DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

Climate-Sensitive Implementation of International Higher Education Cooperation in DAAD Project Funding

Reference Guide



The DAAD integrates ecological sustainability considerations not only into its own institutional procedures, but also into its funding activities. The aim is to implement international higher education cooperation projects in a manner that is as environmentally sustainable as possible, thereby contributing to climate protection and the promotion of sustainable development. The criterion of climate-sensitive project planning and implementation is therefore being applied by the DAAD as a selection criterion in a growing number of funding programmes.

This guide is intended to provide initial orientation for the assessment of the cross-cutting criterion “climate-sensitive project organisation”, newly introduced in 2024, in project applications submitted to the DAAD. The following practical guidance is designed to support higher education institutions in preparing applications and members of selection committees in making funding decisions. They offer suggestions for climate-sensitive project organisation without claiming to be exhaustive.



Project management

Addressing the following questions may help to identify potential levers for reducing the CO2 emissions of international higher education collaborations, minimising environmental impacts and thereby promoting climate-sensitive project management.

- **Collaborative and participatory project planning:** Are virtual planning meetings and workshops envisaged from the outset? Where necessary, will all participants be actively familiarised with digital tools and formats to enable participation on an equal footing? Are in-person meetings planned for project phases in which face-to-face interaction is likely to be required to establish shared understanding, ensure quality or address challenges?
- **Digital project management approaches:** Should digital project management and planning tools be used alongside communication tools?
- **Fewer flights – longer stays:** Should key agreements and the development of important outputs take place in only one or a few (potentially longer) in-person meetings? (see: "ONE Project")
- **Climate-friendly awarding and procurement:** Is due consideration given to environmental friendliness and sustainability in the procurement of consumables and equipment (within the framework of the principle of economic efficiency under public procurement law)?
- **Climate-conscious technology selection:** Furthermore, have software applications or other technologies (e.g. cloud services) been assessed regarding their climate impact, and have climate-friendly solutions been chosen?

With its **guideline** "Criteria for sustainable procurement"*, the DAAD reduces its ecological footprint in its operational activities and in its funding actions.

Examples from higher education institutions:

The **"ONE Project"** aims to enhance environmental awareness as well as the digital communication and cooperation skills of higher education leaders and staff to successfully implement multinational projects with only ONE (physical) transnational partner meeting. Among other resources, its website provides meeting guidelines, case studies and toolkits.

→ ONE-Project - Smart, Green, Sustainable

The University of Bonn has developed a guide that includes checklists and practical examples from day-to-day operations for international events, as well as a glossary.

→ Guide to sustainability in international cooperation, University of Bonn*

Aalen University focusses in its guideline on the project management process and provides, in a concise format, a bibliography, an overview of management systems and instruments, and frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative.

→ Guide to sustainability in project management, Aalen University*

* Please note that this document is currently only available in German



Event management

The key question in this area is how resources can be saved and a contribution made to ecological sustainability when organising events as part of the planned project. For example, the following aspects can be considered when planning and delivering events:

- **Use of hybrid formats in the event concept:** Can speakers travelling long distances participate digitally? Is this technically feasible and cost-efficient?
- **Shorten travel distances:** Are centrally located event venues with good public transport connections available?
- **Make catering climate-friendly:** Can regional, seasonal and vegetarian options be selected for catering?
- **Save (paper) resources:** Can conference programmes and documents be provided in digital form?
- **Preference for sustainable hotels and venues (taking public procurement requirements into account):** Are certified providers available, or can certification schemes be used as a reference?

The **DAAD** has developed a **guideline on sustainable event management** for the planning and delivery of its own events, which takes into account other aspects of sustainability in addition to ecological sustainability. Six key fields of action are identified in which sustainability considerations can be applied. The guideline also contains practical checklists for event planning: Planning and implementing DAAD events sustainably - a guide*

The following **resources** may serve as additional **guidance:**

→ GIZ's "Guide to sustainable event management"* provides an overview of the various phases of event planning and delivery and offers checklists for different fields of action.

→ The Federal Environment Agency's "Guidelines for sustainable organisation of events"* provide comprehensive information on sustainable event management and a detailed checklist.

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Mobility of funded individuals and project staff

In terms of mobility, the focus is first on assessing the necessity of travel itself and then weighing the cost-benefit factor. Wherever possible, synergies should be used, travel should minimise its climate impact, and for unavoidable flights, the option with the lowest climate impact should be chosen. Raising awareness among leadership and staff, as well as monitoring and evaluation, play a crucial role in this area.

- **Assess the necessity of on-site presence:** Can the objectives of an event be achieved in another way, for example through digital communication, with comparable knowledge gains or networking benefits?
- **Longer, but fewer stays:** Is the distance travelled reasonable in relation to the duration of stay and the expected outcomes? Can multiple travel purposes be combined to avoid repeated journeys?
- **Climate-friendly travel**[1]: Can greenhouse gas emissions be reduced by switching to more climate-friendly modes of transport (e.g. bus, train)? Can direct flights be used without significant additional cost? Are the airlines used known to be particularly climate- efficient?
- **Inform yourself:** Are evaluations planned to determine whether the intended reduction of the climate/ ecological footprint is actually being achieved?

In connection with sustainable mobility, the **DAAD** also offers the following **guidelines**, which can serve as additional guidance**:**

→ DAAD Perspectives: Sustainable mobility: This position paper outlines the challenges, describes potentially conflicting goals and presents guiding principles, including the consideration of diversity, environmental friendliness, and quality, to develop more sustainable solutions for future mobility.

→ DAAD Travel Navigator: The Navigator provides guiding questions and considerations for choosing the appropriate mode of transport, assessing the necessity of travel, exploring the possibility of virtual participation, and offers recommendations for environmentally friendly travel practices, as well as further information to support the choice of the most climate-friendly travel option.

In addition, there are also **independent initiatives** that have previously received positive feedback within the **higher education sector**:

→ One such initiative is the Scientist 4 Future campaign "#Under1000 I won't do it"*, which represents a voluntary commitment to avoid short-haul business flights under 1000 km as a symbolic measure for climate protection.

→ The German Transport Club (VCD) has compiled a collection of 22 higher education cooperation projects* and reports on their transferability, successes and challenges in the context of sustainable mobility.

[1] Compensation is currently not yet possible on a widespread basis due to differing requirements and regulations of the funding bodies. A corresponding adjustment may be implemented in future calls for proposals.

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Imprint

Publisher

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Authorised Representative of the Executive Committee: Prof Dr Joybrato Mukherjee
District Court of Bonn
Register of associations, number VR 2107
Sales tax number: DE122276332

Person responsible according to § 18 Abs. 2 MStV:
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The DAAD is an association of German universities and their student bodies. It is institutionally funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

Published as a digital publication on the Internet
1st version, March 2024
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Supported by:
Federal Foreign Office