

YOUNG RESEARCHERS

Supporting postdoctoral researchers in the early stage of their careers

Two-step Call - First phase deadline:

- Life Sciences 13th April 2026
- Physical Sciences and Engineering 14th April 2026
- Social Sciences and Humanities 15th April 2026

GRANTING SCHEMES 2026. SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Fondazione
CARIPLO

TUTE SERVARE MUNIFICE DONARE • 1816



Index

1. INTRODUCTION.....	3
2. BACKGROUND.....	3
3. AIMS.....	3
4. GUIDELINES.....	4
4.1 Eligible subjects	4
4.2 Eligible projects	4
4.3 Criteria.....	5
4.4 Submission process	6
5. BUDGET AND ELIGIBLE COSTS.....	6
6. COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION	7
7. SUMMARY.....	7

1. INTRODUCTION

The call "Young Researchers - Supporting postdoctoral researchers in the early stage of their career" is a two-phase programme that fits within Fondazione Cariplo's mandate "Creating enabling conditions to strengthen our communities".

2. BACKGROUND

The PhD represents the highest level of education in the Italian academic system. Typically, it requires an investment of at least three years and is meant to foster scholars' academic independence, creativity and methodological knowledge.

According to AlmaLaurea Interuniversity Consortium¹, one year after obtaining the degree, 40.1% of PhD holders wish to pursue an academic career, either in Italy or abroad. However, in Italy at least, there are currently only a few funding programs dedicated to postdoctoral researchers in the early stage of their careers. Undoubtedly, our country registers important weaknesses in terms of instruments to strengthen and promote the independence of young researchers.

It is therefore crucial to close this gap for both the researchers and the scientific community. Research is not an individual activity, but rather the result of teamwork that combines different expertise, knowledge, skills and abilities. In that respect it is important to create a good balance between the experience, network and management skills, often possessed by established researchers, and the originality and innovativeness typical of the younger ones².

¹ AlmaLaurea Report 2025 "Profilo dei Dottori di ricerca 2024".

² https://www.dsu.cnr.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Relazione_sulla_ricerca_e_innovazione_in_Italia_2023.pdf.

³ The term *research identity* refers to a set of elements which define the profile of a researcher. These include affiliation to one or more organizations, publications - with related citations -

3. AIMS

Through this call, Fondazione Cariplo intends to support young researchers in the early stages of their careers. The call is aimed to researchers who have obtained their PhD no more than two years before the call deadline and have not yet reached the age of 33. The call is intended to support research projects aiming to enhance the profile of the young researchers and the development of their research identity³.

With this call Fondazione Cariplo offers young researchers the opportunity to develop independent projects, explore new methods, conceptual frameworks, innovative tools or techniques, and acquire or consolidate managerial skills. The call encourages the submission of proposals characterized by contamination between different disciplinary areas, methodologies or approaches, considering this an opportunity to respond to complex problems and to foster scientific progress.

Proposals can include training courses, to consolidate or improve both technical and soft skills. The call requires the identification of a mentor who will support the applicant in her/his academic progress. It encourages internationalization, the development of collaborative networks and research experiences at organizations or groups different from those where the PhD was obtained. Should the proponents decide to take advantage of this opportunity, they are required to detail their work plan and provide adequate letters of support. It should be noted that all proposals' activities and experiences need to be consistent with the research project and

participation in congresses, methodologies and techniques usually used in studies, collaborations, teaching, peer review, editorial and third party activities mission. For a scientific treatment of the topic, see, among others Castelló (2021) What perspectives underlie 'researcher identity'? A review of two decades of empirical studies.

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-020-00557-8>

represent an added value in terms of construction of the research identity.

Finally, young researchers are required to represent the potential impact of their research on society and describe communication and dissemination activities.

4. GUIDELINES

4.1 Eligible subjects

Public or private non-profit organizations carrying out scientific research activities.

Only organizations with an operational headquarter located within the Foundation's area of interest (Lombardy and the provinces of Novara and Verbano-Cusio-Ossola) may apply as lead organization. Applications with a lead organization based outside this area are not eligible.

Organizations based outside this area (both in Italy and abroad) can participate as partners.

By participating in the call, organizations accept the portability of the grant. Any change in the host institution requires the approval by Fondazione Cariplo, according to the guidelines for presentation ("Guida alla presentazione dei progetti su bandi") and the general criteria for granting contributions ("Criteri generali per la concessione dei contributi").

4.2 Eligible projects

To be considered eligible, projects must:

- be proposed by a Principal Investigator who:
 - i. have obtained their PhD Degree no more than 2 years prior to the deadline of this call⁴;
 - ii. has not yet reached the age of 33 by the call deadline⁵;

⁴ Extension of the eligibility time window are foreseen in the following cases:

- Maternity leave: 18 months for each child (born before or after the PhD) and the birth certificate;
- Paternity leave: effective period of documented paternity leave taken per each child (born before or after the PhD);
- Illness leave (over 90 days): documented period of effective leave for serious illness (occurred after the PhD).

- ensure a significant contribution by the PI, who must be involved in the project activities for at least half of their working time, calculated over the entire duration of the project⁶;
- identify a *mentor* who will support the researcher in the development of their research identity;
- start no later than September 2027⁷;
- have a maximum duration of 36 months, with the possibility of an extension of up to maximum 12 additional months.

The Foundation will not consider the resubmission of a project from a candidate who has already submitted proposals twice in the previous editions of this call.

Researchers funded in previous editions of this call as PI of the leading organization will not be allowed to submit further applications, either as PI of the leading organization, or as head of the partner unit, if any.

The total cost of the project should include additional costs⁸ and overhead only, according to eligibility criteria and thresholds as listed below:

- A03 - "Equipment and software"
This entry cannot exceed 10% of project additional costs. It fully covers the costs for newly acquired equipment and software. It is mandatory to clearly motivate these costs in accordance to the specificity of the project;
- A04 - "Other amortizable costs"
This entry cannot exceed 20% of project additional costs and can only include patenting costs and rental of equipment;
- A06 - "Temporary staff"
This entry can only include research personnel costs. The cost of administrative staff is not allowed. In addition to the salary for the candidate, A06 also includes the salary for any collaborators;

⁵ The same extensions of eligibility as detailed in footnote 4 apply.

⁶ This commitment must be declared at the time of the application and, in the event of funding, verified within the contract or another equivalent document issued by the Lead Organization in accordance with its internal procedures.

⁷ Exceptions are allowed only in cases of maternity, paternity, or serious illness.

⁸ Sum of: A03, A04, A06, A07, A08, A10.

- A07 - “Sub-contractors and consultants”⁹
This entry cannot exceed 30% of project additional costs;
- A08 - “Materials and supplies”
This entry cannot include costs related to office supplies and photocopies;
- A09 - “Overheads”
This entry cannot exceed 10% of project additional costs;
- A10 - “Other costs”
This entry can only include travel expenses and conference participation fees for the research personnel involved in the project, scientific publications and activities of communication with the civil society.

The grant will cover 100% of project costs, therefore the requested amount should correspond to the total cost of the project.

Please note that the grant request should not exceed 200.000 euros.

Proposals should provide the following mandatory documents:

PHASE I

- Letter of agreement (PHASE I), available in the project Reserved Area;
- Partnership agreement¹⁰, available in the project Reserved Area;
- Letter of intent (LOI), outlining the project idea, in PDF format and drafted in English, using the designated template;
- Full Proposal, as the detailed description of the project, in PDF format and drafted in English, using the designated template;
- Self-declaration (affidavit) certifying the candidate's eligibility requirements based on the specifically provided form.

⁹This entry should also include audit costs, where applicable. Exclusively certificated auditors are considered eligible. For the sole purpose of ascertaining whether the obligation to perform a financial audit applies or not, the amount which has to be considered is obtained by multiplying the eligible costs detailed in the Budget (sum of entries A06, A07, A08, A09 and A10) by the coefficient 1,25. It is also recommended to refer to the “Grant management and reporting guide” and to the guidelines for audit assignment “Linee guida per affidamento audit”; both

PHASE II

- Letter of agreement (PHASE II), available in the project Reserved Area;
- Budget, in EXCEL format, available in the project Reserved Area.

With the participation to this call, organizations acknowledge, agree and irrevocably accept “Intellectual property rights policy”, “Open access policy” and “Guidelines for the citation of the contribution in scientific communications” available online for download. Please note that all publications resulting from the project results must report the affiliation of the organization with which the proposal was submitted. Furthermore, careful reading of the FAQs specifically prepared for this call is recommended.

4.3 Criteria

In the following paragraphs we describe in detail the evaluation process.

PHASE I

- Formal check of the availability of all mandatory documents and of the eligibility of the organizations (lead institution and partners);
- Selection of the proposals that meet the call's aims and requirements;
- Evaluation of the most competitive proposals in terms of the scientific quality of the project and competitiveness of the CV of the PI.

Please note that at this stage only the Letter of Intent (LOI) will be evaluated.

PHASE II

1. SCIENTIFIC QUALITY OF THE PROJECT (weight 40%)

- clarity in the formulation of the objectives and strategic approach;

documents are available on the Cariplo Foundation's website. However, it is anticipated that in case of funding, the Foundation will confirm to each recipient any obligation to satisfy such fulfillment.

¹⁰To be provided in case the project involves partners and the doc must be drawn up on the basis of the form made available in the project Reserved Area.

- adequate contextualization of the project within the state of the art;
- presence of a logical and well-structured research design;
- adequacy of the proposed methods and techniques with regards to the project objectives;
- originality of the project in terms of proposed methods and techniques.

Please note that in the evaluation process of the Full Proposal, contamination between different disciplinary areas, methodologies or approaches is considered a rewarding element.

2. PROJECT PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (weight 35%)

- curriculum vitae of the applicant (PI);
- coherence between the project activities and the profile of the applicant (PI);
- impact of the project and added value of the mentor in terms of fostering applicant's research identity.

Please note that in the evaluation of the PI, research experience at other institutions will be considered a rewarding element.

3. IMPACT AND DISSEMINATION (weight 15%)

- scientific impact;
- any other impact (at social, technological, economic, and environmental levels);
- quality of the communication and dissemination actions.

4. FINANCIAL PLAN AND DURATION (weight 10%)

- adequacy and coherence of the budget plan and the duration of the project with respect to the activities envisaged in the proposal.

This criterion will also evaluate the adequacy of the contributions from any partners and third parties.

Phase I (Letter of Intent) and Phase II (Full Proposal) follow a peer review evaluation process, where the scientific evaluation is entrusted to external qualified experts, subject to precisely defined rules and procedures aimed at exclude conflicts of interest, ideological bias, personal

pressure and self-referentiality. The completeness of the documentation, the coherence with the call and, for phase II, the consistency of the budget plan, will be evaluated by the Offices.

4.4 Submission process

When submitting their application, proponents will have to select the academic thematic area in which their project fits in, choosing from:

- *Life Sciences*
- *Social Sciences and Humanities*
- *Physical Sciences and Engineering*

In addition, they will also have to detail both the primary sector and the relevant secondary sector¹¹.

Grant applications must be submitted by 5 pm (CET) on:

- 13th April 2026, for Life Sciences;
- 14th April 2026, for Physical Sciences and Engineering;
- 15th April 2026, for Social Sciences and Humanities.

Submission of pending applications is allowed within 30 minutes after the call deadline.

Only the proposals passing Phase I will be invited to participate to Phase II. More details on Phase II submission process will be communicated later on to the applicants in their personal invitation letter.

5. BUDGET AND ELIGIBLE COSTS

The overall budget available for the call is 8 million euros.

In order to standardize the success rate of the submitted projects, the overall budget will be allocated to each academic thematic area proportionate to the number of received requests.

With reference to eligible and/or ineligible expenses, please refer to paragraph 4.2 "Eligible projects".

¹¹ Project classification refers to ERC primary and secondary sectors as indicated at the following link:

https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-03/ERC_panel_structure_2024_calls.pdf.

6. COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

Fondazione Cariplo, as a private entity, has full power to decide on the allocation of the budget. The text of the call and all the necessary documents are available at Fondazione Cariplo website: www.fondazionecariplo.it.

For the purposes of peer review process, any personal data reported in the detailed description of the project may be transferred to non-EU countries or organizations, in compliance with EU Regulation 2016/679. For more information, before submitting an application, please have a look at the new privacy policy on the processing of personal data and the transfer of personal data to countries or organizations outside the European Union.

7. SUMMARY*

Call	Young researchers
Type	Two step call
Deadline	<i>Life Sciences</i> : 13 th April 2026 Physical Sciences and Engineering: 14 th April 2026 Social Sciences and Humanities: 15 th April 2026
Available Budget	€ 8.000.000
Aims	Support postdoctoral researchers in the early stage of their careers in development of their research identity
Eligible organizations	Public or private research organizations
Budget limits	Max € 200.000
Contact	Area Ricerca Scientifica Contact available at www.fondazionecariplo.it Contact e-mail: ricercagiovani@fondazionecariplo.it

**The data in the "Summary" are a snapshot of the key elements of this Call. Please read carefully the full text of the Call for all details.*