

Internal Physics-XS grants 2026 – Call for Proposals

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Introduction

Our department will soon receive around **€1.1M from Horizon Europe (HEU) matching funds**. These funds are provided by RVO (*Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland*) and are distributed as a function of the size of HEU projects awarded to PIs in Dutch Universities and Research Institutes. The goal of these funds is to **support our external funding acquisition activities** (NWO, NGF, EU/ERC, foundations, contract research, etc). These funds can be spent only over a limited period of time (by the end of 2028 at the latest).

The Faculty Board has given the departments the authority to allocate the budget in the way that they think can contribute best to the department's strategy. After discussion at the Section Representatives Meeting (SRM) of March 24th, 2026, the MT would like to propose the first call for proposals for new **Internal Physics-XS grants** supported by these HEU matching funds. The main assessment criterion will be a demonstrable added value of the project towards increasing our external grant acquisition efforts.

It is likely that in the future we will receive additional HEU matching funds given our recent success in HEU projects. If so, and if this Physics-XS scheme is successful, we plan to distribute them in the same manner.

What can be requested

- Between **€25K** (minimum) and **€100K** (maximum) per application, with significant freedom regarding what can be requested.
- This budget can be used *e.g.* for **investments**: equipment, consumables, software licenses, specialised computing equipment, and others.
- If **personnel** is requested: a maximum of 1 postdoc-year can be requested. This could be used to hire a new postdoc, to extend the contract of one of our postdocs for one more year, or to offer a finishing PhD candidate a 1 year of extension as postdoc.
- In the case of finishing PhD candidates: this postdoc extension can only be awarded once **they have submitted their PhD manuscript**.
- These funds cannot be used to support PhD candidates (extensions).
- Is it also possible to request support for travel (*e.g.* short sabbatical), conference organisation, professional grant support, external bureaus, and in general any other activity that is expected to lead to an improvement in our external funding acquisition success.
- Requesting (partial) teaching buyouts is also possible within the restrictions of the call but a clear plan on how teaching activities will be taken care of and on how educational quality will be maintained needs to be provided.

Who can apply

- Any PI in the department can submit a proposal (at most one per round).

- Joint submissions between 2 or multiple PIs are acceptable (and encouraged if one can make a strong case that this will be beneficial for future grant application efforts). For a given round, a PI can only be part of a single Physics-XS submission.
- Is it also possible to submit an application together with colleagues from other Beta departments, provided the funds (e.g. a postdoc hire) are spent within the department of P&A.

When to apply

- Deadline for a first call of proposals is **July 15th, 2026**, such that possible new ideas that arise from the strategic discussions at the departmental Retreat 2026 can be taken into account.
- A decision will be taken after the summer break, with projects starting as early as **October 2026**.
- Should funds remain after this first call (or additional HEU matching funds are allocated to our department), there will be **new calls in the future** with similar conditions.

How to apply

- The department will provide an **application template** following the ENW-XS example.
- Maximum 2 pages per proposal.
- Following the ENW-XS structure is encouraged since this way the same or a similar proposal can be submitted to an ENW-XS round.
- No budget from Project Control is required, we will provide a table with the **standard costs** of personnel for different salary scales in the application template.

Assessment criteria and monitoring

- Main assessment criterion: **demonstrable added value** of the project towards increasing our external grant acquisition efforts.
- Applicants should indicate the **explicit grants and calls** (or other funding sources e.g. companies, foundations, charities ...) that they will be targeting in the near future, explaining why the support provided by these Physics-XS grants will lead to an increase of the chances to secure this specific funding.

We expect the **full commitment of the applicants** with the goals that they state in the applications. The MT will monitor **progress in the agreed upon targets**, and failure to meet them (e.g. by not submitting a proposal to a call that was the main target in the project justification) will *i)* render the applicant not eligible for future rounds of this internal funding instrument and *ii)* may lead to a decrease of the PI budget for the subsequent year(s).

Assessment procedure

- Initial ranking of proposals is done following the ENW-XS strategy: all applicants grade the proposal of other PIs (excluding colleagues from their own sections), at the light of the assessment procedure described above.
- A template for the grading will be provided.

- Final ranking and awarding is done by the MT.

Additional information

- A fraction (~€300k) of these HEU matching funds will be reserved to support **start up packages** of the 3 new PIs that (according to the current planning) will be hired in 2027.
- We also reserve **€25k** to purchase **professional GenAI software licences** for our staff. For a pilot period of 1 year, PIs can request to the MT the purchase of a GenAI pro license to support their funding acquisition period (using it e.g. as internal expert reviewer, for deep literature searches, and other applications). No need to request hence these licenses via the Physics-XS budget. After this pilot run we will evaluate the added value of this investment.
- Budget to be spent before the end of 2028, at the latest.

Next steps

- Consultation round within all Physics staff.
- Discussion and final decision at staff lunch of April 14th, 2026.