



# The Way to the STARS

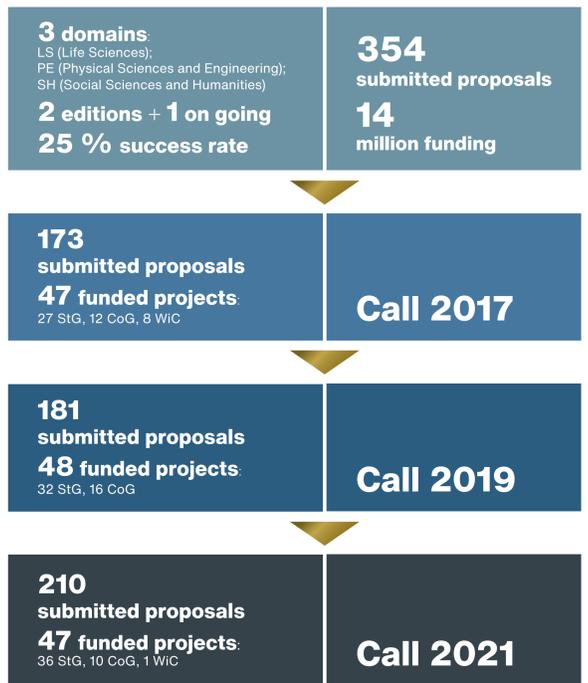
At the University of Padua, pursuing excellence and talent in research is a strategic priority that translates into specific policies and actions.

Why the STARS@Unipd Programme experience is worth sharing.

One of the **main strategic priorities** for research at the University of Padua (Unipd) consists in **pursuing excellent and innovative research** to be performed on its premises by high potential researchers in the widest range of scientific domains. The programme called Talent in Research, launched in 2017, supports talented promising researchers, enhances human capital and encourages transnational mobility, which it values as a prerequisite for career development. **Talent in Research** comprises several initiatives

aimed at increasing the participation of young researchers in **competitive calls** for proposals, as well as **attracting researchers from abroad**. It offers financial support to the most deserving projects, evaluated by internationally renowned experts. One of the most innovative actions is the Supporting Talent in Research at the University of Padua – **STARS@UNIPD Programme**, which runs every two years since 2017 and has reached its **third edition** in 2021. Each edition is funded with **7 million euros**.

210 submitted proposals  
47 funded projects: 36 StG, 10 CoG, 1 WIC



## Main objectives

The aims of the action are to **reward excellence and to foster a high-level, open, transparent and merit-based competition**, as well as to promote the increasingly broad participation of researchers in international competitive **calls for proposals**, such as the ones promoted by the European Research Council. The **STARS** call positively pushes candidates to **pursue** and train for **excellence** overall, to familiarize with and practice a competitive and complex evaluation process. **STARS** grants **added value results** in an increasing community of promising researchers working at more Departments, creating a critical mass that allows for **continuous improvement** in terms of:

- **research results** and impact
- higher standards in administrative/organizational procedures and processes for **research support** and management
- active policy making
- **exchange of good practices**

## Methodology

In order to train researchers for competitive international applications, the evaluation process and criteria of the **STARS@UNIPD calls** are similar to those of the ERC. The application forms themselves, even if slightly simplified, **match the templates of the ERC**. Moreover, the Evaluation Committee is composed by external experts of **recognized international prestige**, selected among panel members of the competitive European projects funded by the ERC, who will be assigned to three sub-committees matching the three ERC Domains. **Scientific excellence is the sole criterion of evaluation**. The selection process is organized in two steps and a final interview. Assessment concerns the ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility of the project as well as the Principal Investigator's (PI) scientific skill, creativity, and commitment.

The **STARS programme is a valuable training ground** for researchers, who are challenged in the creation of project ideas; in presenting/defending their goals, methodology, budget; in preparing convincing application forms. The action allows PIs to establish an independent and credible scientific profile. The STARS programme has become a **benchmark example for other Italian universities**, which have followed the Unipd experience and have developed similar funding schemes.

“ Pursuing excellence in research in the widest range of scientific domains and fostering the highest participation of researchers in international competitive calls are strategic priorities for the University of Padua. STARS grants turn our strategy into action!

**Marcella Bonchio**  
Unipd Vice-Rector for Research 2015-2021

“ Within the STARS project I supervised a multidisciplinary research team and, by improving my research approach, tools and methodology, I have become a competitive PI. The STARS experience definitely helped me towards my ERC.

**Zuleika Murat**  
2017 STARS StG Grantee  
2020 ERC StG Grantee

**International profile**  
**Independent thinking**  
**Challenging Well-established**  
**Ambitious Dreams**  
**Excellence High risk**  
**High gain Bottom-up**  
**Ground-breaking idea**  
**Scientific Recognition**

## How to reach for the STARS

