The European Commission announced on July 17, 2012 the final and biggest ever set of calls for proposals for research under its Seventh Framework Programme (FP7). In total, €8.1 billion will support projects and ideas that will boost Europe’s competitiveness and tackle issues such as human health, protecting the environment and finding new solutions to growing challenges linked to urbanisation and managing waste. The funding – which is open to organisations and businesses in all EU Member States and partner countries - makes up the lion’s share of the EU’s proposed €10.8 billion research budget for 2013. This announcement comes just days after EU leaders emphasised the importance of research and innovation in the Compact for Growth and Jobs.

The calls target both innovation and a range of societal challenges, building a bridge to Horizon 2020, the next funding programme for EU research from 2014-2020. In total €4.8 billion is dedicated to thematic research priorities. Industrial innovation will be supported through close-to-market activities such as piloting, demonstration, standardisation and technology transfer. Special attention will be given to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in a package worth up to €1.2 billion. Around €2.7 billion will help cement Europe’s place as a world class destination for researchers, mainly through individual grants from the European Research Council (€1.75 billion), and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (€963 million) for research training and mobility.

To help spread excellent research more widely, a new "European Research Area Chairs" initiative is being prepared. A €12 million pilot call will select a total of five ERA Chairs, to be hosted by universities or other eligible research institutions in less developed regions in five different EU countries. To host an ERA Chair, institutions must demonstrate their ability to support excellence through providing the necessary facilities and complying with European Research Area principles such as open recruitment.

Most of the calls for proposals (invitations to bid for funds) will be published on 10 July, with some further specific calls to follow in the autumn.

European Research Council: €1.75 billion for new research projects

A total budget of €1.75 billion was announced today by the European Commission to support projects funded by the European Research Council in 2013. Open to independent researchers of any age or career stage, the new ERC calls are meant to help top scientists from all fields (Physical Sciences and Engineering, Life Sciences, and Social Sciences & Humanities) to produce the very best cutting-edge science and to affirm Europe’s place as a world class destination for research. It is estimated that this funding will support around 900 excellent researchers in 2013 (each employing a further 6 team members on average). It is part of the European Commission’s final, and biggest, call for proposals for research projects under its Seventh Framework Programme (FP7).

Two new major features are introduced in this year’s calls:

- The existing "ERC Starting Grant" (aimed at outstanding researchers who are establishing their first research teams or programmes) will be split into two calls: the “ERC Starting Grant” (StG) for researchers with at least 2 and up to 7 years work experience after their PhD and the “ERC Consolidator Grant” (CoG) for researchers
with over 7 and up to 12 years work experience after their PhD.
- There will now be one single deadline for each call, instead of different deadlines for each of the three scientific domains, as there has been in the past.

The money invested in 2013 will be allocated as follows:
- ERC Starting Grants : €398 million
- ERC Consolidator Grants: €523 million
- ERC Advanced Grants: €662 million
- ERC Synergy Grants: €150 million
- ERC Proof of Concept Grants: €10 million

The ERC’s Scientific Council, the governing body of the ERC, has established the following budget split between each of the three scientific domains as follows: Physical Sciences and Engineering (44%), Life Sciences (39%) and Social Sciences & Humanities (17%).

The "Advanced Grant call" (AdG) will be published on the same day as the StG call (10 July 2012), with a deadline in November, a departure from the practice of previous years. The call for Consolidator Grants will be published in the Autumn.

The pilot "Synergy grant" will be repeated this year, following its great popularity in its first year. More than 700 proposals were submitted, which are currently being evaluated, for a very limited number of available grants.

Full press releases:

See also:
- FP7: www.ec.europa.eu/research/fp7
- Innovation Union: http://ec.europa.eu/innovation-union
- Europe 2020: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020
- Digital Agenda: http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda