

## Helmholtz Distinguished Professorship

Funding for the recruitment of leading international women scientists (W3)

Call for applications – April 29, 2026

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Full professorship positions are a defining element of any research institution. As joint appointments with universities, they are also an important link between the non-university research organization Helmholtz and its university partners. Within the framework of the *Joint Initiative for Research and Innovation*, the Helmholtz Association is intensifying its efforts to attract outstanding women scientists from abroad to these positions.

## 1. Goal of the funding

The fundamental goal of the program is to attract a top-level group of exceptionally qualified, experienced, internationally recognized women scientists to the Helmholtz Association. The strategic objectives of the Helmholtz Distinguished Professorship program are to enhance Helmholtz internationalization, to increase the proportion of women leaders in our research centers, to strengthen cooperation with partner universities, and to establish and expand strategically relevant thematic areas by means of targeted recruitment. With respect to the target group, the central objectives are to support the appointment of outstanding women scientists with an international reputation at the W3 professorship level and to create reliable career prospects by funding permanent appointments. The program's resources also create scope for financing and equipping the newly recruited scientists and expanding the options of the recruiting Helmholtz Centers and partner universities for generating additional positions.

## 2. Scope and duration of the funding

The call funds up to 3 Helmholtz Distinguished Professorship positions. The funding volume amounts to 600,000 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 scientist who is awarded a Helmholtz Distinguished Professorship and recruited to a Helmholtz Center 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.<sup>1</sup> If the funded scientist leaves the Helmholtz Center, the payment of the person-related

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<sup>1</sup> The Helmholtz Association does not invest its resources in individual institutions, but in cross-center research programs that compete with one another for funding. By pooling the diverse resources of its various research centers via the so-called "program-oriented funding", Helmholtz is in the unique position of not only being able to offer solutions to individual problems, but also to comprehensively address the complex issues facing science, society, and the economy and to develop system solutions. For more information, please see <https://www.helmholtz.de/en/research/program-oriented-funding/>.

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 is aimed at highly distinguished women scientists with an international reputation who are currently conducting research at institutions abroad and who are recognized leaders in their respective research field. This may also include researchers of German nationality who have been employed abroad in the last years (generally for at least the last three years).

A fundamental prerequisite for the funding is that the nominated candidates are not yet employed at the Helmholtz Center. The funding program targets outstanding women scientists who are currently (that is, at the time the application is submitted) conducting research at institutions abroad. Another important prerequisite for the funding is that the nominated candidate has not received an offer for the professorship position at the partner university (so-called “Ruferteilung”) until after the Helmholtz Distinguished Professorship selection meeting. Nevertheless, it is inevitable to discuss the joint appointment with the relevant partner university as soon as possible and to reach specific agreements regarding the next steps in the appointment procedure before the selection meeting. This will accelerate the planned appointment.

### 4. Selection criteria

The most important selection criterion is the outstanding scientific performance of the nominated applicants (CV, publications, awards, etc.). Other criteria are:

- originality of the planned research,
- an outstanding international reputation of the candidate,
- the joint commitment of the Helmholtz Center and the German partner university to ensure the successful recruitment and establishment of the candidate as a professor.

It is imperative that aspects of equipment, but also additional offers (such as dual-career measures) and structural concerns (such as support for integration into university departments) are taken into account. The current status and further plans for the appointment procedure must be outlined in agreement with 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:

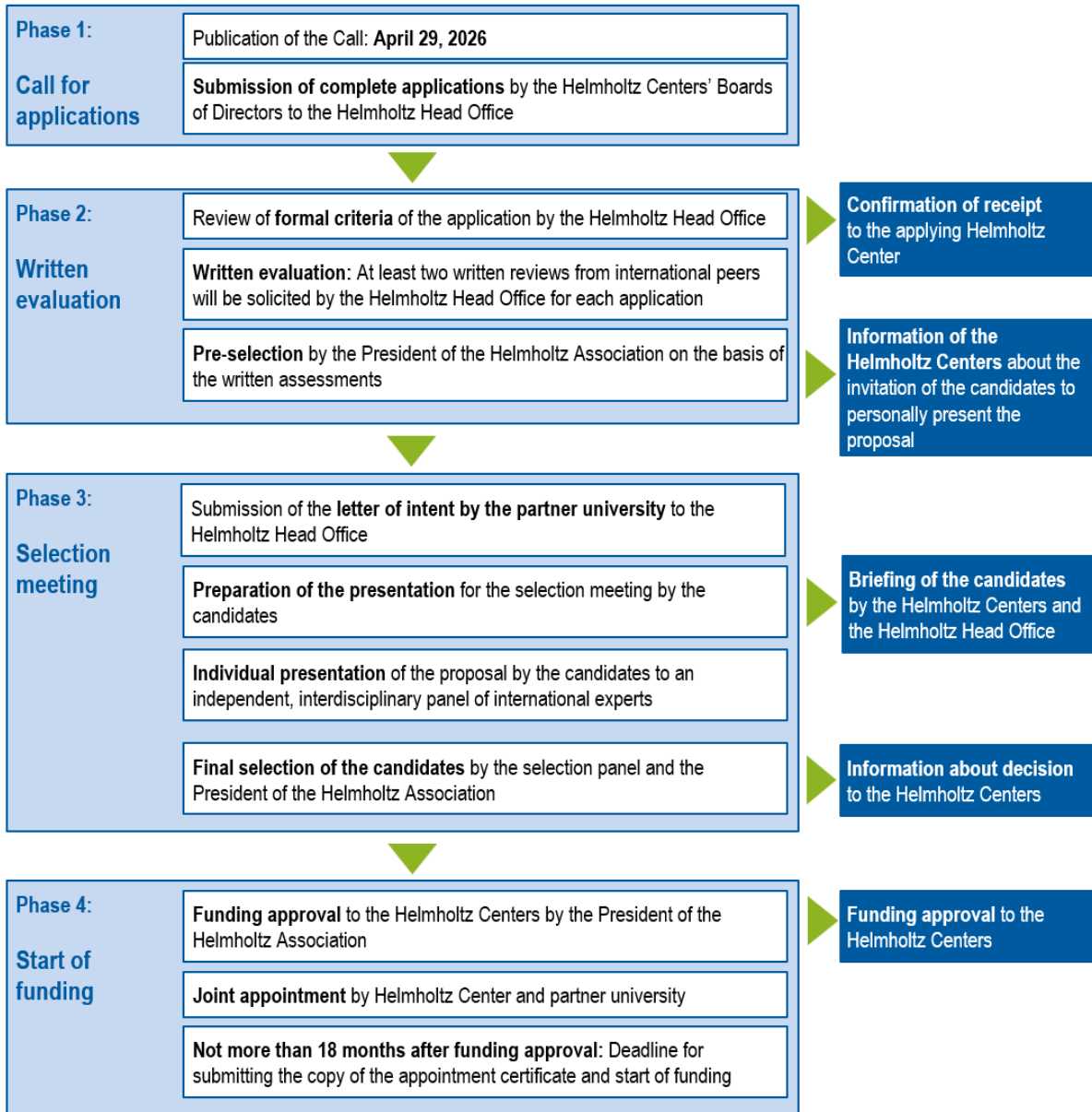
- strategic importance of the appointment for the Helmholtz Center, the research program and the Helmholtz Association as a whole (see application template, “2. Strategic goals of the appointment”),

- a strong complementarity of the candidate's research profile with the applying Helmholtz Center, the research program and the partner university (see application template, "2. Strategic goals of the appointment"),
- The Helmholtz Centers are responsible for checking the candidates 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

This call for applications will be issued internationally. 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, it is highly recommended that the Helmholtz Centers 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](mailto: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 Centers' Boards of Directors. Applications sent by candidates directly to the Helmholtz Head Office will not be accepted.
- 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](mailto: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. I.) 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

We ask that the letter from the Helmholtz Center's Board of Directors is written in English. The letter from the 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 the 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). Please note that only German universities are applicable as partner universities. 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](mailto: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 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 research program (to be filled in by the candidate, max. 7 pages)

- state of the art and preliminary work
- objectives for the next five years
- long-term research plans

Note: A reference list can be added and will not be counted as part of the max. 7 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 email to [ebp\\_hdp@helmholtz.de](mailto: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 template (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