

## CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

September 09, 2025

### HELMHOLTZ DOCTORAL AWARD 2026

funded by the Initiative and Networking Fund of the  
President of the Helmholtz Association

## Objective of the Funding

With their scientific work, doctoral researchers at Helmholtz make valuable contributions to solving pressing societal challenges. The Helmholtz Association's goal is to inspire talented young researchers to pursue research at an early stage and to support them in developing and advancing scientific excellence.

To this end, the Helmholtz Association grants the Doctoral Award. It recognizes outstanding scientific achievements and provides incentives to continue applying the knowledge and skills acquired during the doctoral program.

The Helmholtz Doctoral Award encourages doctoral researchers to pursue a scientific career and conduct mission-oriented research. It also offers them the opportunity to position themselves at the interface between science and application, develop entrepreneurial skills, and actively contribute to transferring research results to society early in their careers.

The President of the Helmholtz Association warmly welcomes and strongly supports the nomination of outstanding young female scientists in order to raise the profile of their research achievements.

In order to give appropriate recognition to both doctoral theses with direct practical relevance and those without explicit practical relevance, the Helmholtz Association grants the **Doctoral Award in two tracks**:

### A) Outstanding knowledge-driven research

### B) Outstanding application-oriented research

Choosing the right track makes it possible to highlight the particular strengths of each piece of work. Six awards are granted in each track, one in each of the six research fields of the Helmholtz Association: Energy; Earth and Environment; Health; Aeronautics, Space, and Transport; Matter; Information. A total of twelve awards are thus granted.

## Application Process

The Centers nominate suitable candidates for the respective research fields and carry out the pre-selection themselves. For each research field in which a Center is active, it can submit a maximum of one nomination per track.

Proposals must be submitted via the Centers' executive boards by **February 13, 2026**, at the latest. Candidates may not apply on their own behalf.

Proposals must be submitted electronically via the ProMeta project management platform of the Impulse and Networking Fund (IVF). The call for proposals is expected to be available there from December 2025.

## Track A

The Track A award recognizes and honors outstanding achievements in **basic scientific research** during the doctoral phase. The aim is to support talented young scientists at an early stage and inspire them to pursue a long-term career in research. The award is intended to provide an **incentive to remain in science** and support them in their scientific career path.

## Application

Candidates for this track must have completed their doctorate at a Helmholtz Center between January 1, 2025, and February 13, 2026 (= submission deadline) with outstanding results. The date of the doctoral defense at the university is considered the date of completion. An award can only be made upon presentation of the doctoral degree certificate or a certificate from the university stating when the defense took place and with what result. At the time of nomination, candidates no longer need to be employed at the Center.

## Scope, duration, and subject of the funding

One award will be granted in Track A in each of the six research fields of the Helmholtz Association.

The successful candidates in Track A will receive a one-time **award of €6,000**, which they can use as they see fit.

## Documents to be Submitted

A) **Cover sheet** with the following information (please use the template):

- 1) Name and contact details (including email and telephone number) of the candidate
- 2) Title of doctoral thesis, grade (if applicable), date of defense, 5-6 keywords
- 3) Helmholtz Center, institute, supervisor
- 4) Assignment to research field and assignment to track

B) Copy of the **doctoral degree certificate** or a certificate from the university (dated no later than February 13, 2026)

C) Informative **curriculum vitae** (including awards, scholarships, stays abroad, presentations/posters at conferences, etc., max. 3 pages)

D) **List of publications** (publications produced during and after the doctoral program)

Please submit A) to D) as a single PDF document.

E) **Letter of recommendation** from the Executive Board and/or supervisor at the Helmholtz Center, containing the following information (max. 2 pages):

- Reasons for selecting the candidate (including the relevance of the research to the mission of the Helmholtz Association)
- Assessment of doctoral performance and other previous achievements
- Assessment of further development and (research) personality

F) **Letter of Motivation** (max. 2 pages) from the nominee, taking into account the following points:

- What can your research achieve?
- Who is your research aimed at?
- Where do you see the added value of your research for society?
- What career steps are you aiming for after completing your doctorate?

## Track B

Doctoral candidates should be encouraged to conduct **mission-oriented research** and thus position themselves at the **interface between science and application**, develop and expand entrepreneurial skills, and help shape the transfer of science into society early in their careers. Track B of the doctoral award aims to provide an incentive for doctoral candidates to examine their doctoral projects for transfer possibilities and to incorporate these into their work, in addition to completed doctoral theses with practical relevance. Ongoing doctoral projects with a corresponding focus may also be nominated.

## Application

Doctoral candidates applying for this track must either

- a) have **completed their doctoral studies** at a Helmholtz Center with outstanding results between January 1, 2025, and February 13, 2026 (= submission deadline), or
- b) are about to complete their doctoral studies.

Case a): The date of the doctoral defense at the university is considered the completion date. An award can only be granted upon presentation of the doctoral certificate or a certificate from the university stating when the defense took place and with what result. At the time of nomination, candidates no longer need to be employed at the Center.

Case b): The expected completion of the doctorate (i.e., submission of the doctoral thesis) should be achieved by February 12, 2027 (i.e., one year after the deadline for nominations for this call). The objective agreed upon in the final work plan with the Thesis Advisory Committee is what counts.

## Scope, Duration, and Subject of the Funding

One award will be granted in each of the six research fields of the Helmholtz Association.

The successful candidates in Track B will receive a one-time **award of €6,000**, which they can use as they see fit.

In addition, the award winners will have the opportunity to participate in a **Helmholtz Field Study Fellowship** as part of the Helmholtz Enterprise Instrument. The three-month fellowship funds a market research phase to better understand customer needs and is accompanied by field study mentoring (see [here](#) for conditions). The fellowship must be officially registered with the Helmholtz Office by December 1, 2026, at the latest, and must be taken up one year after the Doctoral Award contract is signed. In addition, the recipients must be employed at a Helmholtz Center.

## Documents to be Submitted

A) **Cover sheet** with the following information (please use the template):

- 1) Name and contact details (including email and telephone number) of the candidate
- 2) Title of doctoral thesis, grade (if applicable), date of defense (if applicable), 5-6 keywords
- 3) Helmholtz Center, institute, supervisor
- 4) Assignment to research field and assignment to track

B)

Case a): Copy of the **doctoral degree certificate** or a certificate from the university (dated no later than February 13, 2026)

Case b):

- A **work plan** agreed upon with the thesis advisory committee or a comparable structure, which clearly states when the doctoral thesis is scheduled to be submitted.
- **Exposé** (3 pages) on the status of the work and initial results of the doctoral thesis

C) Informative **curriculum vitae** (including awards, scholarships, stays abroad, presentations/posters at conferences, etc., max. 3 pages)

D) **List of publications** (publications produced during and after the doctoral program)

Please submit A) to D) as a single PDF document.

E) **Letter of recommendation** from the Executive Board and/or supervisor at the Helmholtz Center, containing the following information (max. 2 pages):

- Reasons for selecting the candidate (including the relevance of the research to the mission of the Helmholtz Association)
- Assessment of doctoral performance and other previous achievements
- Assessment of further development and (research) personality

F) **Statement** by the transfer office on the application potential of (previous) research on the following points:

- Brief general assessment by the transfer office of the applicability or potential for application of the research results or research project in its current form (max. ½ page)
- What has been achieved so far with regard to a possible transfer between research and application (e.g., involvement of non-scientific stakeholders, current TRL – Technology Readiness Level, if applicable)? (max. ½ page)

G) **Letter of Motivation** (max. 2 pages) from the nominee, taking into account the following points:

- What can your research achieve?
- Who is your research aimed at? Who specifically could be the users or customers for the application of your findings?
- Where do you see added value from your research for the economy or society? What specific problems of potential users or customers can/could be solved with the results of your research?
- Optional: What questions do you have for potential customers that you would like to answer as part of the Field Study Fellowship?

## Decision-making Process

The winners are selected by the management boards of the Helmholtz Association's research fields in consultation with the president. There are no plans for the candidates to give a personal presentation.

## Application Deadline and Schedule

<b>13.02.2026</b>	Deadline for submitting nominations from Helmholtz Centers to the Helmholtz Office via ProMeta
<b>18.03.2026</b>	Deadline for forwarding formally eligible nominations to the management boards of the Helmholtz Association
<b>13.05.2026</b>	Notification from the management boards to the administrative office regarding the selected award winners
Subsequently: Decision by the President of the Helmholtz Association	
<b>07.07.2026</b>	Granting of the Helmholtz Doctoral Award by the President of the Helmholtz Association in Berlin

## Contact Persons

General questions about the call for proposals:

- Anna Tschaut: [anna.tschaut@helmholtz.de](mailto:anna.tschaut@helmholtz.de), Tel.: +49 30 206 329-18

Questions concerning submission via ProMeta:

- Henri Marschall: [henri.marschall@helmholtz.de](mailto:henri.marschall@helmholtz.de), Tel.: +49 30 206 329-224

Questions about the Field Study Fellowship (Track B):

- Julian Alexandrakis: [julian.alexandrakis@helmholtz.de](mailto:julian.alexandrakis@helmholtz.de), Tel.: +49 30 206 329-77

## Appendix

- FAQs about the Helmholtz Doctoral Award
- Cover page template