

How to Use This Guidebook

This guidebook is designed to assist you in drafting your Kootstra Talent Fellowship (KTF) applications for young, talented researchers.

It provides essential information on the expectations and recommendations for the KTF proposal and will be updated regularly as needed. In some instances, example texts or general information are provided in italics. Please use this information as inspiration for your own application and avoid simply copying and pasting it.

Carefully review the Call for Proposals and this guidebook before preparing your proposal. This will help you present key aspects effectively, enabling evaluators to assess your proposal against the evaluation criteria.

This guidebook focuses on writing your KTF application. For additional advice on writing the application, please contact your funding advisor.

The Assessment Procedure

The assessment of the KTF application is divided into several steps, involving members of the Maastricht UMC+ Research Committee (WMUMC+) who may have diverse backgrounds (e.g. clinical, basic sciences and/or social sciences background). Therefore, it is crucial to write your proposal in a way that all committee members can understand your proposed research.

Step 1: Eligibility Check

After submission, an eligibility check will be conducted to ensure your proposal meets all formal criteria (e.g., word count) and is complete (e.g., includes requested letters). If your proposal does not meet all eligibility criteria, it will be deemed ineligible. Therefore, ensure you carefully check your final proposal against the eligibility and assessment criteria before submitting. If your application is eligible, it will be sent to 3-4 members of the WMUMC+.

Step 2: Preselection

WMUMC+ members will assess all eligible proposals using three criteria and their respective weights, resulting in a mean score for each criterion (see Appendix 1 for more detailed information):

1. Quality, innovative character, and academic impact of the proposed research (40%)
2. Personal vision and motivation (20%)
3. Academic profile of the researcher (40%)

All proposals will be ranked according to their likelihood of funding. Candidates with the highest rankings will be invited for an interview with the WMUMC+. The invitation will include the date, time, and information about the presentation requirements and the interview. Additionally, candidates will receive anonymized reviewer reports, which can help in preparing for the interview. In this phase of the evaluation procedure, the scores from the reports are removed. Due to the diverse backgrounds and expertise of the WMUMC+ members, feedback in these reports may vary. Being invited to an interview does not imply a favourable decision.

The Interview Process

Step 3: The Interview

The final step in the assessment process is the interview, which will be attended by members of the WMUMC+. The interview will last up to 23 minutes, with the first 8 minutes dedicated to a brief presentation in either Dutch or English. You may use PowerPoint or PDF for your slides.

Your 8-minute presentation should cover the following topics:

- Explanation of the essence of your research proposal
- Your vision
- How a Kootstra Talent Fellowship will contribute to your research

The remaining 15 minutes will be allocated for questions from the committee members regarding your application, research plan, and research vision. This segment provides an opportunity to elaborate on your KTF proposal, vision, and motivation. The WMUMC+ members will evaluate the interview based on the following criteria, resulting in a final score:

1. Quality, innovative character, and academic impact of the proposed research (30%)
2. Your responses to questions and discussion with the committee (50%)
3. The content and delivery of the presentation (20%)

The final selection of proposals to be funded will be based on the interviews. A well-balanced presentation is crucial for making a positive impression on the WMUMC+ members. The WMUMC+ will provide a recommendation to the Executive Board of Maastricht UMC+, which will make the final decision on awarding the KTF.

The evaluation procedure will be completed within three months of the submission deadline.

Conflict of Interest

Please note that any WMUMC+ member with a conflict of interest regarding a specific KTF proposal will be excluded from both the assessment and the interview of that particular application. A conflict of interest arises when a member has a personal, professional (e.g., supervisor), or organizational relationship with the applicant(s), affecting their ability to perform their role objectively and impartially.

General Advice for Your Application

- **Plan Ahead:** Start your proposal writing process early. Create a schedule and allocate time for feedback, considering any holidays (yours and your supervisor's).
- **Obtain Necessary Commitments:** You cannot apply without the commitment of your School and a recommendation letter from your supervisor. Each applicant must submit a support letter from the scientific director of the Institute, indicating the Institute's commitment to provide a contract for the duration of the KTF project and to match 50% of the project costs. Without these letters, your application will not be accepted or evaluated. Begin discussions with your supervisor and School/Institute early to secure these commitments.
- **Internal Selection Process:** The Institutes of FHML each have an internal selection process. Inquire about this procedure within your Institute, as there may be an internal deadline prior to the KTF closing date.
- **Follow the Call for Proposals:** Read the Call for Proposals thoroughly and use the provided structure as the foundation of your proposal. After drafting your proposal, check again to ensure your ideas and plans align with the aims and rules of the funding instrument.
- **Address Evaluation Criteria:** Treat the criteria mentioned in the Call for Proposals as examination questions. Answer these directly to ensure you address all items that will be evaluated. Stick to the provided structure, even if you believe you have answered the questions elsewhere.
- **Eligibility Criteria:** Proposals not meeting the eligibility criteria will not be evaluated.
- **Focus on Each Section:** Brainstorm each section and focus on one at a time.
- **Simplify Your Language:** Assume less expert knowledge among WMUMC+ members and use simple, easy-to-read language. Explain discipline-specific jargon.
- **Be Clear and Concise:** Use clear and concise wording. Avoid long sentences; a good rule of thumb is that a sentence using two lines is long enough.

- **Set Clear Objectives:** Provide clear and concrete objectives for your project. Avoid vague terms like “investigate,” “assess,” or “explore.” Give reviewers a clear idea of what to expect.
- **Provide Evidence:** Just stating something is innovative does not make it so. Make your claims tangible and concrete. Provide examples and state what has already been done and how your project will make a difference. Examples should demonstrate knowledge of the “state of the art” and understanding.
- **Seek Feedback:** Check with your supervisors or peers to ensure they are convinced of your project’s innovation. Contact your supervisors, colleagues in your field, and colleagues from other fields for advice and support.

You can also seek feedback from the funding advisors of your School/Institute:

- Marco Berndes – m.berndes@maastrichtuniversity.nl – MHeNS
- Vivian Braeken – v.braeken@maastrichtuniversity.nl – CAPHRI, SHE
- Gwynned de Looijer – g.delooijer@maastrichtuniversity.nl – CARIM, M4I
- Frans van Nieuwpoort – frans.vannieuwpoort@maastrichtuniversity.nl – NUTRIM
- Pan Xu – pan.xu@maastrichtuniversity.nl – GROW, MERLN

Your Application

Applications should be submitted via email to the Grants Office of the Faculty of Health Medicine and Life (FHML) at grantsoffice-fhml@maastrichtuniversity.nl. Ensure that the scientific director of your Institute confirms their willingness and ability to provide the 50% matching funds in a supporting letter.

Your application should include the following sections:

- Administrative details
- Information on any previous KTF applications
- Project title
- Description of the proposed research
- Research plan for the KTF
- Knowledge utilization
- Literature references
- Budget

- Appendix:
 - Curriculum vitae of the applicant (see KTF CV format)
 - Signed letter of recommendation from your supervisor
 - Signed support letter or matching agreement from the Institute.

The format outlines all the elements that need to be addressed in your proposal. Use these elements as subheaders in your proposal to ensure you cover all necessary points and make it easy for reviewers to find information.

General Guidelines for the Proposal

The Kootstra Talent Fellowship offers individual grants, so the proposal can be written in the first person (“I will...”). Adhere strictly to the word limits provided. Be specific and provide names, numbers, and examples to demonstrate the feasibility and appropriateness of your plans.

The following chapters of this handbook will address the different elements of the proposal, offering guidance based on feedback from past proposals. Use this information for inspiration to understand what is expected.

Application Form

1. Applicant Provide information about yourself, including your Master’s degree and PhD. If you have more than one Master’s degree, include information for each.

2. Supervisor Provide information about your proposed KTF supervisor.

3. KTF Application Details Use up to 100 words to provide information about the anticipated start date of your KTF project, its duration, the amount of FTE working on your project, and whether you already have another contract for part of the fellowship duration.

The minimum duration of the KTF is 12 months, and the maximum is 24 months, or until a personal grant from an external funding agency takes effect. Part-time employment (up to 0.7 FTE) is possible, with the fellowship duration extended pro-rata. The fellowship must commence within six months of the grant award or on the day of written approval of the PhD thesis if the award precedes thesis approval.

4. Previous Submission Use up to 250 words to indicate whether you submitted a KTF application in a previous round. Provide the feedback and comment and questions you received previously and describe any changes made since the last submission. Also clearly indicate if you did not incorporate any changes.

5. Title of Research Proposal Your title should reflect the most important outcome of the research and entice evaluators to read further. Ensure it is feasible and achievable within your proposal.

6. Description of the Proposed Research Use up to 1000 words, including text in figures and tables, to address the following topics:

1. Research aim
2. Scientific relevance and challenges
3. Originality and innovative character
4. Methods and techniques

6.1 Research Aim Describe the general topic and problem you will address. Clearly define your research aim(s) and/or hypothesis, ensuring the proposed research is feasible.

6.2 Scientific Relevance and Challenges Discuss the current state of knowledge in the problem area, gaps in knowledge, and what your research will contribute. Outline your general approach or strategy.

6.3 Originality and Innovative Character Explain why your project is innovative, the knowledge gaps it will fill, and the advantages of your new approach. Demonstrate how your project relates to and goes beyond current work in the field.

6.4 Methods and Techniques Detail how you will answer your research questions, including methodology, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Provide sufficient details and justify your chosen methods. Discuss potential problems or risks and alternative strategies.

7. Research Plan for the KTF Use up to 800 words, excluding the timeline, to describe your planned activities (work plan). Break down your research into small, achievable tasks and identify your objectives.

7.1 Description of Planned Activities (Work Plan) Outline the steps of your research and scientific career, setting up a timeline to indicate what you will do and when.

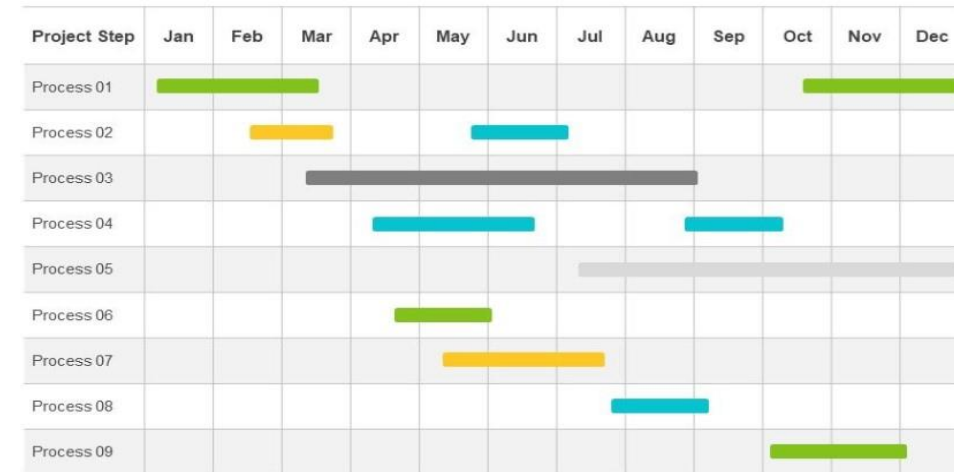
7.2 Local, National, and International Collaboration Identify necessary collaborations for your research and potential future collaborations. Contact these collaborators in advance.

7.3 Grant Acquisition Plan Describe your strategy for securing funding during and after the KTF project. Include these activities in the timeline.

7.4 Timeline (Gantt Chart) Use a Gantt chart to demonstrate the feasibility of your research within the given timeframe and personnel input.

Example of a timeline (Gantt chart):

Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences



7.5 Period Abroad

If your fellowship includes a period abroad, please specify the rationale and learning objectives. Candidates may spend up to 50% of the fellowship duration abroad.

8. Knowledge Utilization

This section of your proposal should not exceed 500 words, including text in figures and tables.

Describe the specific end-results and products (e.g., reports, blueprints, devices) of your project. Consider the use of the data you collect and, where possible, link your contributions to stakeholders, indicating what changes will result from these contributions.

Provide an overview of the stakeholders affected by or interested in the results and products of your research. Identify who they are, how you can effectively communicate with them, and/or involve them in your research. Due to the diverse characteristics of stakeholders, tailor your communication and dissemination strategies to each group. Develop a plan to address them effectively, thinking beyond standard publications and presentations. For publications, remember to use Open Access. Consider modern/social media where relevant, such as apps and podcasts.

Examples of Knowledge Utilization Sentences (from a successful Veni application):

- Results generated in this project can be the next big step in identifying novel drug targets against [...].
- As a result, findings can be used to develop an intervention based on [...].
- After the first publication, I will start broad dissemination to the public through publication in the [...] newsletter, general news websites, and social media.
- Additionally, [...] companies will be informed about the findings to [...].

9. Literature References

There are no specific guidelines on the number of references. Include only relevant literature, keeping in mind that this is a project proposal, not a scientific lecture or article.

10. Budget

Indicate the FTE factor you will be working on the project for each year. You should have a significant role in the project, generally no less than 0.7 FTE for KTF. The minimum duration of the KTF is 12 months, and the maximum is 24 months, or until a personal grant from an external funding agency takes effect. The fellowship duration can be extended pro-rata. Ensure that your stated duration aligns with your project setup.

The KTF will match 50% of the following costs, with the remaining 50% matched by the candidate's School/Institute:

- Salary costs – UNL Scale 10.4 during the first year of the fellowship and, if applicable, UNL Scale 10.5 during the second year (or part thereof)
- Exploitation costs: max. €6,000 per year

Please contact your financial director ('beheerder') of your Institute for advice and support in drawing up the budget.

11. KTF Appendix

1. Curriculum vitae of the applicant (see KTF CV format)
2. Signed letter of recommendation from your supervisor (max. 500 words)
3. Signed support letter or matching agreement from the School/Institute

11.1 Curriculum Vitae

11.1.1 Academic Profile (min. 400 words - max. 700 words)

The word count includes all text in this section, including references, footnotes, text in figures, figure captions, and tables. The use of hyperlinks is prohibited.

Provide a comprehensive narrative of your academic profile, focusing on achievements beyond output. Address your research focus, agenda, and vision. Describe your position in the (inter)national academic field, your motivation for conducting research, and the academic and societal potential of your work. Explain the link between your previous and current work and the proposed research plan.

The relevant elements in your academic achievements depend on your field and personal situation. Examples of topics you may address include:

- Theoretical and/or methodological contributions
- Collaborations, roles in teams, and networking capabilities
- International orientation and activities
- Conference participation and organization
- Educational activities, e.g., the connection of research and education
- Mentorship or supervision of students, academic and non-academic staff
- Relevance of research results and their position relative to societal topics
- Knowledge utilization, outreach, and popularization
- Membership of scientific boards, editorial boards, and committees
- Invited lectures
- Prizes, awards, and grants, and how the opportunities offered by grants were used
- Interdisciplinary activities
- Administrative and managerial tasks
- Contributions to open data and open science
- Alignment of your academic profile with the research project, or vision of how this alignment will be achieved
- Motivation for doing research in general and this project in particular

Do not refer to additional output, output metrics, or expected/future output, and do not mention total numbers of output.

11.1.2 Key Output (min. 400 words – max. 700 words)

Indicate what is considered ‘normal’ output for your specific field. Provide references to your key output (max. 10) and add a motivation for selecting each item: how does this output demonstrate your abilities/qualities as a researcher and/or how is it related to the Kootstra project?

Per output item, provide one reference. The motivation should not include mention of other publications by the applicant.

The word count includes all text in this section, except the output titles and references. Do not mention h-indexes, impact factors, or any metrics referring to the journal, publisher, or publication platform, rather than the individual output item. References to journal or publisher reputation (e.g., terms such as ‘top journal’) are not allowed; the scientific content of a paper is more important than publication metrics or the journal’s identity. Consider a broad range of impact measures directly related to the output item, including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice. Provide context for each motivation to support the assessment.

The use of hyperlinks is allowed in this section only. In the ‘Key Output’ section, you may use one hyperlink per output item, preferably in the form of a persistent identifier (e.g., a DOI).

The maximum number of output items is ten. Note that you are not required to mention ten items. The Kootstra CV form is designed to accommodate all scientific disciplines. The committee will assess each candidate’s selection of output in light of the culture and customs of the scientific field and the candidate’s effective research time. Include relevant information on the culture and customs of your scientific field in your narrative.

Motivation for Key Output Selection

When selecting your key output, briefly describe the research, its impact, and your individual contribution. Explain why each output item is directly relevant to your academic profile, important to your scientific field, or significant to other fields or beyond science, and how it relates to your research idea.

Examples from Veni Proposals:

- The initial publications from the large international consortium project were published in [...]. In my first-authored paper, I demonstrated that [...].
- This paper revealed that [...], which has significant implications for the use of [...] in clinical practice.
- In this study, I learned the novel [name of technique], which is particularly relevant for my VENI application as I will study [...].
- This paper exemplifies my contribution to two international consortium projects [...].
- In collaboration with [...] and [...], I analyzed [...].
- I disseminated the results to patients through newsletters, websites such as [...], and magazines including [...].
- My Veni research will build on the existing collaboration with [...].

Types of Output:

Output may include, but is not limited to, refereed articles, non-refereed articles, letters (to editors), books, book chapters, pre-prints, patents, working papers, proceedings, conference reports, software, code, and open access databases. Mention all types of output relevant to your field and clearly indicate their status.

For journal and book publications, and where possible for other outputs, provide the following information: author(s) in the order published, date, title of the publication, journal or series, volume, page numbers, and (if applicable) publisher and place. Avoid using “et al.” so committee members and referees can see your position in the author list.

If you mention a URL, it should refer only to the individual output item and preferably be in the form of a persistent identifier (e.g., DOI).

Mark open access publications and open access databases with “O”.

11.2 Signed Letter of Recommendation from Your Supervisor

Include a signed letter of recommendation from your KTF supervisor (max. 500 words). Without this signed letter, your application is not eligible.

11.3 Signed Support Letter or Matching Agreement from Institute

Ensure that the scientific director of your School/Institute confirms their willingness and ability to provide the 50% matching funds in a support letter. Without this signed letter, your application is not eligible.

Appendix 1 KTF assessment criteria

All KTF proposals will be assessed according to the following criteria:

A. Quality, Innovative Character, and Academic Impact of the Proposed Research (40%)

- Independent research idea
- Clarity and concreteness of the research question
- Theoretical underpinning of the research question
- Innovative character and degree of challenge (for PI and MUMC+/Institute)
- Effectiveness of the proposed methodology
- Feasibility, opportunities, and obstacles in the execution of the project
- Fit with the strategy of MUMC+/Institute
- Knowledge utilization (scientific, societal, and economic)

B. Personal Vision and Motivation (20%)

- Clear vision of the researcher about their place in the scientific field
- Clear link between proposed research and career vision
- Appropriateness of short-term (KTF) and long-term (follow-up trajectory) career planning in relation to the career vision

C. Academic Profile of the Researcher (40%)

- In the top 10% of their international peer group
- Clear indications of outstanding talent for academic research:
 - Education: supervision, teaching roles, mentoring, assessments, contributions to content or coordination of education/programs/modules, quality of education (e.g., student evaluations)
 - Research: research output (including peer-reviewed publications), productivity (e.g., output relative to work experience and actual time spent on research), recognition for work (e.g., prizes, grants, and awards, invited presentations), contributions to the research field (theoretical, methodological, clinical)
 - Impact: knowledge dissemination activities (including conference participation, public outreach) and layman publications

Leadership: research vision, collaborations and networking, international and/or interdisciplinary research activities, membership of boards/committees, organization of conferences/workshops, involvement in the organization of meetings, other (non-research) activities in group/institute, growth/potential towards independence