Q&A on the 2nd Call for the Helmholtz Water Safety and Security Initiative

14 May, 2025 (online)

Agenda

Agenda WSSC Online Roadshow Event on May 14, 2025

Time	Topic	Speakers
10.00 – 10.30	Q&A 2nd Call for Theme Proposals	Water Campaign Team
10.30 – 11.00	SOLVE – Securing Terrestrial Water Cycles: the Helmholtz SOlution Lab Elbe RiVEer Basin	SOLVE Team
11.00 – 11.30	SLRE – Solution Lab Rur Erft	SLRE Team
11.30 – 12.00	URBAN LE – A Helmholtz Solution Lab. Systemic blue-green-red urban development	URBAN LE Team

Procedure: Each Solution Lab team will have 15 minutes to present their Lab, followed by 15 minutes for questions.

Goals

- **Ensuring water safety and security** by tackling major water-related challenges like droughts, floods, and unpredictable water availability.

- **Promoting interdisciplinary research** by pooling expertise and infrastructure across the entire Helmholtz Association.

- **Fostering application-oriented innovation** through early stakeholder integration and a "transfer by design" approach.

Structure

1. SOLUTION LAB PROPOSALS
(1st Call)

- Establishment of three physical Solution Labs serving as hubs for the thematic projects:

Solution Labs: SOLVE (Elbe) | SLRE (Rur Erft) | URBAN LE (Leipzig)

- The introductory presentations of the three Solution Labs, including the contact details of the main persons of contact, can be found on our website:
Helmholtz Water Safety and Security Initiative - Helmholtz - Association of German Research Centres

2. Theme Proposals
(2nd Call)

- Selection of three theme projects (each consisting of up to six sub-projects) for implementation at one of the previously selected Solution Labs

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Funding

- Total Budget: €9 Million from the Helmholtz Initiative and Networking Fund (IVF)

  ➢ Plus at least 25 % Co-Funding by Helmholtz Centers per proposal

  ➢ Each Solution Lab is allocated €100,000 p.a. for a coordination position

  ➢ The remaining funding budget of approximately €8.1 million will be allocated among the theme projects by an international expert panel

- Funding duration: 3 years within the period 2026 – 2028

- Eligible costs include personnel costs, materials and investments

Dates and Deadlines

Dates and Deadlines	
12/2024	Publication of 1st call for applications (Lab-Proposals)
31/03/2025	Lab proposal selection meeting (1-day meeting)
04/2025	Publication of Solution Lab sites
04/2025	Publication of 2nd call for applications (Theme-Proposals)
14/05/2025	Online Roadshow Solution Labs + Q&A
15/07/2025	**Submission deadline for theme proposals**
7/10/2025	Theme proposal selection meeting (9.00am - 6.00pm)
01/2026 – 12/2028	Funding period

Theme Proposals (2nd Call)

Overview of the 2nd Call
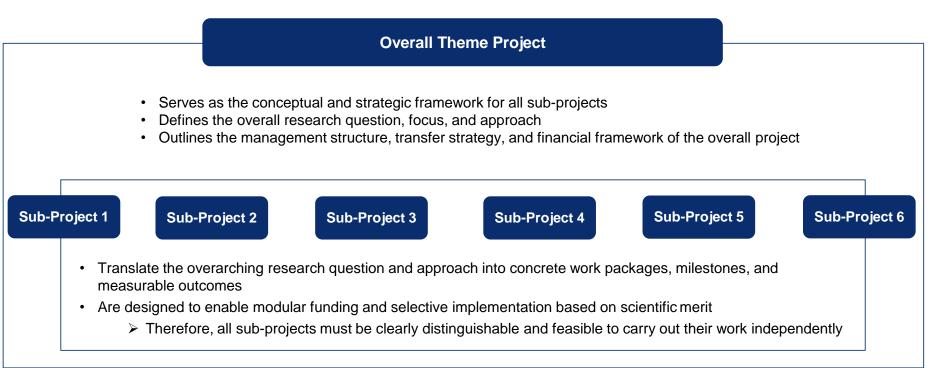
Key criteria

- **Thematic fit:** Terrestrial Water Cycles, Urban Water Systems, or Water Quality

- **Consortium:** Min. 3 Helmholtz Centers, min. 2 research fields

- **Solution Lab link**: Strong integration with one of the three Solution Labs

- **Transfer by design/co-creation**: Stakeholder integration

- **Clear milestones**

Evaluation

- An international panel of experts will review the proposals and allocate the funding among the theme projects (maximum of €6 million per project)

2. Theme Proposals (2nd Call) – Call structure

Overall Theme Project

- Serves as the conceptual and strategic framework for all sub-projects
- Defines the overall research question, focus, and approach
- Outlines the management structure, transfer strategy, and financial framework of the overall project

| Sub-Project 1 | Sub-Project 2 | Sub-Project 3 | Sub-Project 4 | Sub-Project 5 | Sub-Project 6 |

- Translate the overarching research question and approach into concrete work packages, milestones, and measurable outcomes
- Are designed to enable modular funding and selective implementation based on scientific merit
  - ➤ Therefore, all sub-projects must be clearly distinguishable and feasible to carry out their work independently

Guidance for Applicants

- The pre-formulated questions in the templates are guidelines only. You are not required to answer all of them - they are meant to serve as orientation and support the structuring of your proposal.

- Please adhere to the page limits of the templates:

  - Overall theme project template: max. 15 pages (excl. cover, content and annex)

  - Sub-project template: max. 7 pages (excl. cover and content)

Theme Proposals (2ⁿᵈ Call)
FAQ – Frequently Asked Questions

3. FAQ – Theme Proposal

How can the sub-projects be modular and still fit into one overall project?

- Sub-projects should be modular, meaning they should be designed with a high degree of autonomy. This fosters competition and ensures that scientific quality remains the central focus. At the same time, each sub-project should remain aligned with the overall theme project and contribute to the central research question.

Is there a minimum number of participating Helmholtz Centers required for the sub-projects?

- No. While the overall theme projects must involve at least three Helmholtz Centers and at least two different research fields, this requirement does not apply to the individual sub-projects.

Who can be funded?

- Only Helmholtz Centers; in justified cases of indispensable expertise, a qualified university partner (within Germany) can be funded.

Can industry or research institutions be funded with the INF budget?

- No, the INF budget can only be used to fund the centers (and their university partners).

- However, the centers' 25% match can come from various funding sources, including support from external partners, e.g. universities.

Are overhead costs eligible for funding?

- No, overhead costs are not funded by the Initiative and Networking Fund nor eligible as matching contributions.

Do all participating centers receive their funding directly from Helmholtz?

- No, only the lead center will receive the funds and will then distribute the funds to the partners.

Is the 33% funding limit for the coordinating Helmholtz Center flexible?

- It is a requirement for the submission of applications that no more than 33% of the total funds per Solutions Lab may be allocated to the coordinating Helmholtz Centre. This decision was made in order to strengthen cross-center collaboration and to promote healthy competition. Additionally, the €100,000 allocated for the coordinating position is on top of the project budget and does not count towards the 33% cap.

Theme proposals can request up to €6 million in funding – how is this possible when the total campaign budget is only €9 million?

- The call is intentionally oversubscribed to ensure scientific excellence through competition.

- An international review panel selects the most promising projects for funding.

  - To enable selective funding, theme proposals are divided into up to six independently viable sub-projects.

  - Depending on the panel's assessment, some sub-projects may not be funded in order to ensure an effective allocation of the campaign budget.

A 25% match is required from the funded institutions. What does this mean?

- The project partners must provide matching finances of at least 25% of the Initiative and Networking Fund.

- This means €1 million in funding + €250k in own contribution = €1250k total budget.

- Matching contributions between the partners may vary and may be allocated differently over the course of the financial years.

- Matching contributions can be provided in the form of direct costs from own funds (e.g. personnel, material, or investments) or in-kind contributions (e.g. personnel or infrastructure use).

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3. FAQ – Submission of Proposals

How to submit a proposal?

- Proposals must be submitted by July 15, 2025 (11:59 pm) via the ProMeta platform: https://ivf.helmholtz.de/

- Proposals must be uploaded in two copies:

  1. A consolidated PDF file containing the template for the overall theme project (incl. annex) and all templates for the sub-projects

  2. Each sub-project template as an individual file

- We will also provide a process guide for submissions via ProMeta