

Call for Proposals for "Starting grant" Projects for Young Researchers

Funded by the Autonomous Region of Sardinia – Regional Law No. 7 of 7 August 2007

(CUP F83C26001760002)

Article 1

Purpose and Eligible Applicants

This Call aims to fund interdisciplinary research initiatives, using resources issued under Regional Law No. 7 of 7 August 2007, in implementation of the University of Cagliari Action Plan for the HRS4R strategy, specifically Action 18, providing starting grants for early-career researchers.

Project proposals must be submitted by the Principal Investigator (hereafter PI) on behalf of a research team consisting of no less than three members.

The PI and each team member must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- a) be tenured faculty at the University of Cagliari, either under a permanent contract or a fixed-term Type B (RTDb) or Tenure Track (RTT) researcher contract;
- b) hold a PhD degree awarded no more than ten years before the publication date of the present Call;
- c) had not participated, either as PI or team member, in any "Start Up" or "Starting Grant" project funded by the previous Calls.

Upon self-certification, the following shall not be taken into account in the calculation of the ten year period following the Ph.D. award:

- maternity leave (18 months per child);
- parental and/or paternity leave (for the duration of the leave actually taken);
- periods of sick leave with duration longer than 90 days.

With regard to self-certifications and statements submitted, the information provided will be verified, including, where necessary, by requesting appropriate supporting documentation. If a statement is found to be false, the funding will be revoked (without prejudice to the resulting civil and criminal liabilities to be investigated by the competent judicial authority).

Article 2

Financial Allocation and Funding Criteria

The total financial allocation for this Call is €450,000 (gross of administrative costs).

Projects may be funded up to a maximum of €100.000,00 each.

The maximum project duration is 24 months. Over the next 6 months, expenses may be incurred for the dissemination of the project results, which will be the subject of a separate supplementary report.

Article 3

Funding Rate and Eligible Costs

Funding will cover 100% of the total project cost. The following cost items are eligible:

- a) research grants; research and postdoctoral contracts and assignments;
- b) occasional freelance or professional assignments; procurement of services;
- c) procurement of inventory items,
- d) consumables;
- e) publications, costs for open-access publications, organization of conferences, and/or registration fees;
- f) scientific trips related to specific project activities.

Article 4

Submission of Research Proposals

Research proposals must be submitted online by the PI, under penalty of exclusion, no later than September 30, 2026, at 12:00 noon, via the online form available on the STARTS platform, accessible from the UniCa homepage starting from September 7, 2026, at 12:00 noon. Each PI may submit only one project, and researchers may participate in only one research team.

Proposals must be written in English. Italian may only be used for projects in disciplinary areas 10, 11, and 12, on the basis of adequate justification made explicit in the transmission note of the project itself.

Funded projects must be interdisciplinary in nature.

Article 5

Evaluation of Research Proposals

Projects will be evaluated through a peer-review process by two anonymous external experts per each project.

Reviewers will be selected based on ERC sectors and keywords indicated by the PIs and must: (i) not be affiliated with institutions located in Sardinia, and (ii) not have co-authored research products with project candidates in the past five years. Whenever possible, projects focussed on similar topics will be assigned to the same reviewers for comparative evaluation.

Each reviewer may award up to 30 points to each project, distributed as outlined below. The final score will be the average of the two evaluations. Only projects scoring at least 21 points will be deemed eligible.

Reviewers will be selected following the principles of expertise, independence, impartiality, and absence of conflict of interest. Confidentiality and conflict of interest declarations will be collected from reviewers.

Evaluation criteria and scoring breakdown will be:

- a) Quality of the proposed research in terms of merit, results, and cost (up to 20 points):
 - 1. scientific quality, completeness, and clarity of the project (description of general, specific, and operational objectives; expected results; with particular reference to interdisciplinary aspects): up to 15 points;
 - 2. innovation and potential impact in terms of environmental, economic, social, and cultural sustainability: up to 3 points;
 - 3. coherence and soundness of the financial plan: up to 2 points;
- b) Characteristics of the research team (up to 10 points):
 - 1. scientific qualifications of the PI (also evaluated through commonly established bibliometric indicators within the relevant scientific community): up to 5 points;
 - 2. overall scientific qualifications of the group (also evaluated through commonly established bibliometric indicators within the relevant scientific community): up to 2 points;
 - 3. extent of interdisciplinary expertise within the research team: up to 3 points.

Following the evaluation process, a final ranking list of eligible projects will be provided. In case of a tie, priority will be given to the project submitted by the PI from the less represented gender among PI applicants; if a further tie occurs, the younger PI (by age) will prevail.

The list of funded projects will be published on the University of Cagliari website and announced via the institutional mailing list "utenti".

Article 6

Management of Research Projects

PIs of selected projects will assume scientific and organizational responsibility. Administrative and financial management will be carried out by the Departments they are affiliated to.

Management and reporting rules will be defined through specific guidelines.

The project start date will be set by the Research and Territory Division.

Upon project completion, the PI must submit a final scientific report describing the activities carried out and the results achieved, including any publications derived from the project that list the PI and/or other team members as authors or co-authors. The report must be

submitted electronically to the Research and Territory Division, following procedures to be specified.

Article 7

Open Access to Research Results

In order to fulfill the “Open Access Policy for Scientific Research” of the University of Cagliari, it is mandatory to deposit a digital copy of all scientific publications, in the version allowed by the publisher, in an open access repository.

Specifically, for any publication resulting from funded projects, open access dissemination is mandatory under Article 4, paragraphs 2 and 2-bis of Decree-Law No. 91 of 8 August 2013, as amended by Law No. 112 of 7 October 2013. Article Processing Charges (APCs) for open access (pure or gold) publications may be included among project eligible costs.

Confidentiality and personal data protection obligations remain unaffected. Data that could compromise the achievement of the project main objectives are exempt from open access requirements.

Article 8

Acknowledgement of Funding

Publications resulting from any research funded under this Call must include the following acknowledgment:

“Finanziato dalla Regione Sardegna, L.R. n. 7 del 7 agosto 2007, Promozione della ricerca scientifica e dell’innovazione tecnologica in Sardegna - This work was supported by the Regione Sardegna, Regional Law n.7/2007, Promotion of scientific research and technological innovation in Sardinia.”

Article 9

Use of Information and Data Processing

Pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016, and Legislative Decree No. 196/2003 on the protection of personal data, the University of Cagliari is the data controller for personal information contained in project proposals. The University may involve external evaluators, including those outside the EU, in the review process.

The privacy notice for the category “Employees” is available at:

https://www.unica.it/unica/it/utility_privacy.page

Article 10

Communications

All communications related to this Call and its implementation will be sent via email to the institutional accounts of the applicants.

Article 11

Person Responsible for the Procedure

Pursuant to Article 5 of Law No. 241 of 7 August 1990, the officer responsible for the procedure is Nicola Flavio Ruju, Head of the Office for National, Regional, and University Research Programs.