cat.

Constructive Advanced Thinking (CAT) Programme Presentation

Objectives

The aim of the CAT initiative is to foster **networks of excellent early-career researchers** dedicated to devising new ideas to understand and tackle current or emerging **societal challenges**. Although the programme has a strong focus on the societal relevance of the projects, it is entirely **blue-sky**, bottom-up and non-thematic. CAT encourage **collaboration with stakeholders outside academia** (industry, policymakers, NGOs, etc.) who are willing to support or engage in innovative research initiatives

The programme is for groups of 3 to 5 early-career researchers of any discipline who have less than 10 years of experience after earning a doctorate, including doctoral researchers. In any case, the principal investigator (team leader) must have a stable position for the duration of the project. The groups may include one representative of a stakeholder organization related to the theme of the project. In order to engage in fruitful discussions and mature their ideas, the groups will be given the opportunity to **meet for short stays** (i.e. maximum of two weeks) in different participating institutes and to be **put in contact with their fellows and local research communities**. The projects can last up to 3 years (subject to positive evaluation at mid-term, max 6 stays in total).

With few guidelines and a very light application process, CAT is designed to maximize the creativity of research groups. The collaboration between different institutes in different countries aims at giving these groups access to a great variety of high-level thinkers and researchers in order to go beyond the current frontiers of knowledge and to develop highly innovative ideas on how to address very complex societal issues.

Process

Groups must apply with a project (in the form of a text proposal or a video) and a plan for short stays in the participating institutes. They are encouraged to suggest preferred institutes, but the institutes will decide the final distribution of the groups. The applications must meet the Eligibility criteria as detailed on the CAT Open Call.

- **Pre-Selection** (the first step after the deadline of the call):
  The participating institutes will mark the applications they are most interested in (through online platform) .The number of projects that can be flagged by an institute depends on the total number of applications received, but it should not be more than 20% of the applications. Institutes can differentiate their interest ("preselect", "second choice" and "do not preselect"). When assigning ranking points, institutes should consider the team members, research projects and how they fit their IAS.
  At the preparatory stage, an Excel spreadsheet with the schedules of the previously selected CAT groups will be shared together with the application materials of the applicants.
- **External Evaluation**: Projects that have been flagged by, at least, 3 institutes ("preselect") are forwarded to external reviewers.
  The programme coordinator delegates the task of finding experts for evaluations to the participating institutes based on the projects they flagged (wherever possible). The external evaluations should be detailed and evaluate each project according to the evaluation criteria (detailed below).
- **The Selection Meeting**- a Zoom meeting will be held in which The CAT selection committee will attaned.
  The CAT selection committee is composed of representatives from all the participating institutes. It selects the projects and assigns them to different institutes. About two weeks before this meeting, the program coordinator will distribute the proposals that will be discussed, including the external evaluations received for them. At this meeting, it will be decided by the participating institutes which groups will be selected for this call and also which institutes are willing to host each group.
- After the programme coordinator has informed all selected and not selected groups, He/she will distribute emails to the heads of the institutes and the heads of the CAT groups to establish contact between them and determine the dates of the group's visits to the institutes. The host institutes fund the meetings of the groups (travel, accommodation and, if possible, catering for lunches on weekdays).

Evaluation criteria for the projects

These six criteria were given to experts in the second phase of the call to consider in their evaluations:

- Academic quality of the proposal
- Potential for societal impact
- Interdisciplinary/ intersectoral character of the project
- Motivation and fit to the call
- Ability of the team to carry out the project
- Feasibility of the project (work plan and deliverables)

Experts were also asked to provide a concluding remark and rate the proposal on a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent).

Administration, website and budget

There is **no common budget** for the programme. The **institutes directly cover the costs of the groups' stays** on their premises (reimbursements or direct reservations of travel and accommodations, catering for lunches on weekdays, if possible). Each institute keeps track of and covers its own expenses.

A centralized online application/ selection platform will be used to ease the coordination process. **Each IAS should have a separate subpage dedicated to CAT on their institutional websites**. The Netias website will provide overall information on the programme and will channel interest on the open call. The specific details on the open call will be published on the coordinating institute's website. The webpage will display the information on the selected groups and their projects after the ongoing call for applications is closed.

Milestones for the 2023 call

August 10, 2023   Launch and dissemination for the 2023 call for applications

September 4, 2023   Opening the applications platform.

October 15, 2023   Deadline for applications.

October 30, 2023   The programme coordinator checks the eligibility of the projects and sends the eligible projects to the institutes for preselection.

November 15, 2023   voting for CAT groups: The institutes provide the coordinator with a list of preferred projects.

November 22, 2023   The coordinator compiles a shortlist with the projects flagged by at least 3 institutes, and distributes the applications among the institutes for evaluations, on the basis of the interests of each institute.

December 30, 2023   Deadline for sending the evaluations to the programme coordinator, who then shares them with all the institutes.

January 2023   Selection meeting via ZOOM. Each selected project is assigned a contact institute that will coordinate communication with the groups

                       Notification of the groups by the contact institute, negotiation of the dates and conditions of stay with each institute. The programme coordinator notifies the projects that were not selected.

                       Start of the selected projects.