

AXA RESEARCH FUND POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS APPLICATIONS GUIDELINES

The AXA Research Fund is the science philanthropy initiative of the AXA Group that seeks to advance knowledge on global risks for the benefit of society.

This guide contains all the necessary information to apply for a Post-Doctoral Fellowship funded by the AXA Research Fund. You will also find a general overview of the AXA Research Fund selection process, as well as information on the grant agreement terms and conditions. This guide may be used as a reference both by Institutions and candidates and the text therein shall prevail in case of divergence with another document.

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1. Available Post-Doctoral Fellowship scheme & Budget

The mission of the AXA Research Fund is to **fund academic research** dedicated to a **better understanding of important hazards, risks and threats and current global societal challenges** within three clusters: socioeconomic risks, environmental risks and life risks.

Each year, the AXA Research Fund offers **twenty-five (25) Post-Doctoral Fellowships** to outstanding researchers. Each grant amounts **one hundred and thirty thousand euros (€130,000)** for duration **of twenty-four (24) months**. In that perspective, the AXA Research Fund operates a **bottom-up call for application addressed to research institutions** of laboratories registered within the AXA Research Fund database and willing to host Post-Doctoral Fellowship candidates.

Institutions selected are then **invited to put forward nominees**: it is **their responsibility** to **identify** and **submit** the **names of the best possible candidates** to participate in the Post-Doctoral Fellowships campaign. Those candidates will subsequently be expected to submit an application presenting their research project, to be carried out at the host institution that nominated them.

The AXA Research Fund **Scientific Board** composed of international renowned academic and business experts oversees the applicant selection process. It validates the **eligibility** and **selection criteria** as well as the **tools** used to process the call for applications. The president of the Scientific Board, by delegation of the Board, acts as a jury over and decides upon the recommendations of funding based on:

- **Scientific assessments** of applications ("light proposals" & "full proposals") performed by a network of international academic experts (review panel members & remote referees);
- **Public engagement interviews** by non-academic AXA experts. Interviews results are used to make a difference only if it is in favor of the candidate.

The AXA Research Fund partners with the European Science Foundation (ESF) to carry out the **evaluation process**. ESF is an established, **independent and non-governmental organization** dedicated to support science operation. ESF operates the review relying on the criteria defined by the AXA Research Fund.

To know more about the AXA Research Fund: <http://axa-research.org/>.

To know more about the European Science Foundation: <http://www.esf.org/>.

2. Eligibility criteria

• Host institution

The AXA Research Fund partners with academic institutions only. **Host institutions** must be **registered within the AXA Research Fund's database** and **located within the geographical scope** below:

Europe	Central & Latin America	Africa & Middle East	Asia Pacific
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Member states of the European Union - Iceland - Liechtenstein - Macedonia - Moldova - Monaco - Montenegro - Norway - Serbia - Slovakia - Switzerland - Ukraine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Argentina - Brazil - Colombia - Mexico 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Algeria - Bahrain - Cameroon - Egypt - Gabon - Israel - Ivory Coast - Lebanon - Morocco - Nigeria - Oman - Qatar - Saudi Arabia - Senegal - South Africa - Turkey - United Arab Emirates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Australia - China - Hong Kong - India - Indonesia - Japan - Malaysia - Singapore - South Korea - Taiwan - Philippines - Thailand - Vietnam

NB: Please note that this geographical scope is reviewed on a yearly basis.

• Research Project

Applications must be written in **English**, submitted through the on-line submission system before the relevant **deadline** and **complete** i.e. all elements forming the application (information requested on-line and documents listed below). The research project must fall within the **scope** of the mission of the AXA Research Fund as described below. The mission of the AXA Research Fund is to fund basic science dedicated to a better understanding of global **risks** related to:

- **Environmental risks**
 - Climate change; glacier retreat, sea-level rise, extreme events...;
 - Natural hazards: earthquake, atmospheric & space-weather phenomena...;
 - Human driven environmental changes: urban pollution, nanotechnologies, pesticide exposure...);
- **Life risks**
 - Aging & long term care: trends in individual longevity, age-related diseases, population demographics, public policies...;
 - Biomedical risks: infectious diseases and pandemics, exposure to new technologies...;
 - Addictions and risky behaviors: psychology, biology, medicine...;
- **Socio-economic Risks**
 - Geopolitical risks: access to natural resources, international and civil conflicts, political upheavals, international security...;
 - Macro-economic and financial systemic risks: all uncertainties pertaining to relationships between economic aggregates (e.g. national income, government expenditure, aggregate demand)...

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- Individual and collective behaviors relating to uncertainty & risky practices;
- Large corporate risks: internal corporate governance risks, threats and challenges inherent to the corporate environment....;
- Digital risks: cybersecurity threats, Big Data related risks...

Please note that the AXA Research Fund does not fund:

- **“Research & Development” programs** when they pursue an objective of systematic application of knowledge or understanding, directed towards the production of useful materials, devices, and systems or methods, including design, development, and improvement of prototypes and new processes to meet specific requirements. This includes specific technology development, as well as clinical trials. **Please note that translational research is not considered ineligible as long as the research work conducted is mainly fundamental.**
- **Research that would breach the AXA Group ethical guidelines**, which includes (but is not limited to):
 - Research violating national regulations;
 - Research having direct military use;
 - Research having potentially dangerous environmental impacts;
 - Research relying on the artificial production of highly infectious pathogens with potential for large scale harmful/lethal effects for humans and research involving gain of function;
 - Biomedical research conducted without the fully informed consent of the participant;
 - Research on embryonic stem cells (incl. animal, with inferred subsequent human application);
 - Research processing private personal data without the informed consent of the concerned parties (incl. genetic information);
 - Research activities aiming at human cloning.

NB: It is the applicants' responsibility to identify any potential ethics issues, to handle the ethics aspects of their proposal, and to detail how they plan to address them. Please refer to this page for more information on the AXA Group Compliance and Ethics Guide (<http://www.axa.com/en/responsibility/shareholders-esg-risk-management/business-ethics/>).
- **Projects that are already underway** as the AXA Research Fund wishes to finance projects from start to finish.

Any project falling under one of the above listed “non-fundable” categories will be considered ineligible.

Cases of scientific misconduct such as **fabrication, falsification, plagiarism** or **misrepresentation of data** will be considered as breaches of fundamental ethical principles and the proposals concerned will be excluded.

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- **Post-Doctoral Fellow**

A Post-Doctoral Fellow can be presented **through one institution** only and must **not be holding a permanent academic position**. The candidate must have **been awarded his/her first PhD** (or equivalent doctoral degree) within the **5 years preceding the submission** of the proposal, based on the deadline for light proposals (see “Step-by-Step Overview”).

Extensions to this period may be allowed in case of **documented career breaks**. Examples of eligible career breaks include:

- **Maternity / Paternity leave:** For maternity, the effective elapsed time since the award of the first PhD will be considered reduced by 18 months for each child born after the PhD award. For paternity, the effective elapsed time since the award of the first PhD will be considered reduced by the actual amount of paternity leave taken for each child born after the PhD award.
- **Long-term illness** (over ninety days), **clinical qualification** or **national service:** the effective elapsed time since the award of the first PhD will be considered reduced by the documented amount of leave taken for each event which occurred after the PhD award.

*NB: Eligible events that take place within the extension of the eligibility window may lead to **further extensions** (e.g. sabbatical year). The cumulative eligibility period should **not in any case surpass 9 years following** the award of the **first PhD**. No allowance will be made for part-time working (2 years of half-time working count as 2 full-time years).*

The AXA Research Fund peer review evaluation process has been carefully designed to **assess scientific excellence irrespective** of the **gender** and **nationality** of the Post-Doctoral Fellow and **other potential biases**. The evaluations are monitored to **guarantee transparency, fairness and impartiality** in the treatment of proposals.

3. Selection criteria

The **Scientific Board oversees the selection process**, basing its decisions on the **scientific assessments performed by:**

- **Peer Review Panels (PRP):** Composed of **renowned scientists and scholars** from all over the world, they have a wide view and their knowledge cuts across the domains covered by their respective PRP. Each cluster of risk has its own PRP members who are independently identified, invited and appointed by the ESF office based on their scientific profile and experience, to ensure a balanced coverage of the disciplines in the PRP's remit.
- **Remote Referees:** The ESF Office identifies and appoints **two external experts per application** to hold a targeted expertise relevant to the subject of the application and provide an anonymous assessment of the proposal.
- **AXA Experts:** AXA senior employees perform a 20' interview to assess each of the short-listed candidate's ability to share his/her research project with a non-academic audience. Results are used only if in favor of the candidate.

Only the **most renowned research institutions**, which meet the highest standards of excellence, may apply for a Post-Doctoral Fellowship. In the frame of the call for participation, institutions are selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- General research environment and working conditions;
- Institution's general attractiveness nationally / internationally;
- Prospection and recruitment processes;
- Past, present and future achievements of the Institution;
- Ambition and overall institutional vision.

The scientific and academic assessment of all applications by candidates from the selected institutions is based on the stringent selection criteria set forth below.

• **Research Environment**

The application should describe the research environment and highlight the timeliness and relevance of the research project, notably on two dimensions:

- **Host Research Laboratory :**
 - Research environment and working conditions of the Laboratory;
 - Description of the Laboratory's research (publications in international renowned scientific journals, presence of internationally renowned researchers...);
 - Relationship with the international community (international impact of the research carried out, success in attracting top-tier foreign researchers...);
 - Positioning of the Laboratory within the institution;
 - Alignment with the Institution's ambition and overall vision;
 - Activity of the Laboratory within the broader research field.

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The AXA Research Fund has signed the **Charter for European Researchers** and the **Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers** and thereby is particularly attentive to Institutions demonstrating their commitment to an attractive, supportive and stimulating environment in which to carry out research and recognizing the importance of providing its researchers with the training and means to be internationally and inter-sectorally competitive and mobile. Institutions having signed the Charter for European Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers will be considered as having a competitive advantage.

• **Research Project**

- **Relevance to risk:** High value is placed on applicants who evidence clearly the contribution of their research to the discipline in relation to a given risk and, to a larger extent, to the understanding/modeling/ mitigation/prevention of a major risk;
- **Innovative nature and originality of the project, progress beyond the state of art:**
 - Commanding knowledge of relevant literature;
 - Originality both in research hypothesis and methodology used to test it;
- **Implementation:**
 - Feasibility of the project;
 - Project framework: macro-planning, budget, quality of the preliminary work and access to needed equipment, field studies, data...;
 - Research impact, contribution to a better understanding of important hazards and risks, or current global societal challenges...
- **Societal impact:** High value is placed on applicants who clarify the impact of their research on society.

• **Post-Doctoral Fellow**

- **Academic excellence and track record**, and adequacy between the contemplated research program and the Post-Doctoral Fellows expertise;
- **Personal commitment** of the Post-Doctoral Fellow to the aims of the project;
- **Potential for research independence** and evidence of **maturity** including producing independently at least one important publication without the participation of their PhD supervisor;
- **Promising track record** of early achievements appropriate to their research fields and career stage, including significant publications (as main author) in major international peer reviewed multidisciplinary scientific journals, or in leading international peer reviewed journals of their respective field. They may also refer to monographs or demonstrate a record of invited presentations in well-established international conferences, granted patents, awards, prizes etc...;
- **Stature and quality** of the **recommendation** letters;
- **International mobility.** By international mobility, we mean:
 - Current International Mobility: change of institution and/or country between current institution and future post-doc position. Moves to another country between current and targeted position are highly valued. Such mobility is more valued than national mobility. Where a candidate remains in the same institution, a clear justification is required.
 - Previous International mobility: Minimum of 1 semester spent abroad since Master's thesis.
- **Communication skills** as assessed by non-academic AXA experts.

4. Application process

• Key dates

Institutions are invited to submit their requests for application slots from October 12, 2015 (noon Paris time) with AXA Scientific Board's decision on funded candidates to be released on June 8, 2016. The following table provides key dates for institution and candidates:

Application slots (→ Institutions)	Slots' allocation	Oct. 12 ⇨ Nov. 13, 2015
	Slots announcements	Nov. 18, 2015
	Name dropping	Nov. 18 ⇨ Dec. 7, 2015
Light proposal (→ Candidates)	Light proposal submission	Nov. 18 ⇨ Dec. 14, 2015
	Short-list announcements	Feb. 23, 2016
Full proposal (→ Candidates)	Full proposal submission	Feb. 23 ⇨ Mar. 21, 2016
	Public engagement interview	Mar. 22 ⇨ May 11, 2016
	Rebuttal	Apr. 23 ⇨ Apr. 29, 2016
	Results announcements	June 8, 2016

• Detailed step-by-step overview

1. Institutions registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This step happens only once and is a pre-requisite for applying to the AXA Research Fund campaigns. Once an institution has been registered, it becomes part of the AXA Research Fund community. Institutions are invited to appoint a single point of contact who will handle the relationship ("Operational Contact") with the AXA Research Fund. Registration should be requested at least 5 days before the opening of the campaign. • To check whether your institution is already registered, please visit this page (https://secure-researchfund.axa.com/Public/InstitutionSearch.aspx). • For more information on how to register an institution, please visit this page (http://www.axa-research.org/how-to-register-an-institution).
2. Application slot <i>Starts</i> Oct. 12, 2015 <i>Ends</i> Nov. 13, 2015 12 CET Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only registered institutions may apply for a Post-Doctoral Fellowship (see step 1). • Institutions wishing to present candidates are asked to fill out an online form and select among 12 research fields representative of their strongholds in terms of fundamental research. The point is to highlight their strengths, values and strategy. • Institutions are not limited to these initial choices and are allowed to present candidates in other research fields once they have been informed of the number of applicants they may present (from 0 to 4). <p><i>NB: Neither applicants' names nor specific project descriptions are expected at this stage of the process.</i></p>

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<p>3. Light Proposal</p> <p>Candidates' name dropping: Starts: Nov. 18, 2015</p> <p>Ends: Dec. 7, 2015 12 CET Time</p> <p>Light Proposal submissions: Starts: Nov. 18, 2015</p> <p>Ends: Dec. 14, 2015 12 CET Time</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The AXA Research Fund relies on Institutions' operational contact persons to present candidate(s) on behalf of their Institution by entering her/his name & email address online. Each candidate then receives via email all the necessary information to access the application form. • The Post-Doctoral Fellow is responsible for filling out the application form online. • The Post-Doctoral Fellow will be required to upload the following documents composing the "Light Proposal" application, in PDF format (size limited to 4MB): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extended synopsis of the postdoctoral project: 1.5 pages max + references; - Detailed CV: 2 pages max + ½ page of the most relevant publications; - Career statement: 1 page max, detailing link between the PhD thesis and the postdoctoral project, justification of the choice of the host institution, professional objectives of the applicant and how the AXA Research Fund fellowship can contribute to achieving these objectives. Information about the international exposure is also requested.
<p>4. Full Proposal</p> <p>Starts: Feb. 23, 2016</p> <p>Ends: Mar. 21, 2016 12 CET Time</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-Doctoral Fellows having been successful in the selection of the "Light Proposal" are invited to submit a "Full Proposal" application and are responsible for filling out the application form online. • The Post-Doctoral Fellow will be required to upload the following documents composing the "Full Proposal" application, in PDF format (size limited to 4MB): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updated detailed CV, incl. participation to colloquia: 2 pages max; - Detailed description of the research project: 6 pages max: long term objective and specific aims, rationale, methodology, work plan, budget; - Extended list of the most relevant publications: 2 pages max; - Short bio of the future supervisor and list of 10 most relevant publications of the hosting group in the past 3 years: 1 page max - Two Reference letters (1page/letter) that must be submitted separately by their authors. The Post-Doctoral Fellow will be required to submit the names of 2 referents, with their institution and email address, so that the referents obtain the information on how to submit their reference letters. The applicant's Post-Doctoral advisor writes the first letter and the second letter is necessarily written by a different referent, preferably by the applicant's previous advisor.

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5. Public engagement interviews <i>Starts:</i> Mar. 22, 2016 <i>Ends:</i> May 11, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two AXA experts will, in parallel to the evaluation of the full proposal, interview candidates. Their role is to help the AXA Research Fund assess the candidates' ability to share their research project with a non- academic audience. The AXA experts will get in contact with the candidate to settle up a 20 min interview, to assess: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potential to act as a spokesperson in public debate; - Popularization and pedagogical skills; - Ability to highlight the value of the research project to society.
6. Rebuttal <i>Starts:</i> Apr. 23, 2016 <i>Ends:</i> Apr. 29, 2016 12 CET Time	<p>Applications will be reviewed by remote referees in parallel of the interviews.</p> <p>These reviews will be made available to the Candidates for the Rebuttal process.</p>
7. Selection <i>Starts:</i> May 3, 2016 <i>Ends:</i> June 7, 2015	<p>The Peer Review Panels will examine the Full proposals, together with the outcome of the Light Proposals, the external reviews, the rebuttal and provide their recommendation on each proposal to the Scientific Board.</p> <p>The Scientific Board will review the full documentation (Full proposals, external reviews, rebuttal and Review Panel's recommendation) and select the awarded candidates based on the ESF recommendations.</p>
8. Results' publication June 8, 2016	<p>As soon as the Board has taken its decision, the AXA Research Fund will inform the Institution through the Institution's representative. Results of the campaign will also be made available online. (http://www.axa-research.org/publication-of-results).</p> <p>In parallel, the announcement will also be reflected on the dedicated platforms for applicants and institutions, where the outcomes will be published.</p>

5. Grant and agreement terms and conditions

Upon written acceptance of the grant's offer by the selected candidate, the AXA Research Fund will liaise with the Operational Contact of the grantee's host institution to set in motion the contracting process. Grantees will be kept updated by their Operational Contact throughout the contracting process.

- ***Duration of the agreement***

Due to the ground-breaking nature of frontier research projects, it is expected that **all projects start within 12 months** from the final results publication date. The AXA Research Fund reserves the right to cancel a grant if the proposed start date goes beyond this limit.

The agreement period covers the granted research project period. Should the AXA funding not be entirely spent at the end of the agreement, the institution could request for a non-financial extension in order to finalize the research project with the remaining funds. A specific document detailing the terms and conditions is available on the AXA Research Fund website (<https://www.axa-research.org/sites/dev/files/A-Howtoobtain-Modus/NoCostExtension2015.pdf>).

- ***Amount & payment of grant***

Payment of the grant is dependent on (i) the agreement signing, and (ii) on the Post-Doctoral Fellow taking up the AXA Post-Doctoral Fellowship.

Grants are **paid in four (4) installments**, each installment being equal to one fourth of the total funding:

- An advance payment (as pre-financing) is made when the post-doctoral grantee starts the research project,
- 2 interim payments: respectively 12 months and 18 months after the starting of the project,
- A final payment is made at the end of the project, on the basis of actual expenditures

- ***Use of grant***

The AXA Research Fund requests that the Institution commits to fund the Postdoctoral Researcher in accordance with the following terms and conditions:

- A fixed sum of five thousand (5,000) euros per year exempt from VAT to cover the costs incurred by the Post-Doctoral Fellow that are directly related to the research project, subject to supporting documents to be provided to the Institution,
- A minimum of thirty-five thousand (35,000) euros as an annual gross salary exempt from VAT;
- The Institution may use a maximum of twenty five thousand (25,000) euros per year exempt from VAT to cover the environmental costs directly related to the Postdoctoral Researcher's project. Any adjustment on the grantee's salary is deducted from this allocation.

The sole purpose of the financial grant paid by AXA is to support the research project. In this connection, the AXA Research Fund requests that the Institution provides AXA evidence that the whole of the contribution paid by AXA is paid in

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accordance with the terms and conditions described herein, for conducting the aforementioned postdoctoral research. All other expenses are eligible as long as they are directly connected to the grantee's research project.

Incidental expenses must be directly related to the research project the AXA Research Fund has selected. All overheads must be motivated.

Eligible costs can in particular include:

- AXA Post-Doctoral Fellow expenses (incl. annual gross salary, travel & accommodation costs...),
- Acquisition of scientific equipment and resources (databases, survey costs, consumables...),
- Academic and public engagement activities organization costs.

The AXA Research fund does not cover expenses which are not directly connected to the Post-Doctoral Fellowship research program, and in particular infrastructure or overhead costs. The application must make clear that the research environment provides full institutional support in this regard.

Non eligible costs include (but are not limited to):

- Costs related to general administration (incl. telecommunication expenses, office supplies, miscellaneous recurring consumables...),
- Costs of office (incl. rent or depreciation of buildings, general equipment's and related expenditure such as water or heating, maintenance, insurance, safety costs...).

• *Employment contracting framework*

The AXA Research Fund requests that the Institution legally employs the Post-Doctoral Fellow as a postdoctoral researcher in the department or the laboratory, under an employment contract that complies with current national legislation of the Institution. The AXA Research Fund requests that the Institution undertakes to:

- Entrust the Post-Doctoral Fellow with the research for which he/she has been given authorization to work at the host Institution,
- Provide the Post-Doctoral Fellow with the necessary resources to conduct his/her postdoctoral research,
- Agree to the involvement of an AXA Contact person whose role is notably to ensure regular contact between the Post-Doctoral Fellow and the AXA Research Fund with the general aim of helping the young researcher in his/her career,
- Allow the Post-Doctoral Fellow to attend meetings and seminars organized in connection with the AXA Research Fund.

The Post-Doctoral Fellow is placed under the sole responsibility of the Institution which ensures that the postdoctoral research project runs smoothly and is properly conducted.

The AXA Research Fund requests that the Institution appoints a Scientific Officer to manage the Post-Doctoral Fellowship. In the event that he/she is unable to carry out his/her tasks as defined herein, the AXA Research Fund requests that the Institution appoints a new Scientific Officer with the necessary and adequate guarantees to manage the Post-Doctoral Fellow work to completion. The AXA Research Fund requests that the Institution provides the AXA Research Fund with the name of the new Scientific Officer.

- **Monitoring of grant**

A report is requested from the researcher, one year after the launch of the Post-Doctoral Fellowship project that includes information on the progresses of the research project, and a financial report on AXA funding expenditures. At the end of the fellowship, the researcher is also requested to fill in an Executive Summary Report to inform the AXA Research Fund of the results of the research and the financial report showing a statement of expenditure. Specific outputs from the project are asked to be included (e.g. publications).

- **Intellectual property**

The AXA Post-Doctoral Fellow remains **fully independent** to conduct his/her research project. Also, AXA will **not claim any right to the ownership or use** of the results coming from the research program, and the Institution and/or the Post-Doctoral Fellow and member or her/his team keep full ownership of their results, in accordance with the legal and/or contractual provisions existing between them.

- **Publicity on grant**

The AXA Research Fund is a philanthropic initiative and therefore the publicity on the grant is only designed to enable AXA to promote its general interest role. The title of both fellowship and researcher should include the name of "AXA". When communicating on the AXA fellowship, the Institution and the researcher should mention the support of the AXA Research Fund.

The AXA Research Fund guarantees the use of personal data disclosed by the candidates solely for the purpose for which they were provided. Furthermore, the AXA Research Fund does not transfer the personal data outside the European Union without the prior written consent of the candidate and accomplishment of required formalities. All the persons who may be in contact with the private information related to candidates (referees, panel members & chairs) sign upstream a non-disclosure agreement.

- **Post-Doctoral Fellow leave of absence**

Each project selected by the Scientific Board and funded by the AXA Research Fund is a combination of a candidate, a project and a host Institution. Thus, the candidate is expected to carry out the project as described in the proposal, and as acted in the grant agreement. Furthermore, it is expected that the candidate establishes and concludes the funded research project in association with the original host institution (applicant legal entity).

Only in very exceptional cases, is it possible to adjust the scientific strategy and reallocate expenditure (e.g. regarding staff, equipment, consumables) accordingly, provided the research performed is still in line with the original scientific or scholarly objectives (<https://www.axa-research.org/sites/dev/files/A-Howtoobtain-Modus/NoCostExtension2015.pdf>).