

Helmholtz Rising Talent Professorship

Program for First-Time Appointments
(W2/W3)

Call for applications – April 29, 2026

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Within the framework of the Joint Initiative for Research and Innovation, the Helmholtz Association is intensifying its efforts to attract and fund highly talented women scientists – especially from abroad – to top positions. This call aims to support these efforts through the program for first-time appointments (W2/W3) for advanced women scientists who are about to become a scientific leader in their field and demonstrate outstanding scientific performance.

1. Goal of the funding

The fundamental goal of the funding instrument is to facilitate the establishment of highly qualified candidates as professors. Therefore, the program aims to support the first appointment of highly talented women scientists to universities at the W2 or W3 level and to help them to establish themselves as professors. The funding enables those who have recently qualified for a professorship to take a decisive step in their academic career. The strategic objectives of this funding program are to increase the proportion of women at the medium levels of Helmholtz management and to strengthen cooperation with partner universities in Germany. With respect to the target group, the program aims to recruit and retain highly qualified women scientists and create reliable career prospects by funding permanent appointments only. The additional resources also create scope for financing and equipping this first W2 or W3 position and, for example, for early appointments (so-called “vorgezogene Berufungen”). Women scientists who have already been employed at Helmholtz Centers can be funded if the appointment involves a clear career step for junior professors, young investigator group leaders, or other postdocs and if the candidate shows an outstanding scientific performance.

2. Scope and duration of the funding

Up to 4 professorship positions will be funded within this call. The funding volume for both W2 and W3 professorships amounts to 200,000 euros per scientist and year and increases the basic funding of the recruiting Helmholtz Center. The Helmholtz Center and the German partner university are expected to provide additional financial resources of substantial amount. The funding can be used to finance the position of the woman scientist, the members of her research group and relevant equipment. An essential prerequisite for funding is a concept for the use of the funds that details their deployment and additional resources provided by the Helmholtz Center and the partner university. The jointly appointing institutions are strongly encouraged to come up with innovative offers to attract the target group (dual-career measures, onboarding offers, etc.).

The funding is targeted to the woman scientist who is awarded a first-time professorial appointment through this program. If funding is granted, the successful appointment as professor (submission of the certificate of appointment is necessary) is a prerequisite for transferring funds to the budget of the recruiting Helmholtz Center. After notification of the successful appointment and announcement of the start of employment, this funding increase for the respective research programs will be granted accordingly for the duration of the employment contract at the respective Helmholtz Center. If the funded scientist leaves the Helmholtz Center, the payment of the person-related funding to the Center ends. In this case,

the Helmholtz Center is obliged to inform the Helmholtz Head Office of the leave immediately. The nomination of a replacement candidate is not possible.

3. Target group

The funding program aims to support highly talented women scientists from both Germany and abroad who demonstrate outstanding scientific performance and for whom a decisive step towards a professorship can be supported. Such “rising star” candidates include:

- Internal and external candidates who will be appointed for the first time to the W2 or W3 professorship level from a junior professorship, young investigator group leadership position, or another post-doctoral position. The current position should correspond to the level ‘R3 – Established Researcher’ of the European Commission’s research profile description. The qualification for the professorship should not be too far in the past, time spent outside academia is taken into account. The envisaged professorship must be permanent. The candidates should be excellent scientists within their respective fields.
- External candidates who are currently in a fixed-term professorship and are to be recruited to a permanent position at Helmholtz, such as from a fixed-term W2 position at another institution to a W3 position at Helmholtz. The focus lies on women scientists in the earlier phase of their careers as leaders in science (in contrast to the call for applications for “Helmholtz Distinguished Professorship – Funding for the recruitment of leading international women scientists”). Candidates who are already in permanent professorships in Germany or are to be appointed from a fixed-term W2 position at Helmholtz to a permanent W3 position at Helmholtz are not eligible for funding.
- Women researchers who currently hold professorial positions at foreign institutions and are to be recruited to a Helmholtz Center, with a focus on scientists in the earlier phases of their careers as leaders in science (in contrast to the call for applications for “Helmholtz Distinguished Professorship – Funding for the recruitment of leading international women scientists”).

4. Selection criteria

The most important selection criterion is the outstanding scientific performance of the applicants (CV, publications, awards, etc.). This will be evaluated in relation to academic age. For German candidates, documentation of relevant research experience at foreign institutions is another key criterion. Other criteria are:

- Originality of the planned research work,
- Outstanding qualifications, documented by such accomplishments as an ERC Starting Grant or comparable funding, on the part of the nominated candidate
- The joint commitment of the Helmholtz Center and the German partner university to support the successful establishment of the candidate as a professor.
It is imperative that aspects of equipment, but also structural concerns (such as support for integration into university departments) and supporting HR development measures and, if applicable, dual-career measures will be addressed. The current status of and further plans for the appointment procedure must be outlined by the partner university. A signed declaration of intent by the university management is part of the application, but can be handed in later (see “6. Dates and deadlines”).

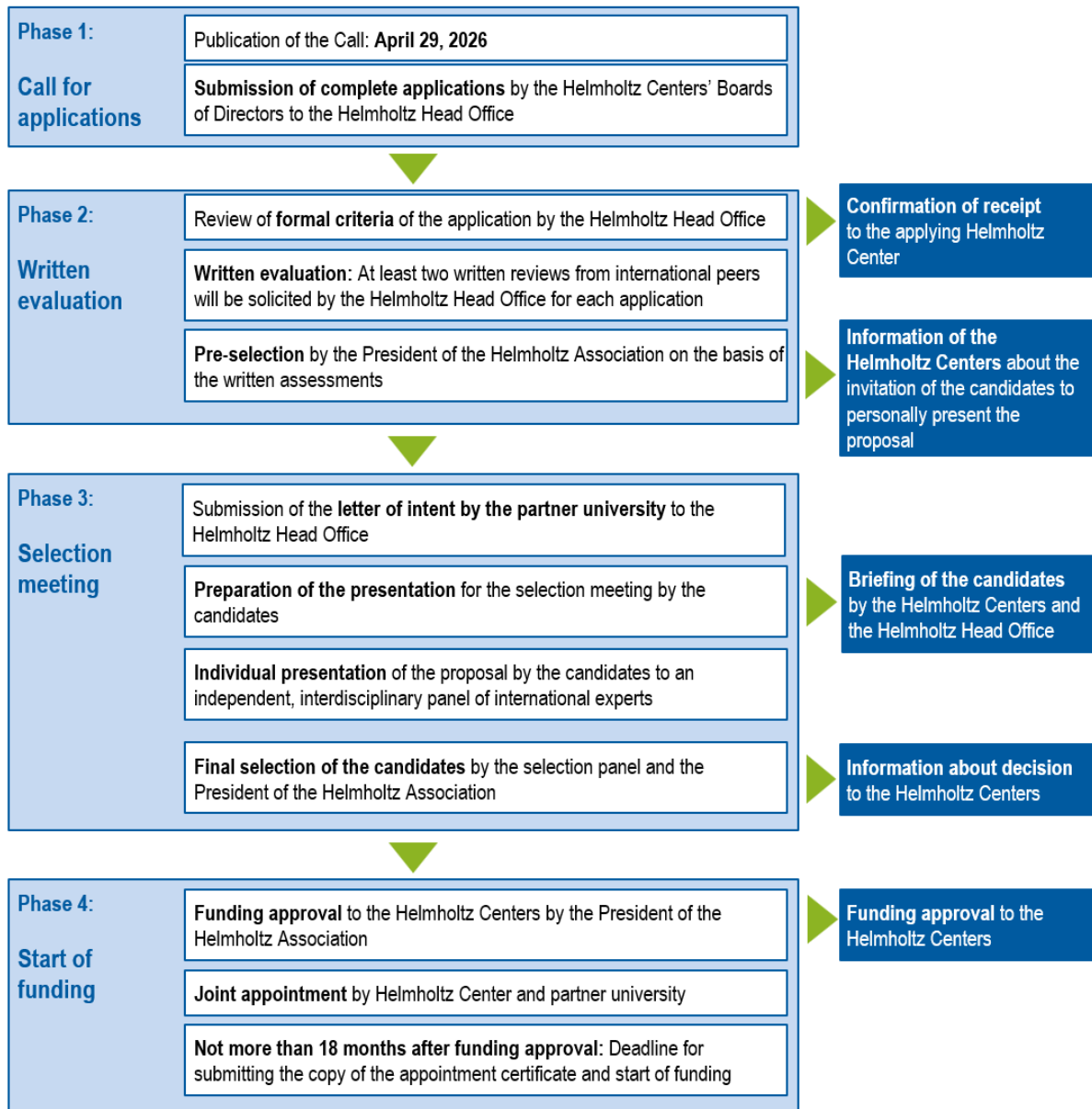
The Helmholtz Centers nominate suitable candidates. Fundamental prerequisites for nomination include:

- Strategic importance of the appointment for the Helmholtz Center and the research program (see application template, “2. Strategic goals of the appointment”),
- Complementarity of the candidate’s research profile with the applying Helmholtz Center and the research program (see application template, “2. Strategic goals of the appointment”),
- The Helmholtz Centers are responsible for checking the scientists with regard to the risk of unwanted knowledge transfer or scientific espionage. This must be carried out before the final application documents are submitted.

5. Application and selection process

The application and selection procedure involves the following steps:

- Interested women scientists should approach the respective Helmholtz Center directly and get in touch with the contact persons indicated (see [Annex 7](#)). At the same time, the Helmholtz Centers are invited to actively recruit suitable candidates. For any general questions regarding the call, interested women scientists may contact the Head Office: Anna Born, anna.born@helmholtz.de; +49 30 206 329-16.
- The Helmholtz Centers are encouraged to organize an internal pre-selection process and enter into negotiations with their German partner universities.
- The applications for funding will then be jointly prepared by the Helmholtz Center and the candidate and submitted to the Helmholtz Head Office in Berlin via the Helmholtz Center’s Board of Directors. Applications sent by candidates directly to the Helmholtz Head Office will not be accepted.
- Each Helmholtz Center may nominate up to two candidates. Forschungszentrum Jülich (FZJ) and Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) may nominate up to three candidates.
- At least two written reviews from international peers will be solicited by the Helmholtz Head Office for each application.
- The President reserves the right to make a pre-selection on the basis of the written reviews and the candidate’s fit with the targeted profile.
- The final selection will be based on the recommendation of an independent, interdisciplinary panel of international experts. Invitations to the personal presentation of candidates are sent out at least five weeks before the date of the selection meeting.
- The Helmholtz Center’s Board of Directors will be informed about the results of the funding decision within five working days after the candidate’s presentation at the selection meeting.
- The selected candidates must be appointed as professors not later than 18 months after funding has been approved. Otherwise, the funding expires.
- Funding will be transferred to the budget of the recruiting Helmholtz Center after a copy of the appointment certificate has been submitted and commencement of employment has been reported to the Helmholtz Head Office. The Head Office will promptly notify the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space that the funds have been approved.



6. Dates and deadlines

July 15, 2026: Deadline for submission of complete applications by the Helmholtz Centers to the Helmholtz Head Office by e-mail

November 18, 2026: Deadline for submission of the statement by the partner university to the Helmholtz Head Office by e-mail

December 09-10, 2026: Final selection meeting in Berlin

Not later than 18 months after funding approval: Deadline for submitting a copy of the appointment certificate and start of funding

7. Documents to be submitted

Only complete applications will be considered. The Head Office may exclude incomplete applications or applications that indicate biased reviewers.

The applicant is the nominating Helmholtz Center. The complete application documents must be submitted via e-mail to ebp_hdp@helmholtz.de. All components of the application must be written in English.

To ensure the legally binding nature of the application submission, the electronic cover letter from the Center management (see 7.1.) must be signed with an advanced or qualified digital signature. If this is not possible, the manually signed original must be submitted by mail in addition to the scanned version sent via e-mail. In this case, please send the original of the cover letter to: Helmholtz-Gemeinschaft Deutscher Forschungszentren e.V., Anna-Louisa-Karsch-Str. 2, 10178 Berlin. The date of the e-mail is decisive for meeting the deadline.

I. Cover letter from the Helmholtz Center's Board of Directors

Separate document, English, PDF

The cover letter from the Helmholtz Center's Board of Directors should address the following aspects:

- resources commitment with reference to the matching funds listed in the financial plan
- information on the status of arrangements with the candidate and the partner university, especially if the partner university statement is handed in later than the application
- confirmation that the candidates have been checked with regard to the risk of unwanted knowledge transfer or scientific espionage and that the results are satisfactory

II. Application

Based on the application template (Annex 1), English, one PDF

Please note: Annex 1 is a template for preparing the application. Using this template is a formal prerequisite for application submission. The maximum number of pages specified for each component must not be exceeded. The structure of the application is as follows:

1. Overview of the application (to be filled in by the Helmholtz Center and the candidate)

- stakeholders and thematic focus
- nominated candidate
- planned research program for the first five years in brief
- in the case of a resubmission of the application

2. Strategic goals of the appointment (to be filled in by the Helmholtz Center, max. 3 pages)

- strategic development planning of the applying Helmholtz Center and the relevant Helmholtz research program(s) and role of the planned position/professorship
- suitability of the nominated candidate
- collaboration and networking with universities and non-university research institutions

3. Recommendation letter from the Scientific Advisory Board of the Helmholtz Center submitting the application (English, PDF, to be inserted, max. 2 pages)

4. Partner university statement (English, PDF, to be inserted, max. 2 pages)

The partner university statement must be written in English and should be signed by high-ranking officials (president, vice president or dean, including official stamp). This statement should address the following aspects:

- goals of the intended appointment and details of the appointment (denomination, integration into the department and any other relevant structures)
- promised resources, if applicable planned dual-career measures
- appointment procedure outlook

The partner university statement may be handed in later than the application (see “6. Dates and deadlines”). In this case, it must be submitted to the Helmholtz Head Office via e-mail to ebp_hdp@helmholtz.de.

5. Motivation of the nominated candidate (to be filled in by the candidate, max. 2 pages)

- motivation to join the Helmholtz Center
- motivation to join the German partner university

6. Curriculum vitae and track record of the nominated candidate (to be filled in by the candidate, max. 4 pages)

- personal details, education and key qualifications
- research achievements and peer recognition

7. Description of the planned work program (to be filled in by the candidate, max. 15 pages)

- state of the art and preliminary work
- objectives for the next five years
- five-year work program including proposed research methods
- long-term research plans

Note: A reference list can be added and will not be counted as part of the max. 15 pages.

8. Financial plan (to be filled in by the Helmholtz Center and the candidate)

- Please prepare the financial plan first using the template (Excel file, [Annex 2](#)) and then paste the calculated data into the application template ([Annex 1](#)) under chapter 8.1 and 8.2.
- For details, see application component “III. Financial plan” below.

III. Financial plan

Separate Excel file ([Annex 2](#)) & copying of the values into the application template ([Annex 1](#)) under chapter 8.1 and 8.2.

The following two tables must be calculated:

- **Table 8.1:** costs for the first five years with annual data on personnel costs, costs of materials and supplies, and investments. In the event of division into several programs, this must be clearly stated in the financial plan.
- **Table 8.2:** financial contributions by the Helmholtz Center, financial contributions by the partner university (if applicable) and funding from this scheme, that is resources of the Joint Initiative for Research and Innovation.

IV. Proposal of six unbiased reviewers in the relevant field

Separate document, English, Excel file

Please use **Annex 3** (Excel file) for listing six unbiased potential reviewers.

V. Declaration with regard to the proposal of six unbiased reviewers in the relevant field

Please consider the notes in **Annex 4** which must be signed by the nominated candidate.

VI. Declaration of consent regarding data protection

Please use **Annex 5** to consent to our data policy which must be signed by the nominated candidate.

VII. Declaration on the use of artificial intelligence in preparing the proposal

Please use **Annex 6** to provide a transparent declaration on whether and how Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation of the proposal. This must be signed by the nominated candidate.

File names

Please submit the application documents via e-mail to ebp_hdp@helmholtz.de as PDF files (no more than 3 MB) respectively as Excel files in the following order and name the files as indicated below:

I_Cover_letter_CandidateSurname_Center.pdf

II_Application_CandidateSurname_Center.pdf

III_Proposal_unbiased_reviewers_CandidateSurname_Center.xlsx

IV_Declaration_unbiased_reviewers_CandidateSurname_Center.pdf

V_Declaration_data_protection_CandidateSurname_Center.pdf

VI_Declaration_AI_use_CandidateSurname_Center.pdf

8. List of annexes

Annex 1 Application template (Word file, mandatory use)

Annex 2 Financial plan (Excel file, mandatory use, but does not need to be submitted)

Annex 3 List of six unbiased potential reviewers (Excel file, mandatory use)

Annex 4 Declaration with regard to the proposal of six unbiased reviewers in the relevant field
(Word file, mandatory use)

Annex 5 Declaration of consent regarding data protection (Word file, mandatory use)

Annex 6 Declaration on AI use in the proposal preparation (PDF file, mandatory use)

Annex 7 Contact persons at the Helmholtz Centers

Annex 8 Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

Annex 9 Data protection compulsory information