

Helmholtz Enterprise

Support for founders at the Helmholtz Centers

Call for proposals for funding from the Initiative and Networking Fund

Helmholtz-Association | 13.07.2026

Call for project proposals for „Helmholtz Enterprise“

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1. Objective of the funding instrument

The "Helmholtz Enterprise" spin-off program is part of the Helmholtz Association's Initiative and Networking Fund (*Impuls- und Vernetzungsfonds*) and supports the establishment of spin-off companies from Helmholtz Centers. With "Helmholtz Enterprise" we strengthen the transfer culture and promote entrepreneurship among employees of the Helmholtz Association.

Helmholtz Enterprise consists of two independent modules, which can be applied for independently of each other. The **Field Study Fellowship** finances a budget for personnel and material costs for the Helmholtz Centers or their institutes in order to identify customer needs through interviews and market research. The **Spin-off Program** finances the establishment of start-up teams working at the Center and the implementation of start-up projects. The Spin-off Program also finances externally found team members if required and the expansion of start-up competencies of the internal team, e.g. by participating in entrepreneurship training.

Applying for the Spin-off Program is possible even if an application for the Field Study Fellowship has not been submitted. Applicants of the Spin-off Program who have not completed the Field Study Fellowship have gained an understanding of the "job to get done" of potential clients in another way. The Field Study Fellowship is nevertheless recommended to prepare for a possible start-up project. The Field Study Fellowship can facilitate an application for the Spin-off Program. However, a completed Field Study Fellowship does not require an application for the Spin-off Program.

The funded projects will be supported within the framework of the program. Support is provided within the framework of the respective module, by the local Transfer Offices and the Transfer and Innovation Division of the Helmholtz Office.

If you have any questions about Helmholtz Enterprise, please contact the Transfer and Innovation department at the Helmholtz Office:

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2. Scope of funding through Initiative and Networking Fund

Field Study Fellowship	Spin-off Program
Max. 25,000 € Application volume max. 25,000 € (excl. 5,500 € for coaching). Co-funding by the Center is not required.	Max. 250,000 €. An additional minimum of 25 % contribution from the Centre to the total project costs required.
3 Months	14 Months

- Allowances for personnel costs:** These are based on the tariff classification of the persons who may be available for the spin-off and are therefore person-related. The calculation of personnel costs should be based on the current values of the TVöD. All ancillary personnel costs are included in the cost estimates (e.g. special annual payment; employer gross). Additional costs (e.g. overheads, non-specific costs for persons) are not eligible. Externally found or to be found team members, who take over defined tasks as part of the internal founding team with responsibility for results, are also to be listed under personnel costs with an appropriate cost rate.
- Allowances for non-personnel costs:** In particular, this includes project-relevant material, participation in entrepreneurship training (e.g. accelerators), travel costs, patenting and notary costs directly related to the spin-off project. The share of material costs under b) in the total funding should be well justified. The team is responsible for a success-oriented use of funds. Overheads are not eligible for funding.
- Subject to the approval of the relevant funding authority,** it is possible for Helmholtz Centres to forward funding from the Initiative and Networking Fund—such as through the Helmholtz Enterprise Program—to newly established companies originating from research activities, provided these are no older than three years at the time of funding. Such funding may be granted in accordance with European state aid law either under **Article 22 of the Allgemeine Gruppenfreistellungsverordnung (AGVO)** for aid to start-ups, or alternatively as a **de minimis aid pursuant to Regulation (EU) No. 1407/2013**.

3. Requirements and procedure

The Centers of the Hermann von Helmholtz-Gemeinschaft Deutscher Forschungszentren e.V. are eligible to apply. Only persons who are employed at the Center during the funding period are eligible for funding.

Funding requirements

Field Study Fellowship
• Applicants must identify at least five potential interview partners (organisations and target users) and briefly describe how access to these interviewees will be established. • Funding from one to a maximum of two persons. Only one person can be funded full-time. • Time input from 50% part-time to full-time. • Direct supervisor and technology transfer at the Center support the application. • Budget of up to 25,000 € for personnel and material costs, exclusively for customer interviews. • Additional 5,500 € are reserved centrally by the HE management for field study experts (mentors).

Spin-off-Programm
• Funding is provided for Helmholtz Centers from which a spin-off is established during or after the funding period. Companies already founded are not eligible for funding. • In addition to technology spin-offs, funding is also available for: i) non-profit foundations (gGmbHs), ii) independent service units of Helmholtz Centers if the aim of this unit is to bring industrial partners and contracts to this research infrastructure, iii) service providers who build on the technological or scientific competence of the Helmholtz Center and iv) prepare applications for large-volume transfer/translation funding programs or financing rounds with investors for the Life Science area. • Alone or in a team, at least 100% personnel capacity in the first phase. • Direct supervisor and technology transfer at the Center support the application. • The innovation has reached a technology readiness level (TRL) of ≥ 4. • „Job to get done“ of potential customers is already clearly identified. • Entrepreneurship Training: Participation in an accelerator program is mandatory. The content, period and estimated costs of the accelerator participation must be

specified in the application documents. If required, the Transfer and Innovation Department of the Helmholtz Head Office offers referral to a partner program (see website).

- 1:1 support: 10,000 € need to be reserved in the application (non-personnel costs) for a coach/spin-off expert who can be centrally organized by the program.

Application

In general, the current application forms must be used, completed in full and confirmed with a legally binding signature. The application forms are available for download at <https://www.helmholtz.de/en/research/current-calls-for-applications/>.

Applications are submitted electronically via the IVF project management platform ProMeta. An account can be created at <https://ivf.helmholtz.de/> by self-registration in order to submit the application forms. After logging in with the user name assigned by the platform and the password you have created, you will get to the overview page with the currently running calls for proposals and can enter the master data and upload the documents via the button "Submit proposal".

The deadline for both modules is September 25, 2026.

Expert opinion

Field Study Fellowship	Spin-off-Programm
No presentation to jury. Jury will decide on the basis of the application on 13.11.2026.	Physical presentation in front of the jury in Berlin on 13.11.2026.
Funding decisions will be announced approximately two weeks after the jury meeting.	

Applications are evaluated by a jury consisting of external experts, members of the working group "Technology Transfer and Intellectual Property" (TTGR) of the Helmholtz Association and representatives of the Helmholtz Office.

In individual cases, the jury may recommend deviating from the funding applied for. The decisive factor here is the assessment as to whether and to what extent the funding is suitable and appropriate for achieving the respective objectives within the framework of the Helmholtz Enterprise funding phase and beyond. The Helmholtz Office and the Center will agree on the financing of the changed funding amount or funding quota.

If the funding from the Initiative and Networking Fund is rejected, the jury will issue a recommendation in the minutes, which will be communicated to the founders/applicants and may make it easier for the Center to decide whether to fund the project with its own funds or to submit a revised application.

Grant agreement

The Helmholtz Association enters into an allowance contract with the Helmholtz Center. The allowance is granted as **fixed amount financing and is non-refundable**.

Project progress and reporting

Field Study Fellowship

- Project starting date is flexible (earliest 01.02.2027).
- Kick-off information with tools for customer interviews.
- Support by field study mentor.
- Presentation of results and experiences as “explainer video” max. 3 months after the end of the funding.
- Deliverables at the end of the project: Final report and explainer video (submission: max. 3 months after the end of the project).

Spin-off-Programm

- Project starting date is flexible (earliest 01.02.2027)

Months 1 - 8:

- Kick-off call before the project starts.
- Support by a coach/ spin-off expert upon own agreement.
- Review after month seven. The founder team presents the current status of the spin-off in front of selected members of the jury. The jury decides on the further funding of the project.
- A complete team ready for the foundation of the new company with CEO competence is prerequisite for further funding in months 9-14.

Months 9 - 14:

- Working in a complete team of founders with CEO competence and preparing the foundation.
- Final report three month after the end of the funding period. Up to five years after completion of the program, information on the founding status, number of employees, awards, turnover and/or capital raised (financing rounds, funding) of the spin-off company must be reported annually on request to the Helmholtz Office (in the first quarter of each year).
- Portrait of the spin-off on our website.