



French President Emmanuel Macron (right) with his US counterpart, Donald Trump.

FUNDING

Climate scientists flock to France's call

President said 'Make Our Planet Great Again' — and researchers signed up.

Hundreds of climate scientists, including many from the United States, have applied to work in France under a €60-million (US\$69-million) scheme set up by the country's president, Emmanuel Macron, after his US counterpart Donald Trump rejected the Paris accord on global warming. And Germany has announced that it will set up a similar programme to lure researchers.

Macron launched his 'Make Our Planet Great Again' initiative on 8 June, seeking to entice foreign scientists to France with offers of 4-year grants worth up to €1.5 million. Six weeks on, the programme has been flooded with applicants. Many were seeking short sabbaticals, but the 154 who applied to stay

for 4 years or more are of the most interest, says Anne Peyroche, a biologist and the chief research officer of the CNRS, France's national basic-research agency. The scheme will short-list around 80 scientists by mid-September, with 50 or so winners to be announced around the end of November.

VISIONARIES WANTED

One applicant is Ashley Ballantyne, a bioclimatologist at the University of Montana in Missoula. His proposal involves laying the foundation for a global integrated carbon-observing network, combining satellite and atmospheric data to seek insights into how ecosystems respond to climate change.

"There are very few funding opportunities in the United States that promote research on carbon-climate interactions at the global scale, so the fact this programme was looking for visionary thinking was appealing," he says.

The French offer is a "very attractive proposition for many scientists in the US", says Kim Cobb, a palaeoclimatologist at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta. US climate science is under pressure, she adds: researchers are waiting to hear whether Congress will approve Trump's proposed drastic cuts to the field. Cobb says that, were she not a tenured scientist working in an exceptional research environment, she would be "jumping at the opportunity" to work in France.

GERMAN BACKING

Officials in Germany announced on 13 July that they will establish a scheme to operate alongside the French programme. The German fund will comprise €15 million of government money, matched by a sum from the country's participating research organizations. Details of the programme are not yet finalized, but Germany's research ministry has created a website (go.nature.com/2vxxgme) where interested researchers can sign up. Peyroche says the German fund will target younger or more-junior scientists than its French counterpart.

Climate scientists in France support Macron's political stance on the Paris agreement. But a vocal minority of researchers argues that the scheme is largely a public-relations exercise to boost France's image abroad while research funds at home are scarce. The French government last week proposed trimming the 2017 budget for research and higher education by €331 million, as part of more than €3 billion of cuts in public spending to pay for new initiatives without increasing the national deficit.

"These numbers should make any foreign scientist wonder about the generous invitation of President Macron to relocate to France," says Patrick Lemaire, a biologist at the University of Montpellier and founder of the researcher-led campaign group Sciences en Marche. But Sacha Wunsch-Vincent, an economist at the World Intellectual Property Organization in Geneva, Switzerland, says that Macron's prominent overtures to foreign scientists and entrepreneurs are helping to promote France as a good place to do research and innovation. "There is a seismic shift in the branding of France," he says. ■



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