

Helmholtz Distinguished Professorship – Funding for the recruitment of leading international women scientists (W3)
Call for applications – April 29, 2026

Annex 8: Frequently Asked Questions

I am interested in the call for applications. Can I apply directly?

A candidate cannot apply directly to the Helmholtz Head Office, but must contact a Helmholtz Center that fits her field of study. The Board of Directors of the Helmholtz Center in question will decide which candidate to nominate and is authorized to submit applications.

Is the call for applications linked to certain chairs (that become vacant), disciplines, or denominations?

No, the call for applications is not dependent on any subject or discipline. However, relevance to the Helmholtz research programs and the focus of a given Center will be an essential part of the decision by that Center to nominate a given candidate. The precise alignment of the appointments with the structural development plans of the appointing partner universities is a question to be resolved between the nominating Helmholtz Center and the partner university.

Why are only permanent professorships funded?

The program aims to increase the proportion of women leaders in our research centers and to create reliable career prospects. This can only be achieved through permanent positions.

Can candidates be funded who are already working at a Helmholtz Center?

As the title of the program implies, the goal of the program is to recruit leading international women scientists to the Helmholtz Association. A fundamental prerequisite of the funding is that the nominated candidates are not employed at the Helmholtz Center at the time the application is submitted. The funding program is rather aimed at outstanding female scientists who are currently (that is, when the application is submitted) conducting research at institutions abroad. That is why applications to fund internal Helmholtz scientists are out of the question. An exception may apply if the nominated candidate is hired by the Helmholtz Center after the application was submitted.

Can candidates be funded who already have an appointment at the German partner university or at another German university?

No. Another important prerequisite for the funding is that the nominated candidate has not been appointed as professor in Germany before the selection meeting. Nevertheless, it is recommended to initiate a dialogue with the relevant partner university regarding a joint appointment of the candidate as soon as possible, and to reach specific agreements regarding the next steps in the desired appointment procedure before the selection meeting. This will, in any case, accelerate the planned appointment.

What should be done if the partner university wants to or has to make a public call for applications for the professorship in question?

It is the responsibility of the partner university to provide information about the design of the appointment procedure in its statement. If there are no prospects for a person-specific procedure, the reasons should be explained to avoid giving the impression that the partner university is not entirely convinced of the candidate's suitability.

Can a Helmholtz Center nominate as many candidates as it wants?

In principle, yes. However, too many applications give the impression that the Center has not been particularly selective in its decision to nominate.

Who evaluates the applications?

At least two written reviews from international peers will be solicited by the Helmholtz Head Office for each application. The final selection process involves an independent, interdisciplinary panel of international experts, who will decide on the selection recommendation.

Are there any formal requirements or a sample structure for the application?

Yes, there is an application template whose structure and scope must be adhered to. Applications deviating from this structure cannot be considered in the further selection process.

Can financial plans include the costs for dual-career measures?

The Helmholtz Centers are expressly requested to describe dual-career measures for the partners of the nominated candidates and identify any contributions on the part of the Center and/or the partner university in the financial plan. There is also the possibility to apply for dual career funding from funds of the Joint Initiative for Innovation and Research for Helmholtz Distinguished Professorship holders.

Can financial plans include general and administrative costs, internal services, etc?

Yes, general and administrative costs can be included as contribution on the part of the Center in the financial plan.