

## CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

October 05, 2026

### HELMHOLTZ DOCTORAL AWARD 2027

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

## Objective of the Award

With their scientific work, doctoral researchers at Helmholtz make valuable contributions to addressing pressing societal challenges. The Helmholtz Association seeks to recognize outstanding achievements by doctoral researchers and to increase the visibility of excellent early-career researchers and their work.

To this end, the Helmholtz Association grants the Helmholtz Doctoral Award. The award recognizes outstanding scientific achievements during the doctoral phase and highlights the contribution of doctoral researchers to the missions of the Helmholtz Association.

The Helmholtz Doctoral Award recognizes both excellent knowledge-driven research and research with strong application and transfer potential. In doing so, it reflects the breadth of doctoral research across the Helmholtz Association and gives visibility to different forms of scientific excellence.

The President of the Helmholtz Association particularly welcomes the nomination of outstanding female researchers in order to increase the visibility of their research achievements.

To give appropriate recognition to both doctoral research with direct application potential and knowledge-driven research without an explicit application focus, the Helmholtz Association grants the **Doctoral Award in two tracks**:

### A) Outstanding knowledge-driven research

### B) Outstanding application-oriented research

Choosing the appropriate track allows the particular strengths of each doctoral research project to be taken into account. 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 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 25, 2027**, 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 2026.

## Scope of the Award

Awardees who are employed at the Helmholtz Center that nominated them for the Doctoral Award may receive funding of up to **€6,000 for research-related activities**. The funding is purpose-bound and may be used, for example, for conference participation, research stays, publication costs, or access to research data or other resources directly required for the awardee's own research activities.

For Track B awardees, participation in a **Helmholtz Field Study Fellowship** may be chosen as an alternative to this research funding, subject to the applicable eligibility requirements and conditions.

Further details on eligibility, eligible and non-eligible expenses, and the use of the funding are set out in the FAQ accompanying this call. The FAQ forms part of the conditions of this call.

## Track A

The Track A award recognizes and honors outstanding achievements in **basic scientific research** during the doctoral phase. The award is intended to give visibility to excellent early-career researchers and to recognize outstanding scientific achievements at an early stage of their careers.

## Application

Candidates for this track must have completed their doctorate at a Helmholtz Center between January 1, 2026, and February 25, 2027 (= 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.

## 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 25, 2027)

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 recognizes doctoral research with strong application and transfer potential and encourages doctoral candidates to examine their projects for transfer opportunities and 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, 2026, and February 25, 2027 (= submission deadline), or
- b) be 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 24, 2028. The objective agreed upon in the final work plan with the Thesis Advisory Committee is what counts.

## 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 25, 2027)

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. Candidates are not required to give a personal presentation.

## Application Deadline and Schedule

|                             |                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>25.02.2027</b>           | Deadline for submitting nominations from Helmholtz Centers to the Helmholtz Head Office via ProMeta         |
| <b>18.03.2027</b>           | Deadline for forwarding formally eligible nominations to the management boards of the Helmholtz Association |
| <b>13.05.2027</b>           | Notification from the management boards to the Head Office regarding the selected award winners             |
| Until the end of May 2027:  | Announcement of the award winners by the Helmholtz Association                                              |
| <b>Subsequently in 2027</b> | Presentation of the Helmholtz Doctoral Award by the President of the Helmholtz Association in Berlin        |

## Contact Persons

General questions about the call:

- 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

### Transparency Note: AI Co-Writing

AI tools were used to support writing by paraphrasing, summarizing, restructuring or generating draft text fragments.