
- Environmental Sciences and Management
- Agroecology

**3 types of grants** exist:

- 1<sup>st</sup> grant 1<sup>st</sup> year: for those who have not yet started their PhD or have been working on their doctoral thesis for less than 12 months
- 1<sup>st</sup> grant 2<sup>nd</sup> year: for PhD candidates who apply after one year of PhD studies
- 2<sup>nd</sup> grant: only available to candidates who have already been granted a first FRESH or FRIA grant

### 3. Regulatory and administrative information

## 3.1. Timeline 2023

<b>4 July</b>	call launched for FRESH and FRIA grants
<b>24 August</b>	applicant application registration deadline
<b>Oct</b>	preselection of FRESH applications
<b><u>10 Oct - 9 Nov</u></b>	FRIA interviews
<b><u>6 - 17 Nov</u></b>	FRESH interviews
<b>December</b>	final decisions (Board of Trustees of the FNRS)
<b>Dec 2023 - Jan 2024</b>	evaluation reports sent to all candidates
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Oct 2023</b>	<i>(retroactive*) scholarship starts (*unless otherwise requested)</i>

*\* If the FNRS accepts a starting date later than 1 October, the elapsed time between 1 October and the starting date of the grant shall not extend the duration of the grant*

## 3.2. PhD promoter and co-promoter

The **promoter** must meet the following conditions:

1. they must be permanently appointed to an academic or scientific position or on probation in the university
2. this academic or scientific position must be effective no later than the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2023. A promoter who will obtain the legal age of retirement / become professor emeritus by the validation deadline set by the academic authorities (rectors) is not eligible

In addition, ULiège requires that the promoter cannot be retired on the start date of the exchange (01/10/2023)

If the promoter reaches the legal age of retirement / becomes professor emeritus between the beginning and the end of the granting scheme; approval by the Head of the institution must be obtained (contact P. Blanchard)

A **co-promoter** must be a member of one of the institutions listed in Appendix 1 of the [Rules and regulations](#) of each grant

### 3.3. Appendices

#### 1st grants:

<u>Academic results and ranking</u> (document to be completed by the Faculty/faculties which awarded your degree(s), duplicate as necessary, then upload to the FNRS e-space)	30/09/2023
Certificate of achievement or a copy of the Masters diploma, and if applicable, a registration document or a certificate that enables admission to doctoral programmes issued by the university where the studies will be carried out <b>OR</b> a letter authorising direct entry to PhD studies	30/09/2023
Reference letters	30/09/2023
Medical doctor and veterinary applicants who have been undertaking a specialty training: certificate of enrolment of the specialty in question	30/09/2023

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> grants (renewals):

<u>Recommendation and evaluation letter from the supervisor and the thesis committee</u>	Send to RISE ( <a href="#">Liliane Gelon</a> ) to obtain the Rectrice’s signature and then send to the FNRS: 21/10/2023
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## 3.4. Enrolment at ULiege

Holders of a foreign degree: complete the ULiege enrolment services [online form](#) to obtain the required documentation **NO LATER THAN 5 SEPTEMBER**

**Registration is required from the very beginning of the doctoral programme for insurance reasons.**

It is possible to claim a tuition refund if:

- you have been awarded the grant
- you do not wish to continue your PhD because you have not been awarded the grant

For refund claim applications, please complete the ULiege Enrolment services [online form](#) **until 15/01/2024**

## 4. The evaluation and selection process

## 4.1. The selection process

### FRESH:

1. Each application is reviewed by several members of the jury chosen by the applicant. Each application is reviewed individually and then scores are compiled to create a **preselection list**. Criteria includes:
  - the research project (40%)
  - the competencies of the applicant with regard to their specialty (CV) (40%)
  - the research environment (10%)
  - the societal impact of the project (10%)

*-> For each criterion, irrespective of their weight, applicants must meet a minimum quality threshold*

2. An **interview** with the preselected applicants

**FRIA:** **Interviews** are held with all the applicants

## 4.2. The juries

	Types	Composition
<b>FRESH</b>	1 Cultural challenges panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 members from FWB universities</li> <li>• 3 civil society representatives</li> </ul>
	3 Economic and social challenges panels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 members from FWB universities</li> <li>• 1 civil society representatives</li> </ul>
<b>FRIA</b>	2 panels with 19 subject areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LS: Life and Health Sciences</li> <li>• PE: Physical Sciences and Engineering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 or 8 members from FWB universities</li> <li>• 1 non-academic member</li> </ul>

-> 2 ULiege members per jury

-> **Choose your jury strategically, based on the skills of the members:** This is a critical step: a wrong choice can lead to an insufficiently relevant evaluation and harm the application!

## 4.3. Evaluation

FNRS criteria:

- Quality of the research project: feasibility, originality, host laboratory, work plan, societal impact and activity report + *societal impact* (**FRESH**)
- Competencies of the applicant with respect to their specialty area (CV)
- Presentation and answers given to questions about the project
- Scientific knowledge in general

In preparation for the interview, each file is entrusted to a rapporteur, according to the descriptive elements and the keywords that the applicant indicated on the application form

## 4.4. Societal impact

### FRESH

A specific feature of the FRESH fund is the societal impact of the research programs that are selected for funding

#### **Candidates for a FRESH grant must provide:**

- a justification of the potential societal impact of their project in their application file, highlighting the players, groups or sectors that are likely to benefit from the results of the research in the short-medium term
- the contact details of a referee outside the academic sphere who will be contacted by the FNRS to provide a reference letter (the applicant does not have to include it him-/ herself in the FNRS e-space)

#### **The societal impact is taken into account in the pre-selection process (10% weighting)**

It is strongly recommended to consider the societal impacts from the beginning of the project and ensure that it is clearly communicated in the application. Dissemination of research results should also be outlined

**Some jury members are particularly attentive to the societal impact of a project** and it can be a deciding factor between candidates. Therefore, when presenting the societal impact, it is necessary to have carefully thought about it and to be convinced of its reality (demonstrate its feasibility, establish contacts, etc.)

## 4.4. Societal impact

### FRIA

**Although not mandatory, candidates for a FRIA grant can provide:**

- the justification of the potential societal impact of their project in their application file, highlighting the players, groups or sectors that are likely to benefit from the results of the research in the short-medium term
- In case of short term industrial or agronomic prospects: the contact details of 2 referees from the industry and/or agriculture sectors who will be contacted by the FNRS to provide a reference letter (the candidate does not personally have to include the letters in the FNRS e-space)

**As this is not an evaluation criterion, an application that does not have industrial or agronomic prospects will not be negatively reviewed**

However, when presenting prospects for application, it is necessary to have carefully thought about and clearly demonstrate the reality of this impact (establishing contacts, demonstrating feasibility, etc.). Some jury members are very attentive to this (especially members of civil society)

## 4.5. Ethical issues

*Are you conducting experiments or using samples on human beings/materials?*

*Are you using animals in your experiments?*

*Does your project entail ethical issues related to Human Sciences?*

-> In the event you are awarded a grant, researchers concerned with ethical questions will be required to submit their questionnaire accompanied by the opinion and comments from the Ethics Committee to the FNRS

Candidates may be asked ethical questions during the interview

-> **Anticipate these issues as soon as you write the project!**



## 5. The application file

## 5.1. The main sections

Applicants must submit their application online, either in French or in English, through the FNRS web-based application [e-space](#)

### **Main sections:**

- Application creation (identity of the candidate and of the promoter)
- Data proving the eligibility of the applicant
- Researcher's identification
- Framework
- Project description
- Other information
- Appendices
- Validation

## 5.2. The researcher

- Administrative details (eligibility of the request)
  - Academic track record (ranking and honourable mentions): the adequacy between its background and the anticipated project is a fundamental element and is much more important than the results! A bottom-up approach is also an added value to the application
  - ORCID ID number (if you have one)
  - Professional experience
  - Scientific seniority (juries take this into account when assessing the profile)
  - Prior awards and honours
  - Possible publications (published or accepted)
  - Research stays abroad (might have an added-value). Like awards and publications, they can compensate for modest academic careers
- > Having a preliminary research experience is a positive element in an application

## 5.3. The research project

- **Title** (short and snappy, integrate the question to be answered), summary (present why the research is important, the objectives and means), keywords, choice of jury and descriptor fields, ethical issues, etc.
- Description of the **project** (see next slide):
  - 4 pages maximum (6 if charts, graphs & tables are added), organized in 4 parts: goals of the research, state of the art, research project, work plan – **do not exceed the maximum number of allowed pages!!**
  - an additional page can be devoted to the bibliography
- In case of a resubmission: comments on **changes** made in the research project (optional)
- Applicants for a 1<sup>st</sup> grant, 2<sup>nd</sup> year: **activities report** on the 1<sup>st</sup> year of doctorate
- **FRESH: societal value** of the project
- Potential **interdisciplinary approach** of the research project (optional)
- Description of the **work environment**
- **Summary** of the master's thesis or equivalent
- **Additional comments** (optional)
- PhD **work calendar** per month

-> The quality of the project is undoubtedly the most important criterion for the juries

## 5.3. The research project

- Trust your promoter to support you and guide you in drafting your project
  - The research project must be clear (well-organized and accessible to all), coherent, unambiguous and equally ambitious, original, concise, well-written and without spelling mistakes (put words/essential parts in bold)
  - The **feasibility** of the project must be convincing. The research must be done in 4 years and be at a doctoral level. A balance must be found between feasibility and **originality**
  - A real research question should be introduced along with a well-substantiated hypotheses; the **objectives** must be clear
  - Beware of projects that are too "applied": if it can, or must (**FRESH**) present a societal impact or an industrial or agronomic perspective, the project must remain **fundamental**
  - Situate the project in relation to the **state of the art** (1/2 page max)
  - **Methodology** is a key aspect and is often highly questioned: it must be detailed and justified
  - Introduce a very specific and personalized **schedule**, which clearly highlights the first 2 years. A Gantt chart might be useful (see next slide).
  - Adapt your project to the call specifications if it has already been submitted to the *Aspirant* call
  - The project may or may not be a continuation of the master's thesis (few questions about the thesis are asked during the interview). A thesis allows the candidate's potential to be highlighted
- > Have different people proofread your project from the beginning. It must be understandable to non-specialists (give short definitions of key concepts, etc.)

## 5.3. The research project

### Gantt chart example

**Prospective timeline FRESH-FRIA 2023**

	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Call launch						
Pre-selection based on the application files						
FRIA interviews						
FRESH interviews						
Funding decisions (Board of Trustee of the FNRS)						
Start of the scholarship				◆		

## 5.3. The research project

### Additional comments

- Free section, to be used
- This can be particularly useful for presenting a risk analysis, or for presenting elements that could not be presented before, due to a lack of space or a place to develop certain points that you consider important

## 5.4. The work environment

- Include elements to assess whether the environment (the intellectual means and/or equipment available to the applicant) is appropriate to achieve the aims of the project (in conjunction with feasibility and methodology)

The research environment must provide the experimental means that are necessary for the project

The promoter can be of great assistance in defining this environment

Promoter, co-promoter, joint supervision: **co-promotion and joint supervision must be considered in the case of an interdisciplinary project or if a gap exists in the research environment.**

- > It must be relevant, clearly described and provide the multidisciplinary expertise required by certain projects (work with a co-supervisor in the case of an interdisciplinary project). You must have convincing arguments that this is an ideal environment and that the project cannot be completed elsewhere

**Human resources:** *if there are new techniques, who's going to coach you? Present the number of people in the lab, and the techniques mastered, possibly with the help of a technician. Are there lab seminars, how often are they held? When will you discuss with your promoter? Will you be supervised by another person? What are their qualifications?*

### **Honourable mentions**

Present any **awards** obtained by the promoters and/or co-promoters on this subject



## 5.5. Academic referees

Include the contact details of referees (member of the academic staff of a scientific institution) other than the promoter who will be contacted by the FNRS and invited to provide a reference letter. They will give their opinion on the quality of the candidate and on the application file (mention people who really know you):

- for a **FRESH** application: 1 referee
- for a **FRIA** application: 2 referees

-> *Tip: ask a researcher you met during a research stay or a scientific event abroad*

References will be contacted by the FNRS (the applicant does not have to include these letters in the FNRS e-space).

These letters are important and are carefully read by the jury members. They should be specific to the candidate, highlight their strengths and be unambiguous: the letters must indicate, in particular, the confidence of the promoter

-> Explain to the referees which task the FNRS will ask them to perform and ensure that they will be able to complete the letter within the time limit set by the FNRS

## 5.6. Referees involved in the field outside the academic sphere

Contact details of referees outside the academic sphere:

- **FRESH applications: mandatory (1 reference)**
  - > *Select a referee from the very beginning of the project so that they are aware of the societal impact of the project*
  - > *To find a referee, make use of your network and/or canvass people who have done the same master's degree and who are now working outside the academic world*
  - > *This expert must be able to give an opinion on the societal impact of your project, in particular the contribution and interest of your research for their company, association or organisation. Their main function must be within this company, association or organisation*
- **FRIA applications: only necessary for short-term applications within the FRIA scheme (2 referees)**

The referees will be contacted directly by the FNRS (the applicant does not have to include these letters in the FNRS e-space)

These letters are important and are carefully read by the jury members. They should be specific to the candidate

-> Explain to the referees which task the FNRS will ask them to perform and ensure that they will be able to complete the letter within the time limit set by the FNRS

## 6. The interview

*The oral examination takes place at the F.R.S.-FNRS and is based on the research project (feasibility, originality, host laboratory, work plan and activities report, if applicable), the applicant's profile with regard to their specialty (C.V.), their presentation and the answers given to questions regarding their research project, and their scientific knowledge in general.*

*[Excerpt of the F.R.S.-FNRS rules]*

## 6.1. Preparation: the PowerPoint

- > A **PowerPoint presentation** is strongly recommended (almost mandatory) and should be prepared in conjunction with the promoter. It should be well-structured, concise, without typos, PDF
- Try to **surprise the audience**: do not repeat the project point by point as it has already been read by the jury. Instead, develop novelties, emphasize strong points of the project, integrate graphics and diagrams, etc.
  - The audience may be very **heterogeneous**: be general enough so that the majority can understand, but add some technical elements for the experts. Everyone must have a good understanding of your project!
  - Include **a few simple slides**:
    - title
    - context, motivation
    - goals
    - methodology: approach, challenges, contributions, preliminary results
    - main research axes
    - possible readjustments (if presenting the project for a second time)
    - Societal impact (FRESH), industrial or agronomic approaches and prospects (FRIA)
    - give the key messages in conclusion
  - + some **'joker' slides**: work plan, dissertation results, additional information, specific characteristics of the material, schemes + methodology, possible short or mid-term applications, recent publications...
  - Provide **high contrast** for projected photos (some FNRS rooms are very bright)

## 6.2. Objective of the interview

Persuade the jury committee to select you because of:

- The originality of your project
- Your skills and competencies and the originality of the topic and its methods: demonstrate that it's your project, not that of your supervisor or your team
- Its feasibility within 4 years
- The societal impact

The interview is also an opportunity to provide clarifications and to show an authentic, holistic image of yourself.

The interview can reverse a first impression (whether positive or negative)

-> **The interview must be very carefully prepared and practiced several times** (first in front of the promoter, then in front of various audiences). If your research unit and/or faculty organise interview preparation sessions, take part in them, they are very useful!

## 6.3. The interview: how it works

The interview must take place in person on the premises of the FNRS in Brussels. In exceptional cases, applicants who are unable to attend are requested to duly justify their situation by email to [auditions-jurys@frs-fnrs.be](mailto:auditions-jurys@frs-fnrs.be) as soon as possible. The emails will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Bureau of the Board of Trustees or the Secretary-General of F.R.S.-FNRS

10 min presentation (not to exceed!), followed by 10 min questions

The interview will take place in French or English, the choice is yours: select the language in which you are most comfortable.

1. Welcome address (by the jury)
2. Your presentation
3. Question-answer session. The applicant is mainly questioned by the rapporteur who leads the discussion.

## 6.4. The questions

- They are usually open-ended and focus on the project. They should be answered in a concise and precise manner
- Rapporteur questions: they are the person that reads your entire application and they will ask you the most questions
- The other jury members may ask very broad questions: **be prepared for naive questions!**
- Questions might be confusing, distracting or disturb you!
  - > Answer, defend if necessary, without aggressiveness or arrogance
  - > Seek to convince all the members of the jury (which might be very heterogeneous)
  - > If you don't know the answer: be honest...and show you know where the answer to the question could be found!
  - > Structure your answers well: you can first answer briefly, then elaborate
  - > If necessary, rephrase the question before answering, to make sure you clearly understand the question

*Be prepared to explain and justify every single word of your application; answer concrete questions/prior research stays; explain the price of e.g. testing samples; explain why an important reference is lacking in the bibliography; present the doctoral training in which you will enrol; in case of an interdisciplinary project: demonstrate that the environment will enable you to carry out this research, be able to justify your ethical choices...*

Ideally, a dialogue with the members of the jury should be established

## 6.5. Some ‘tips and tricks’

- **Be punctual**
- **Be polite** (welcome –without shaking hands!–, thank the committee for their time and commitment...)
- **Mind your manners:** dress up, mind your posture, make eye contact with all the jury members
- **Be honest:** no bluffing!
- **Be organised** (ensure you have all your materials ready ahead of time: USB key, pointer, copy of your dissertation, etc.)
- Be prepared to project your voice: the room is big!
- Never turn your back to the jury members to read your slides
- Interruptions are possible at any time, either for questions or if the presentation is too long  
-> Don't be thrown off track! Stay focused, do not let distractions take away from the presentation



## 6.6. Your attitude

- Be dynamic, **enthusiastic** and convinced by your project
- Convince people by your motivation and your professionalism
- Don't be shy, answer with confidence!
- Be open, demonstrate interest in the topic and speak to everybody - know your audience!
- Show that you possess the right competencies and skills to master your project

## 7. ULiège 2022 Results

Grant	N° of applications	N° of awarded scholarships
1st grant <b>FRESH</b>	32	5
1 <sup>e</sup> bourse <b>FRIA</b>	95	29

## 8. ULiege contacts

### Research and Innovation Administration

**Patricia Blanchard**

[patricia.blanchard@uliege.be](mailto:patricia.blanchard@uliege.be)

+32 4 366 55 86

### Registration office

*PhD Enrolment*

*Refund claim applications (until 15/01/2024)*

[admission.phd@uliege.be](mailto:admission.phd@uliege.be)

## 9. Useful links

### FNRS

[Mini-guide, rules and regulations and guide to FRESH et FRIA juries](#)

[Composition of the juries](#)

[FNRS e-space](#)