

## Breaking news and analysis from the world of science policy



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The Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Ljubljana. If Slovenia wins in the Teaming competition, it has promised to double the award with money from the European Structural and Investment Funds.

# European Union's pairing plan for science proves popular

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By [Lucas Laursen \(/author/lucas-laursen\)](/author/lucas-laursen) | 31 October 2014 2:45 pm | [0 Comments \(/europe/2014/10/european-unions-pairing-plan-science-proves-popular#disqus\\_thread\)](/europe/2014/10/european-unions-pairing-plan-science-proves-popular#disqus_thread)

A program designed to boost investments in the scientific infrastructure of Europe's lagging regions by pairing them with elite institutes elsewhere on the continent has proved unexpectedly popular. The European Commission has received 169 scientific business plans for the scheme, dubbed Teaming, and may be able to advance only 16%

of the proposals to the next round of the competition. The commission will start reviewing the proposals in Brussels next week.

"We were delighted," says commission spokesman Michael Jennings. "The response exceeded our expectations." It also triggered an automatic 20% boost to the evaluation budget, according to an internal commission document obtained by *ScienceInsider*.

The €314 million scheme, [hatched a few years ago](https://www.sciencemag.org/content/336/6086/1222.summary) (<https://www.sciencemag.org/content/336/6086/1222.summary>), is a small part of Horizon 2020, the European Union's nearly €80 billion research funding program; the idea is to trigger the creation or rejuvenation of research facilities in 15 countries in the so-called Widening region of Europe, where scientific output is low, and eight associated member states. Regional governments can seek help from an established institute in remaining member states, most of them in Northern and Western Europe, to draw up a plan to start or revamp a science center.

Romania tops the list with 24 proposals to host research centers, followed by Poland, with 19, and associated member state Serbia with 15. Germany provides the most candidate partner institutions, 136, followed by the United Kingdom, which appears in 67 applications. Spain submitted two ineligible applications to host a center; the country is actually on the list of high-performing partner countries and participated in that capacity in 29 applications.

Proposals will be judged in part based on commitments from the regional government to provide funds, good working conditions for scientists, and institutional independence, according to the [call for proposals](http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020/calls/h2020-widespread-2014-1.html) (<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020/calls/h2020-widespread-2014-1.html>) published late last year. "The idea was to combine the highest scientific competence with the political will to build up an internationally attractive research infrastructure and innovation environment," says [Herbert Reul](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/28225/herbert_reul_home.html) ([http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/28225/herbert\\_reul\\_home.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/28225/herbert_reul_home.html)), a member of the European Parliament for the Christian-democratic European People's Party and one of the architects of the program. The hope is that a shot at winning otherwise unattainable Horizon 2020 funds makes scientific reforms and

investment more palatable to local politicians.

Slovenia, for instance, will model the governance of the institutes proposed in its plan on German and other foreign research centers, says [Urban Krajcar \(http://si.linkedin.com/pub/urban-krajcar/61/2a3/b79\)](http://si.linkedin.com/pub/urban-krajcar/61/2a3/b79), the director-general for science at the country's Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. The country has also promised to double any Horizon 2020 Teaming funds with money from the so-called European Structural and Investment Funds for regional development, he says. (The funds—worth some €352 billion between 2014 and 2020—are typically used for other types of infrastructure, such as roads and bridges; the commission's hope is that the Teaming call will shift part of them to scientific infrastructure.)

Among Slovenia's proposals is a nanoscale sensor research center, a center for vaccine production and biotherapeutic technology, and a plan to upgrade an existing biomedical engineering Center of Excellence. “It would be a great honor for Slovenia to have one” of the winning applications, Krajcar says.

The commission will announce about 27 first-stage winners in February 2015; the list will be further winnowed down to perhaps six pilot Teaming centers by 2016. Horizon 2020 foresees another Teaming call beginning in 2018, but given the demand for this first round, the authors of the internal document propose adding an extra cycle in 2017 if the commission can find the funds.

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