



# Talent Development

## Guidelines



Dutch Heart Foundation  
**Hartstichting**

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## Context

Dutch cardiovascular research is internationally renowned for the scientific breakthroughs and healthcare innovations it has produced. However, the rapidly increasing number of cardiovascular patients requires more and accelerated research to develop and apply new solutions to reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease. To conduct good research and to implement it in practice, talents in the cardiovascular field and from many different disciplines are urgently needed. If we want more research to be done in those areas where it is most needed, we must (continue to) attract researchers and retain the best talents for the cardiovascular field in the Netherlands. This also requires that some of our top performers with different backgrounds develop into cardiovascular medical administrators to lead the broad multidisciplinary field of (biomedical) research, healthcare and prevention in the future.

# Introduction

The Dutch Heart Foundation helps talented researchers to get the most out of their careers in various ways. For example, there are the individual grants of the Dr. E. Dekker programme – intended for research talents in different stages of their scientific and administrative careers. Cardiovascular courses for doctoral students and junior postdocs are also organised annually in Papendal. The Dutch Heart Foundation also actively contributes to the Talent Pillar of the Dutch CardioVascular Alliance (DCVA) and is one of the initiators of the two-year DCVA Leadership Program for talent from various (cardiovascular) disciplines and fields. In addition to these forms of individual talent development, the Dutch Heart Foundation also encourages talent development through the consortia it funds. This document focuses on the latter.

## Talent Budget

In 2011, the Dutch Heart Foundation started to facilitate and (financially) encourage talent development within (national) thematic partnerships. This is based on the advice of the Cardiovascular Profiling Committee which described, in its March 2010 report 'Focus on Synergy and Impact', the importance of customisation and shared responsibility in talent development in the cardiovascular field. This led to the establishment of the consortium funding programme known as Cardiovascular Research Netherlands (CVON) and, more broadly, it led to collaboration with the DCVA from 2018 onwards. The Dutch Heart Foundation asks each research consortium it funds to set up a talent programme and to set aside money for it – generally 10% of the total budget. Consortia spend this budget, largely at their own discretion, on networking, deepening and enrichment activities. Part of this budget is intended for joint talent development activities in the context of the DCVA. This supports the development of dedicated, high-quality researchers and makes it more attractive for them to choose a career as a researcher and commit themselves to the cardiovascular field for life. In this way, the Dutch Heart Foundation aims to ensure the continuity of high-quality and innovative research.

## Guidelines for setting up a talent programme

This document was written in consultation with the Dutch cardiovascular field to support the design, assessment and implementation of strong talent programmes. We especially thank the DCVA Talent Pillar and other talent development stakeholders (including talent coordinators, research leaders and talents) who have contributed to this document through interviews, focus groups and feedback. This document includes guidelines for all those involved in talent development in the cardiovascular field, and specifically for those involved in talent programmes designed within consortia. Among other things, it includes guidance for:

- Research leaders or talent coordinators in consortia that receive financial support from the Dutch Heart Foundation and are engaged in the design and implementation of a talent programme;
- Researchers – talents – inside and outside a consortium who want to know more about talent development within the cardiovascular field;
- The Dutch Heart Foundation in assessing consortia's plans for talent programmes;
- Research leaders or talent coordinators in consortia that receive financial support from a third party but wish to become part of the DCVA.

In addition, this document is intended to provide greater definition of talent development. By doing so, we want to (1) better align the expectations of those involved, (2) promote collaboration and (3) show what the Dutch Heart Foundation and the cardiovascular field consider to be good examples of how to facilitate and encourage talent development.

# What do we want to achieve?

We distinguish two main goals in the design of a talent programme: the personal development of the individual and the substantive development of the cardiovascular field.

## Individual

First, we want the talent budget to benefit the individual – the talents within and outside the consortium. We would like to see a focus on personal development: what do people need for the next step in their career, in research or in another function within the cardiovascular field, such as in education or at a company? In short, it is important to stimulate self-reflection, so that people learn to recognise their own qualities and to reflect on their own interests or ideas, and to ensure they are properly equipped for the rest of their career.

## The Cardiovascular Field

In addition to the individual, we want the talent budget to serve the cardiovascular field. We want to use talent programmes to support future leaders within the cardiovascular field.

To achieve this, it is important to stimulate innovation and creativity by giving talents room to ‘think outside the box’ and to come up with new ideas. After that, there must be an opportunity to express these ideas, with a talent activity maintaining a clear connection to the consortium. We also value transparency and openness so that talents who are not yet active in a consortium can find their way there.

Talent development can be used in various ways, and we encourage tailoring of talent programmes to match the needs of the consortium. For this reason, there is no standard set-up for a talent programme. They are meant to differ from consortium to consortium.

# Who is a talent programme for?

## Definition

'Talent' is a broad concept and formulating a definition is complex. We choose the following characteristics for a 'talent' (not all criteria have to be met). In addition to strong research skills, a talent will have a personal combination of several of the following qualities.

- **Proactive attitude:** showing initiative and anticipating opportunities;
- **Broad and genuine interest:** showing curiosity by asking in-depth questions;
- **Motivated and driven:** having the will and passion to visibly invest time and effort in research;
- **Creativity:** daring to go off the beaten track and produce (their own) original ideas;
- **Self-reflection:** recognising their own strengths and weaknesses and working on them by stepping out of their comfort zone in order to develop further;
- **Supporting the field:** thinking ahead and thinking strategically to move things forward and generate impact in practice;
- **Collaboration-oriented:** soft skills such as good presentation, networking and collaboration skills.
  - **Presenting:** being able to convey the message to increase its visibility, to raise their own profile, and to improve visibility of the research, their project group and the consortium.
  - **Networking:** communicating with others, expanding their network and being able to determine which people are necessary to move forward.
  - **Collaboration:** being able to make optimal use of the qualities of others.

## Providing support

The support within a talent programme is mainly aimed at PhD students and postdocs. They are at the beginning of their careers and need support to make a lasting commitment to the cardiovascular field. It is up to the consortium to determine and substantiate who most needs the support. It may well be someone outside this phase. For example, it is extremely important to eventually prepare new generations as (managerial) successors of the future and to consider talents outside the consortium who are important for achieving the consortium's goals.

## Attracting new talents

A talent programme is intended for talents in the cardiovascular field. These are talents already working within the consortia that receive financial support from the Dutch Heart Foundation, but also those working outside them. We therefore encourage opening (parts of) a talent programme to external talents who are not (yet) affiliated with a consortium. Experience shows that it is necessary to create the right conditions for external talents to connect with the consortium, for example by inviting them to consortium meetings.



# What does a talent programme consist of?

When setting up and implementing a talent programme, there are several important steps: appointing a talent coordinator, creating a talent development plan, appointing an independent assessment committee, making an inventory of existing talent activities and evaluating and monitoring the talent programme. An explanation of each on these points is given below.

## Talent Coordinator and Junior PI

A good talent programme needs a talent coordinator. Given the multitude of tasks conducted by research leaders, we recommend that someone else from the consortium (preferably a junior PI) is given the opportunity to coordinate the talent programme and develop in that role. This will also allow senior PIs to see how a junior PI is developing and discern whether that person really has the qualities to become a senior PI. For the junior PI, it is an excellent opportunity to work on their visibility and to network within and outside the consortium.

The following are important elements in the selection and development of a junior PI within a consortium:

- A junior researcher in a tenure track, university lecturer (UD) or university senior lecturer (UHD) is involved, demonstrating that the institution where this person works has expressed its confidence in the junior PI concerned by means of (the prospect of) a permanent appointment. Recruitment can be broadly approached via the Dutch Heart Foundation, DCVA and Young@Heart, among others.
- Current senior PIs are honest about who has potential and identify these people in a timely manner. This involves looking ahead over a period of ~five years and estimating whether a junior PI can develop into a senior PI.
- The junior PIs see added value in participating in a consortium. In addition, they should be able to demonstrate their ability to gain insight into the consortium by, for example, playing a proactive role in preparing reports, submitting applications that strengthen the consortium's research, and taking part in (inter)national working groups such as the Dutch Society of Cardiology (NVVC), European Society of Cardiology (ESC), and International Society for Heart Research (ISHR).
- A master-apprentice principle can also be considered for developing the junior PIs, where they are assigned more and more tasks and responsibilities, for example by giving (international) presentations or taking part in committees.

## Role and profile description for the talent coordinator

Below you will find a draft role and profile description for the talent coordinator. Tasks, profiles and focus points differ from one consortium to another. It is therefore important to adjust the profile according to the talent development goals and focus points within the consortium and the professional field.

### Role description

- Be the lead and point of contact for the talent programme: responsible for the proper set-up, implementation and evaluation of the talent programme.
- Involve the talents in the design of the talent programme; assign parts of the organisation to the talents and guide them in this.
- Manage the talent budget: financial processing, overview and reporting.
- Communicate within and outside the consortium regarding the talent programme.
- Establish an (independent) assessment process with regard to any (open) calls for talents.
- Maintain contact with other talent coordinators; once every six months or so, talent coordinators from Dutch Heart Foundation-funded consortia and other DCVA consortia meet to exchange ideas and inform each other of talent activities. This is organised by the DCVA Talent Pillar.

## Profile description

- Pays attention to the career prospects and future of talents within the cardiovascular field in general and the consortium in particular.
- Demonstrates affinity with or experience of (encouraging) talent development in the cardiovascular field; preferably has knowledge of existing talent development initiatives.
- Has a proactive, committed and open attitude towards the talent programme and the talents.
- Is a connector with excellent communication skills who encourages collaboration.
- Able to produce creative and innovative ideas and to take the talents with them.
- Persuasiveness: can stimulate participation in the talent programme and broaden the perspective of talents.

## Talent Development Plan

When a consortium is formed, we expect a talent development plan with a concrete outline of how the talent budget will be spent in the first year. The plans for the continuation of the talent programme can be further elaborated after the consortium has been established. In the first progress report (after 13 months), a final plan should have been drawn up together with the talents within the consortium. This way, there is still enough time to make the best use of the talent budget within the set time frame, in consultation with the talents and the relevant research manager at the Dutch Heart Foundation. Answering the following questions will help to create the content, form and timeline of a talent programme:

<b>Contents</b>	What is the ambition and strategy, and why? What are the goals of the talent activities? What are the expected benefits of the talent programme and what is required to achieve them? How do the expected benefits of the talent programme fit in with the goals of the consortium?het consortium?
<b>Form</b>	What kind of talent activities are involved? Which target groups are the talent activities intended for and how are those target groups reached? Who is involved in (the implementation of) the talent programme? How is participation of the talents organised?
<b>Timeline</b>	When is it expected that the talent programme can be further developed? When are benefits from the talent programme expected? When (e.g. in which phase of the research project) can the expected benefits from the talent programme be deployed within the consortium?

## Independent Evaluation Committee

It is important for the consortium to ensure an objective assessment when spending the talent budget. Therefore, we recommend the timely appointment of an independent evaluation committee, for example with international experts or experts from other DCVA consortia. An independent evaluation committee can also provide support if no agreement is reached on how the talent budget will be spent.

## Make an inventory of existing talent activities

First make an inventory (possibly via existing networks such as Young@Heart) of what is already offered (in terms of resources and programmes) in your research institutes, so that you can offer customised solutions within your consortium using the resources from the consortium, and avoid duplication of work. We recommend including the inventory of existing talent activities in the talent development plan to increase its visibility.

## Monitor/evaluate the talent programme

Write an annual evaluation report with input from the talents to properly monitor the process and personal development of the (external) talents and to adjust the talent programme where necessary. The evaluation reports form part of the consortium's progress reports, mid-term and end-term reports.

# What makes a talent programme successful?

A successful talent programme brings out the best in people and the consortium. It is important to be open to new ideas from your own consortium and from (external) talents. In addition to stimulating substantive deepening (knowledge and 'hard skills'), the following aspects contribute to the realisation of a successful talent programme.

## Information Provision

<b>What?</b>	Ensure clear communication within (and outside) the consortium regarding the talent programme and specific activities.
<b>Why?</b>	To make the best use of the talent programme, the talents are well-informed about the possibilities it offers.
<b>How?</b>	Inform the target group structurally, for example during consortium meetings, through a newsletter and by attending joint talent coordinator meetings (organised by the DCVA Talent Pillar). External communication can also take place via the websites and social media pages of the consortium, DCVA or Dutch Heart Foundation.

## Participation of Talents

<b>What?</b>	Guarantee the participation of the talents themselves: involve them in the design and implementation of the talent programme.
<b>Why?</b>	No two talent programmes should be the same. It is important to give talents the opportunities they need.
<b>How?</b>	For example, have the PIs set up the talent programme, give talents the responsibility for organising summer schools and/or symposiums, or organise peer review sessions to discuss the talent programme so that any questions or concerns are identified.

## Independence & Recognition

<b>What?</b>	Make sure the talents can take their own ideas further and get recognition for their work.
<b>Why?</b>	To develop and build their profile as independent researchers, the talents should be given the opportunity to produce their own ('out-of-the-box') ideas and to realise these. This also stimulates creativity and innovation. In addition, many researchers indicate that winning a prize or a scholarship has moved them forward in their career. It is 'proof' of their talent.
<b>How?</b>	For example, consider awarding talent grants or vouchers, or allowing talents to gain experience in writing an (international) application.



## Team Spirit & Networking Opportunities

<b>What?</b>	Stimulate team spirit within the consortium and enlarge the network of talents.
<b>Why?</b>	By meeting each other, researchers get to know the field and learn to exchange insights. Forming a close-knit group promotes cooperation and is more effective in the long run. The expansion of the researchers' network forms a basis for the future.
<b>How?</b>	For example, organise meetings, summer schools and/or symposia, conference visits, mentoring programmes or fellowships that give people the opportunity to visit another research institution or work environment (abroad). Also create informal events where ideas can be exchanged in an accessible way.

## Interdisciplinarity

<b>What?</b>	Encourage interdisciplinary cooperation by collaborating with other consortia or research groups.
<b>Why?</b>	The focus should not only be on the talent of one individual, but also on the talents of others. Researchers can learn a lot from each other by working together. New collaborations can add other expertise to the consortium.
<b>How?</b>	Consider DCVA-transcending activities or themes, such as offering a joint scholarship, stimulating the exchange of talent between consortia, or offering the opportunity for a (short) internship within another research group; for example, a group with expertise in recruiting research participants or considering gender differences and multi-ethnicity in research.

## Career Prospects & Personal Development

<b>What?</b>	Offer opportunities for talents to broaden their career prospects and to develop relevant soft skills or organisational qualities.
<b>Why?</b>	Knowledge from the cardiovascular field is also needed outside academia in order to generate impact. Therefore, talents should also be able to focus on the future (including developing leadership qualities and/or gaining managerial experience) and broaden their horizons.
<b>How?</b>	Consider, for example, ways to start working on the communication or implementation of research results, or the realisation of their value. For example, organise master classes, company and/or (commercial) partner visits, or meetings about patient participation or communication with the wider public.

## Pitfalls

To ensure a successful talent programme, we would like to share the pitfalls that have been identified in the evaluation of existing programmes:

- **Not appointing a committed or independent talent coordinator.** Talents sometimes need a little push to make progress, and an active and committed talent coordinator can play a crucial role in this. We consider it important that the talent coordinator is independent and does not favour their 'own' staff.
- **Using the talent budget to extend the appointment of researcher(s).** The talent budget is an additional development option and not intended as a salary for previously appointed researchers.
- **Only adding value for the individual or the consortium.** Effective talent programmes are of value to both the individual and the consortium, ensuring a common interest. For example, allow the development of individual competences to coincide with challenges for the consortium
- **Not opening any part of the talent programme to talents from outside the consortium.** It is not the intention that only the protégés of research leaders participate in the talent programme. The talent programme should preferably also attract external talents and offer them an opportunity for development, which can enrich a consortium. It is therefore important for the consortium to orient itself nationally to be able to select talent from outside its own institution as well.
- **Setting up a programme that is too fixed and leaves no room for the talents' own input.**
- **Not keeping track of the talents or remaining in close contact with them.** Make sure there is a strong connection between the talents and the consortium. The direct supervisor and the talent coordinator play an important role in this. It is helpful to regularly discuss expectations regarding talent development and career planning.

We would also like to mention that the Dutch Heart Foundation does not agree to using the talent budget to pay for participation in the annual cardiovascular courses in Papendal. The Dutch Heart Foundation already contributes financially to the courses. It is therefore intended that the participation of talents in the courses should be funded from the training budget of their own research institutes.

# Closing remarks

This document was developed through discussions with various stakeholders in the field of talent development (including talent coordinators, research leaders and talents, and staff of the Dutch Heart Foundation). These discussions led to a better definition of talent development, with the aim of aligning expectations more closely, promoting cooperation and jointly identifying appropriate ways to facilitate and stimulate talent development within consortia.

Above all, it is important to maintain the pleasure and enthusiasm of talented researchers in cardiovascular research. The talent programme offers many opportunities for this: make use of them! Furthermore, a well-thought-out talent programme can be more than a positive development for the talents; it can also be used to strengthen a consortium.

## Other tips:

- **Be innovative.** Innovation and creativity are always appreciated.
- **Connect with Young@Heart.** Young@Heart is a community for (young) researchers in the cardiovascular field that organises events and offers networking opportunities. In addition, Young@Heart enjoys working with the cardiovascular consortia, so be sure to contact them to make use of their extensive network and initiatives.
- **Increase the visibility of the talent programme.** For example, use your own website, the channels of the [Dutch Heart Foundation](#), (partners of) the [DCVA](#) and [Young@Heart](#).

**Finally**, when recognising talent, we not only look at research performance. Aspects such as leadership, realised impact, education and patient care also play an important role. For this we would like to refer to the position paper of VSNU, NFU, KNAW, NWO and ZonMw '[Room for everyone's talent: towards a new balance in the recognition and rewards for academics](#)'.

Any questions? Please contact the relevant research manager or email: [research@hartstichting.nl](mailto:research@hartstichting.nl)