

Funding of first-time professorial appointments of highly talented female scientists (W2/W3) – May 15, 2025

Annex 7: Frequently Asked Questions

I am interested in the call for applications. Can I apply directly?

A potential candidate cannot apply directly to the Helmholtz Association, but must contact a Helmholtz Center that fits her field of study. The Board of Directors of the Helmholtz Center in question will decide which candidate to nominate. Only the Helmholtz Center Boards of Directors are authorized to submit applications.

Is the call for applications linked to certain chairs (that become vacant), disciplines, or denominations?

No. The call for applications is not dependent on any subject or discipline. However, relevance to the Helmholtz research programs and the focus of a given Center will be an essential part of the decision by that Center to nominate a given candidate. The precise alignment of the appointment to the structural development plans of the appointing partner universities is a question to be resolved between the nominating Helmholtz Center and the partner university.

Why are only permanent professorships funded?

The program aims to permanently increase the proportion of women in scientific management positions at Helmholtz and to create reliable career prospects. This can only be achieved through permanent positions.

What does “first-time professorial appointment” mean?

“First-time professorial appointment” within the meaning of this funding program refers to female scientists who will be appointed to a permanent professorship at a German university for the first time in their career.

Does an appointment to a professorship from abroad count as a first-time appointment?

Candidates who already hold or have held professorships at foreign institutions are eligible for funding as long as they have never held a W2/C3 or W3/C4 professorship in Germany.

A candidate holds a temporary W2 professorship. Is she eligible for funding within the scope of this program?

Candidates who hold or have held a W2 professorship can be funded as part of this program as long as the appointment to this professorship did not involve a Helmholtz Center. The program’s aim is the joint recruitment of scientists to professorships by a Helmholtz Center and a partner university, but not to change the types of professorships scientists hold within the Helmholtz Association.

A candidate holds a temporary W2 professorship outside of Helmholtz and is to be recruited to a permanent W2 position as part of a joint appointment involving a Helmholtz Center. Is she eligible?

This case is not ruled out in principle. However, the program’s focus is more on the funding of clear career steps. Whether such a case will be funded is at the discretion of the reviewers.

Why does the program fund the appointment to W3 professorships when the title indicates that it is intended to support first-time appointments?

The German federal states differ in the salary grades they typically assign to initial permanent professorships. That is why an initial appointment at the W3 level can also be funded.

Under what conditions can candidates be funded who are already working at a Helmholtz Center?

Internal candidates can be nominated for funding if they have not yet held W2 or W3 professorships in Germany and this first professorship career step is to be supported. Typically, such candidates are already Helmholtz Young Investigators group leaders or junior professors.

What is considered relevant and required research experience at foreign institutions in order to be eligible for internal candidate funding?

That is at the discretion of the review panel. The time spent abroad is one factor. As a rule, the duration should be at least six uninterrupted months, preferably several years.

A candidate from abroad is to be appointed to a W3 position at a Helmholtz Center. How should she decide whether it is best to apply for the “first-time professorial appointment” program or the “Helmholtz Distinguished Professorship – Funding for the recruitment of leading international female scientists” program? Can a candidate apply for both programs at the same time?

The two programs differ in terms of the seniority of their target groups. The program “Helmholtz Distinguished Professorship” sets very high standards of experience and performance for the scientists to be recruited, while the “first-time appointment” program is aimed at scientists at earlier stages of their careers whose performance has been outstanding in relation to the current stage of their career.

Nominations for both programs are not out of the question. However, candidates should be aware that a joint panel will consider the applications for both programs. If a candidate is nominated for both programs at the same time, this circumstance will be immediately obvious and indicate that the Helmholtz Center is not sure which career phase the candidate is in. It would be advisable to provide an explanation for this approach if such a parallel nomination is pursued.

What should be done if the partner university wants to or has to make a public call for applications for the professorship in question?

The partner university has to provide information about the design of the appointment procedure in its statement. If there are no prospects for a person-specific procedure, the reasons should be explained to avoid giving the impression that the partner university is not entirely convinced that the candidate is suitable.

Can a Helmholtz Center nominate as many candidates as it wants?

In principle, yes. However, many applications give the impression that the Center has not been particularly selective in its decision to nominate. This approach also increases the probability that a pre-selection will be made based on written peer reviews and that not all nominated candidates will be able to present before the panel of experts.

Who evaluates the applications?

Several written peer reviews relevant to the candidate's field of study will be obtained for each application. The final step in the selection process involves an interdisciplinary, independent panel of external reviewers, who will decide on the funding recommendation.

To what extent is it possible to involve cooperation partners from abroad, and can the costs for doing so be covered by the funding?

The Joint Initiative for Research and Innovation only finances project components that are located in Germany. Costs that can be covered by funding include travel expenses incurred during necessary visits to foreign partner institutions. However, foreign institutions cannot receive funding from resources of the Joint Initiative for Research and Innovation. This means that funding cannot be forwarded to partners abroad. Funding of cooperation projects across borders is according to the principle of mutuality; this means that the project component that is located abroad is to be funded by an institution or funding organization in the relevant country. The partner university with which the appointment is planned has to be in Germany.

Are there formal requirements or a sample structure for the application?

Yes. There is an application template whose structure and scope must be adhered to. Applications deviating from this structure will not be considered in the selection process.