

FAQ on the Helmholtz Doctoral Award 2026 Call for Applications

Before applying and submitting

How does the selection of candidates at the Helmholtz Center work? Can individuals with doctoral degrees/doctoral candidates apply on their own initiative?

The selection of suitable candidates is generally the responsibility of the respective Helmholtz Center. While doctoral graduates/doctoral candidates cannot apply directly to the Helmholtz head office, the Centers are free to allow self-nominations in their selection process. Interested doctoral graduates/doctoral candidates should contact their doctoral supervisors or the contact persons for the Helmholtz Doctoral Award at their Helmholtz Center.

Is it necessary for candidates to still be employed at the Helmholtz Center at the time of nomination? And what is meant by “doctorate at the Helmholtz Center”?

No, employment at the time of submission is not a prerequisite for nomination. However, nominees must have been employed at the Helmholtz Center during their doctoral studies. The type of employment or form of funding for the doctoral studies is not relevant.

It is also not a prerequisite that the doctoral thesis took place exclusively at the Helmholtz Center for the entire duration. However, a purely guest role at the Helmholtz Center for a limited period of time would not be considered a “doctorate at the Helmholtz Center.”

Track B

How should the phrase “doctoral candidates [...] b) are about to complete their doctoral studies” be understood?

This means that the doctorate does not have to be completed yet, but the doctoral thesis must be submitted within one year of the nomination deadline. The decisive factor here is the latest work plan discussed with the Thesis Advisory Committee.

Example: The deadline for submitting the application is February 13, 2026. The work plan states that the doctoral thesis is to be submitted by January 31, 2027. The application requirements are therefore met.

What if no Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) has been established?

The Helmholtz doctoral guidelines stipulate that doctoral candidates should be supported by a doctoral committee, including through annual meetings at which the doctoral candidate's work plan is discussed. A comparable structure may also support the doctoral program. If no comparable committee exists or if there is no written work plan agreed with the TAC from which the requested date can be derived, the supervisor may also confirm the planned submission date in writing.

What should be submitted to the transfer office for assessment if the doctorate has not yet been completed?

The transfer office receives the exposé to be submitted for nomination from candidates who have not yet completed their doctorate. Furthermore, it is up to the candidates (whether they have completed their doctorate or not) to decide what (additional) information to provide to the transfer office in order to assess the application potential of the research carried out in the doctorate or the research project.

How are the research fields and tracks assigned?

The Helmholtz Center is responsible for assigning a doctoral thesis to a research field and one of the tracks. If you are unsure about the assignment, we recommend that you contact the relevant management board and clarify the assignment before submitting your thesis. The head office will not reassign theses to different research fields or tracks once nominated.

How does submission via ProMeta work?

The submission is carried out by a person designated by the Helmholtz Center, usually the contact person for the Helmholtz Doctoral Award at the centers. At ivf.helmholtz.de, an account can be created for this center employee via self-registration in order to submit the application forms. After logging in with the username assigned by the platform and the password you have created, you will be taken to the overview page with the current calls for applications, where you can enter the master data and upload the documents by clicking on the "Submit application" button.

Please enter the name of the nominated person under "Acronym".

A financial plan must also be provided when entering the information. The prize money can be entered at this point.

After selection

Who announces the selection of the award winners?

After receiving feedback from the management boards of the research areas on the award winners and subsequent approval by the President of the Helmholtz Association, the head office communicates the result to the centers and all nominees

How is the prize money paid out?

Once the award winners have been selected and the selection announced, a contract is drawn up between the nominating Helmholtz Center and the Helmholtz Association. Once this has been signed by all parties, the Helmholtz Center can request the prize money from the Helmholtz Association and forward it to the award winner after payment. This process usually takes six to eight weeks.

The payment terms are determined by the Helmholtz Center. It should be noted that prize money is generally taxable. The Helmholtz head office does not provide advice on this matter. It is the responsibility of the award winners to obtain information elsewhere (e.g., tax advisor, tax office).

How can the prize money be used?

The winners are free to use the prize money as they wish. There are no restrictions on how it must be used.

Track B

What exactly does the additional funding option offered by the Field Study Fellowship entail?

The Field Study Fellowship enables Track B award winners to conduct market research using an additional funding budget (up to €23,000 over three months) in order to better understand customer needs through interviews and market research. The budget is to be used exclusively for personnel and material costs related to market research. Funding can be provided for one to a maximum of two people, with the time commitment varying from a minimum of 50% part-time to 100% full-time. Only one person can be funded on a full-time basis.

In addition, the program includes mentoring focused on market research, which can also be taken advantage of.

During what period can the Field Study Fellowship be taken up?

The fellowship must be registered with the Helmholtz Office by December 1, 2026, at the latest. The fellowship must commence within one year of the contract being signed.

Can the Field Study Fellowship also be used if the award winner is no longer employed at a Helmholtz Association center but at another scientific institution in Germany or abroad?

No. The Field Study Fellowship funding and mentoring can only be taken up if you are employed by the Helmholtz Center that submitted the doctoral award application for the entire duration of the funding period.

How can the Field Study Fellowship be applied for and how should it be reported on?

The Helmholtz Administrative Office must be notified of the recipient's intention to accept the fellowship by December 1, 2026, at the latest. Please contact the [contact person](#) in the Transfer & Innovation department to arrange the start date of the fellowship.

The award winner shall submit a rough cost plan for the use of the personnel and material resources required for market research, in consultation with the Helmholtz Center. A separate application form is available on request from the Helmholtz Headquarters (Transfer & Innovation). On this basis, a grant agreement will be concluded between the Helmholtz Office and the Helmholtz Center.

After completion of the fellowship, proof of use must be provided through a final report and an explainer video.

What personnel and material costs can be financed through the Field Study Fellowship?

Personnel costs: These are based on the pay scale classification of the persons involved. Personnel costs should be calculated based on the current TVöD (collective agreement for civil servants) pay scale rates. All ancillary personnel costs are included in the cost estimates. Any additional costs (e.g., overhead costs, non-personnel-specific costs) are not eligible for funding. To calculate personnel costs, please contact the responsible third-party funding or human resources department (e.g., Grant Office) at your center.

Material costs: All material and travel costs necessary for conducting the market research are eligible for funding. Overhead costs are not eligible for funding.