



International Postdoctoral Fellowship ISTA-Fellow

Guide for Applicants

The **closing date** for the Call for Proposals is **12th June, 2024 (14:00 CEST)**

Further information on the program can be found at: ista.ac.at/en/education/postdocs/

Applications can be submitted at: apply.app.ista.ac.at

A. ISTA-Fellow program: Overview

The ISTA-Fellow program will recruit approx. 10 fellows, with further fellowships ('COE-Fellow') available for eligible applications/projects aligning with 'Cluster of Excellence' (COE) program themes (see section B). ISTA-Fellows and COE-Fellows both receive a 2-year contract.

Scientific Excellence

The program supports **excellent postdoctoral researchers with a broad and diverse scientific portfolio** and provides them with the **tools and support structures** to maximize the chances for breakthroughs and build the strongest foundation on which discoveries can emerge. ISTA-Fellow features a **bottom-up approach** throughout the whole program, with fellows free to propose any research topic within or cutting across the [scientific fields represented on campus](#): Biology, Neuroscience, Mathematics, Data and Computer Science, Physics, Chemistry, Earth Science & Astronomy). There is **no compromise on excellence** when it comes to the selection of fellows and their projects. Fellows have access to state-of-the-art facilities and are encouraged to interact closely with colleagues from different fields as part of their fellowship project.

ISTA-Fellow aims to create the best environment for international scientific talent, supporting both the research and the researcher

Benefits of becoming an ISTA-Fellow (or COE-Fellow)

Funding

Fellows receive 2-year, full-time employment contracts with an internationally competitive salary (min. 69'000 EUR gross) and full social security coverage.

Research Environment

Fellow projects will be carried out in a unique setting: a modern campus where shared [scientific facilities](#) concentrate cutting-edge equipment and scientific expertise in scientific computing, imaging and optics, (cryo-)electron microscopy, nanofabrication, pre-clinical studies, and a newly completed NMR facility. The core principles of the ISTA faculty selection process – *person before area, quality before speed* – have resulted in an unprecedentedly high concentration of scientifically innovative leaders: over three quarters of faculty have won at least one ERC grant. Close support from the fellow's faculty supervisor(s) is guaranteed by ISTA's scientific group size limit (≤ 15 persons).

Housing and Family Services

Subject to availability, on-campus guesthouse/apartments can be rented, giving incoming fellows time to find more permanent housing. ISTA provides onsite daycare from the age of 3 months (places/reservations subject to availability). Visa support is provided by ISTA's International Officer.

Language

The official language of the institute is English. To help fellows integrate in the host country, German-language courses are offered on campus.

Eligibility Requirements

- All research fields present at ISTA are eligible (see <https://ista.ac.at/en/research>).
- At the date of the respective call deadline, applicants must hold a PhD (or equivalent) or anticipate the completion of their PhD degree before the start of their fellowship (should be no later than 01/03/2025). A fellowship contract will not be issued until a copy of the diploma/proof of successful defense is provided.
- Researchers already employed at ISTA on 12/06/2024 (call deadline) are not eligible to apply.
- To be additionally considered for a COE-Fellow award, applicants must justify that their proposed project aligns with the research themes/goals of an existing Cluster of Excellence (COE) program in which ISTA participates (see section B).
- If successful, fellowships should commence between 01/09/2024 and 01/03/2025. (**note:** additional start-date restrictions may apply to COE-Fellows)

B. COE-Fellow awards

Cluster of Excellence (COE) programs are large-scale, long-term cooperative research programs on key basic research topics. Each COE brings together up to eight universities and/or research institutions – and dozens of researchers – from across Austria, and are characterized by cutting-edge research, research-led education, and the advancement of junior researchers, as well as an exchange of knowledge at national and international levels.

ISTA will contribute to existing COE programs in which it participates through COE-Fellow awards. Applicants may request to be considered for a COE-Fellow award *in addition to* being considered for an ISTA-Fellow award (only one award will be made per fellow), through a single application process. To be considered for a COE-fellow award, applicants must be hosted by a COE-eligible group (applicant must confirm with requested host) and provide a justification (see section C) as to how their project aligns with the relevant COE program themes.

Current COE programs eligible for ISTA COE-Fellow awards are:

- Microbes drive planetary health
- Quantum Science Austria
- Materials for Energy Conversion and Storage
- Bilateral AI

Please see the [website](#) for more details on the relevant COE program themes.

Note: Further COE programs will be announced in mid-May. Please regularly check the program [webpage](#) for details of further basic research topics eligible for ISTA COE-Fellow awards.

C. Application Process

Overview

1. Create an account at apply.app.ista.ac.at.
2. Verify your account by following the instructions contained within the email sent to you.
3. Complete the application by entering all required information and uploading all required documents (more information on this below).
4. Submit your application.

General notes on the application process

Your application must contain all required information and documents – **including the reference letters from your referees** – and have been submitted to our online system by 14:00 CEST on the date of the application deadline. Applications that are incomplete or ineligible will not be considered by the selection committee.

Online application form: Requirements

Personal Data: This section of the application requests standard personal information¹ (e.g. your name, address, etc.) as well as the (expected) date of PhD conferral/defense.

PhD Education: In this section please complete all required fields about your PhD program.

Additional Education: This section is optional. However, if you wish to enter additional information about your academic background (e.g. undergraduate studies), the selection panel is happy to review the information as part of your application.

Current affiliation: Please enter details of your current academic/professional affiliation. If currently on leave/unemployed, please enter details of your latest employment.

Supervisors: In this section you must identify the professor (supervisor) with whom you plan to work with at ISTA. You are strongly advised to contact your potential host supervisor to reach agreement on any potential submission. Details on our faculty, their research interests and contact details can be found here: <https://ista.ac.at/en/research/>

NOTE: *It is your responsibility to ensure your proposed research matches the interests of your chosen supervisor/group. Projects which do not align with the research interests of the group, or where the host does not possess the required expertise or infrastructure to host the project, risk being excluded as 'out of scope/ineligible' during the administrative checks.*

You may also identify a secondary supervisor if desired. You may also nominate a professor external to ISTA as secondary supervisor where the specific scientific expertise required for a minor part of your project is not available at ISTA. However, the core/majority of your project should be aligned with the expertise of your primary supervisor.

Project Information: In this section, you should enter a **project title** (max. 100 characters incl. spaces) and **project summary** (max. 300 words; no special characters), written to be understandable and accessible for a broad academic audience.

Uploads: The following documents (pdf format) must also be uploaded for your application to be considered complete and eligible:

¹ **Data Privacy Statement:** ISTA processes your personal data in accordance with the statutory data protection regulations. For more information including processing for the purpose of application and quality management and your rights as a data subject please refer to our data privacy statement: <https://ist.ac.at/dataprotection/>

1. **Research Proposal** (max. 5 pages - not including references). This proposal should outline a work plan for the 2-year fellowship, and consider the formatting and evaluation criteria outlined below.

Formatting: The following parameters **must be respected** for the Research Proposal layout:

Page Format	Font Type	Font Size	Line Spacing	Margins
A4	Times New Roman, Arial or similar	At least 11pt	At least single spacing	At least 2cm (top, bottom, sides)

Structure: In order for the Selection Committee to assess Research Proposals on a common basis, the proposal **must** be structured in the following two sections (**A & B**), using the exact headings provided:

A. Research project

The Research Project should give a concise presentation of the scientific proposal, which will allow evaluation panels to assess the feasibility of the outlined scientific approach. Describe the proposed work in the context of the state of the art of the field.

B. Scientific match & interdisciplinarity

Justify how the proposed project (and your research interests/expertise) complements that of your chosen host research group(s). If relevant: do you foresee any interactions/synergies with different research groups or different disciplines, either as part of this project or as part of further research stemming from this project?

Research Proposals which do not follow the above page limits, formatting and structure risk being excluded as 'ineligible' during the administrative checks.

2. **CV (max. 2 pages) & Publication List** (not included in page limit). Career-breaks (e.g. unemployment, parental/health leave, etc.) should also be included to ensure fair assessment of academic productivity based on effective 'academic age'.
3. **Motivation Statement** (max. 2 pages). This statement should provide an outline of the applicant's career goals, as well as the benefit of the ISTA-Fellow program towards reaching these goals.
4. **Completed Ethical Issues Table** (available under 'How to Apply (incl. downloads)' at ista.ac.at/en/education/postdocs). The ethical issues table must be fully completed. If it is determined that you have uploaded an incomplete ethical issues table, you will be asked to re-submit a completed table, provided your application was otherwise complete and submitted by the deadline.

The remaining documents (PhD diploma, PhD transcript) are optional, however you should upload any available diplomas related to degrees listed in the PhD Education and Additional Education sections. This can be done using the "other files" fields.

COE-Fellow awards: In this section, you must indicate (checkbox) that you would like your application to be additionally considered for a COE-Fellow award. If so, you must **select the relevant COE program** (dropdown list) and provide a **justification** (max. 200 words; no special characters) as to how your project aligns with the relevant COE program themes (see section B and [website](#)). You are strongly advised to align this justification with your chosen host supervisor, as well as to check if they are a COE-eligible host group.

Applications which request to be considered for a COE-Fellow award, but whose request is deemed not to be properly justified (e.g. insufficient/weak link to COE program themes; ineligible host group), will still be considered for an ISTA-Fellow award provided they are otherwise complete and eligible.

Referees: You must submit the name and contact information for three referees. These referees should be former professors or other senior scientists with whom you have worked. However, in order to accommodate applicants with an intersectoral background, one letter of recommendation may be submitted by a previous non-academic supervisor. Your potential host at ISTA may not be listed as one of the referees on your application.

Note: *You do not have to wait until you have fully submitted your application in order to notify your referees. Once you have entered your referees' information and saved the application, a 'contact referees' button will appear at the bottom of the page. Clicking this button will notify your referees that you have requested a letter of reference and they will receive an email from our application system informing them how to upload their reference letter.*

You may check on the status of these letters and, if needed, send reminders to your referees by logging into the system and viewing your submitted application. **All reference letters must be received no later than the application deadline.** Applications missing reference letters at the application deadline will be rejected as incomplete.

D. Evaluation and Selection

Complete applications passing the initial eligibility check by program management are evaluated by the Selection Committee based on the following criteria:

Scientific Excellence

Evaluated based on the proposed project, as well as the expertise and professional career of the candidate. This is done based on the Research Statement (quality, innovative aspects, credibility of research), CV (quality and number of publications, awards and distinctions, invitations to give talks and presentations, relevant positions, projects and collaborations), and the three reference letters provided by external professors or senior scientists who know the candidate well.

Career Potential

Capacity to reach or re-enforce a position of professional maturity in research: How will the fellowship impact on the career of the applicant? In what sense and to what extent will it add to their existing experience and enhance their career perspectives?

Scientific Match

Justification of how well the candidate's interests and expertise complement existing expertise at ISTA, while ensuring an appropriate match with the scientific focus and research lines of at least one target research group on campus. Will the candidate be able to interact with different research groups or different disciplines? Does the candidate fit into the Institute's research culture, which emphasizes cross-disciplinary interactions?

Following discussion and ranking at a Selection Committee meeting, **final fellowship awards** will then be made: COE-Fellow (applications with eligible host group and justifiable link to relevant COE-program) and ISTA-Fellow (all eligible applications).

Approximately 10 fellowships will be awarded under ISTA-Fellow, with the number of COE-fellows awarded dependent on the final number of eligible clusters/host groups (new eligible COEs may be added to the list during the call running). Unless otherwise stated in the award letter, fellowships should commence between 01/09/2024 and 01/03/2025.

All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their applications no later than 4 months after the application deadline (including reserve list status where relevant). Where an applicant considers they have a case for complaint regarding the evaluation or eligibility checks, they can submit a request for redress through the online submission platform.

Contact: Should you have questions on the ISTA-Fellow application process, please see the FAQ section on the [program webpage](#) or contact: ista-fellow@ista.ac.at

About ISTA

The Institute of Science and Technology Austria (ISTA) is a multidisciplinary research institution that combines basic science with graduate education. The scientists of ISTA perform theoretical and experimental research in biology, neuroscience, physics, chemistry, mathematics, computer science and related fields. They are organized in small- to medium-size research groups that interact with each other, also across the boundaries of traditional disciplines. Each research group of ISTA is headed by a tenured or tenure-track professor. Shared scientific facilities concentrate cutting-edge equipment and scientific expertise in imaging and optics, (cryo-)electron microscopy, nanofabrication, life science and pre-clinical studies.

The core principles of the ISTA faculty selection process – *person before area, quality before speed* – have resulted in an unprecedentedly high concentration of scientifically innovative leaders: Over three-quarters of faculty have won at least one ERC Frontier grant. ISTA's ERC application success rate of almost 50% is also by far the highest in Europe among all institutions hosting more than 30 ERC grantees. In addition to ISTA's success in recruiting world-leading faculty, its interdisciplinary design has also resulted in verifiably excellent scientific output: ISTA ranked eighth in Nature Index 2018's 'rising stars' of the world (research institutes established within the last 30 years), the highest placed European institute and the only institution outside of Asia to appear in the top 10. This was surpassed in 2019, when the Nature Index ranked ISTA number 3 among the world's best research institutes based on publication output (normalized by size of research institute).

To learn more about ISTA and the research undertaken there, please visit our [website](#).

