HELMHOLTZ

Research for grand challenges.

Validation Projects

Call for Proposals

The Initiative and Networking Fund | Helmholtz Association | 07.08.2026

1. Call for Proposals for Validation Projects

The mission of the Helmholtz Association is to conduct interdisciplinary, long-term, cutting-edge research in fields of high strategic relevance. Our mandate is to develop solutions to major societal and techno-economic challenges and to translate research findings effectively into practical applications and commercially viable solutions. Together with partners from science, industry, and society, Helmholtz develops integrated, systems-based solutions, thereby strengthening the capacity for innovation.

Validation funding translates this mission-driven approach into concrete pathways to transfer. It specifically promotes excellent research toward practical application, utilization, and societal or economic impact. In this way, validation funding strengthens the Helmholtz contribution to the economy’s capacity for innovation, technological sovereignty, and societal progress.

2. Objective

Purpose of Funding

Validation funding from the Impulse and Networking Fund (IVF) addresses the gap between research results generated at Helmholtz Centers and their practical application. It focuses on application-oriented validation to assess the technical, commercial, or societal viability of these results and to substantially enhance their value and commercialization potential. This funding primarily targets ideas and inventions at early technology readiness levels (TRLs 2–3).

Validation projects may pursue one or more of the following approaches in particular:

- Demonstrating technical feasibility for the intended application
- Developing prototypes, demonstrators, or production processes
- Conducting preclinical validation or proof-of-concept studies
- Initiating collaborations with industry partners and other application partners
- Developing a transfer and commercialization strategy, including plans for a potential spin-off

The funding strengthens the focus of research on transfer and market needs, fosters entrepreneurial thinking and action, and supports cultural change across Helmholtz.

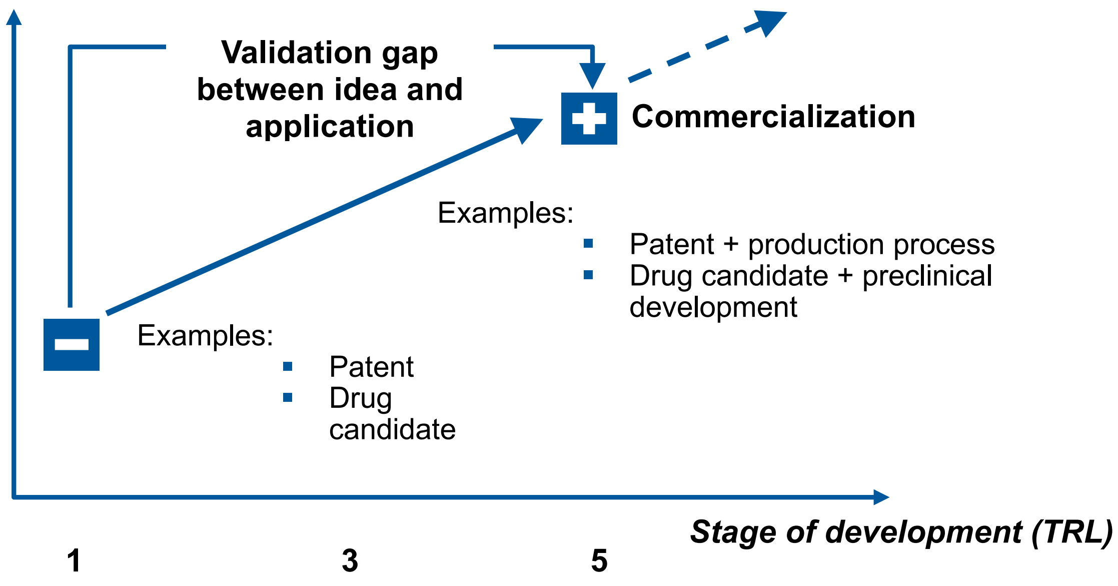
Target Group

This call is open to researchers employed by Helmholtz Centers who wish to validate market-relevant research results or methods with a view to their future application and transfer. Proposals may be submitted only through a Helmholtz Center. Other organizations, including spin-offs and collaboration partners, are not eligible to apply. Funding will be awarded through the applicant Helmholtz Center.

Proposals may be submitted by researchers from a single Helmholtz Center or by cross-center consortia involving up to three Centers. Joint projects involving two or three Centers will receive preferential consideration if cross-center collaboration and the exchange of expertise and resources within the Helmholtz Association add substantial value to the validation project.

However, participation by more than one Center is not a prerequisite for funding.

Value of the invention / commercialization potential



3. Funding Requirements

Scope of Funding

Projects are eligible for funding if they further develop and validate research results or methods, particularly with a view to their subsequent transfer or impact. Where the primary transfer pathway involves a public-sector, institutional, or societal application, validation may also include demonstrating the practical suitability, effectiveness, acceptance, and transferability of the proposed noncommercial application[1].

Projects must be designed to significantly increase the economic value or societal benefit of the underlying technology by improving its applicability, addressing a market, institutional, or societal need, or both. Progression to a higher technology readiness level (TRL) is one indicator of such value enhancement (see figure). Projects should ideally reach TRL 4 or 5, or a higher level.

A validation project is considered successfully completed when the following requirements for commercialization or another form of transfer have been met:

1. The TRL has increased as planned.
2. Market exploration activities have been conducted, and potential transfer or commercialization partners have been contacted.
3. A product, service, or application concept has been developed, together with a commercialization brief or a transfer and commercialization strategy.

[1]Examples: the GITEWS tsunami early warning system or SORMAS, a digital epidemic and pandemic management system.

Application and Funding Requirements

A grant may be awarded if the following requirements are met:

- The proposal is proposed by a researcher at a Helmholtz Center.
- The proposal is submitted in full according to the provided template and may be supplemented with an optional video pitch.
- The technology, its market or transfer potential, and the need for validation are clearly and convincingly described.
- The technology transfer office of the applying center confirms the project and will be involved in monitoring the project.
- The center's executive board supports the project, including co-funding by the center amounting to at least 25% of the total project costs.

Exclusion of Double Funding

At the time of application, applicants must confirm that the proposed validation project is not receiving funding, either in whole or in part, from any other funding agency. Any pending applications submitted to other funding agencies or donors must be disclosed to the Validation Projects Office using the contact information provided below.

4. Type, Scope, and Amount of Funding

Project Period, Funding Amount, and Funding Mechanism

Funding is available for validation projects to be carried out between 2027 and 2028. The following key funding parameters apply:

- Funding period: up to 24 months
- Funding amount: €300,000 to €1,000,000 per project – 75% of the total project costs
- Funding share: up to 75% of eligible total project costs
- Funding type: fixed-amount funding
- Co-financing: at least 25% of eligible total project budget must be provided by the participating Helmholtz Center(s), business partner(s), or both.

Eligible Costs

Eligible costs include direct project-related personnel and material costs, as well as investments. Costs for contracts with third parties may also be eligible if they are necessary to carry out the validation project.

Eligible costs include, in particular:

- External services, such as custom manufacturing, data provision, and prototype development
- Services provided by contract research organizations (CROs)
- Market analyses, marketing services, coaching, and other support measures
- Consulting services in the areas of production, quality management, regulatory

requirements, or technical validation, particularly for services provided by project advisors and mentors (see below).

- Material costs for consumables and for conducting studies

The engagement of an external project advisor or mentor to provide guidance and support on the transfer and commercialization strategy is mandatory. The external project advisor or mentor must remain involved throughout the duration of the project. At least €20,000 of the project budget must be allocated for this purpose.

As the transfer offices of the participating Helmholtz Centers are required to support the projects (see above), the proposal must explain how the associated costs will be covered. Where necessary, funding from the grant or from a Center's co-financing contribution must be allocated for this purpose.

Co-financing and Disbursement

Funding will be provided as a fixed-amount grant and disbursed to the applicant Helmholtz Center. Participating Helmholtz Centers must provide co-financing equivalent to at least 25% of the total project budget[2]. This contribution may consist of direct or indirect costs, including overhead costs. A Helmholtz Center's contribution may be replaced, in whole or in part, by a financial contribution from an industry partner.

5. Procedure

5.1 Application Procedure

Submission and Selection of Proposals

Application Submission Quotas: To ensure a fair and manageable selection process, the number of applications that may be submitted is limited. Application quotas are based on the annual budgets of the Helmholtz Centers, including basic funding, LK I, and LK II, and are determined according to three size categories. The maximum number of applications that may be submitted is therefore as follows:

Max. 3 proposals	DLR, FZJ, KIT
Max. 2 proposals	AWI, DESY, DKFZ, DZNE, Hereon, HMGU, HZB, HZDR, MDC
Max. 1 proposal	CISPA, GEOMAR, GFZ, HZI, UFZ, GSI[1]

[1] GSI may submit proposals only through the Helmholtz Institutes in Jena and Mainz.

The selection process consists of a single stage:

- Submission of a complete application
- Evaluation based solely on the submitted application

[2] **Example calculation:** A grant of €1,000,000 under the validation funding program represents 75% of the total project budget. The required 25% co-financing contribution from a Helmholtz Centers or industry partner, amounts to €333,333, resulting in a total project budget of €1,333,333 [€1,000,000 + €333,333 = €1,333,333].

Call for Proposals and Deadline

The **deadline** for submitting proposals for the 2026 call: **October 15, 2026**

The IVF funding framework provides for a series of calls for proposals for Helmholtz validation projects, starting in 2026. The timing and scope of future calls will be determined based on the availability of funds.

Applicants must use the "Validation Project Proposal template," which must be completed in full, signed, and submitted. The application form is available for download at www.helmholtz.de/ausschreibungen.

Applications must be submitted electronically through **ProMeta**, the IVF project management platform. Applicants may create an account through self-registration at https://ivf.helmholtz.de. After logging in with the username assigned by the platform and their chosen password, applicants will be directed to an overview of all current calls for proposals. Applicants must select "Submit Application" to enter the required information and upload the relevant documents. Self-registration is already available; the submission forms will be activated by August 31, 2026.

Applicants may voluntarily submit a presentation video of no more than five minutes introducing the project idea and the proposed implementation approach. Submission of a video is optional and is not required as part of the application. The video must be made available through a suitable portal, web service, or cloud service.

For questions regarding the call for proposals, please contact the responsible team members at the Helmholtz Head Office at validierung@helmholtz.de.

Applications may be submitted through **October 15, 2026**.

5.2 Selection and Award Procedure

Proposals will be evaluated based on the established evaluation criteria:

- Innovation potential and uniqueness
- Commercialization potential and advancement in technology readiness level (TRL)
- Feasibility, project partners, and project plan
- Planned approach to assessing transfer and commercialization potential, involvement of the transfer office, and use of external advisory support
- Added value resulting from the cross-center exchange of expertise and resources, where applicable

Based on the evaluation:

- Eligible projects will be ranked in order of funding priority.
- Funding will be granted according to the ranking and subject to the availability of IVF funds.
- Eligibility does not create an automatic entitlement to funding.

The final funding decision will be made by the President of the Helmholtz Association, Prof. Dr. Martin Keller.

6. Milestones and Project Management

Validation projects must be managed using **milestone-based project structures**. Evidence must be provided to demonstrate that the defined milestones have been achieved. Failure to achieve the milestones may result in termination of the project following the 12-month mid-term review.

After 12 months, a **project report** must be submitted to the Helmholtz Head Office. The Head Office will review the report within four weeks of submission. A **Business Model Canvas** for the validation project must be included as an integral part of the project report and will form part of the mid-term review.

For the review, the Helmholtz Head Office will engage external reviewers with relevant subject-matter expertise and experience in research transfer. The mid-term review will be conducted in coordination with the transfer office of the participating Helmholtz Center and the external project advisors or mentors. An oral hearing will be held only in critical cases or if further clarification is required.

The evaluation criteria for the mid-term review after 12 months are:

- Achievement of the defined milestones
- Adherence to the approved budget
- Assessment by the Center's transfer office
- Assessment by the external project advisors or mentors

The remaining grant funds will be released only following a successful mid-term review. In this case, the project may continue to receive funding for a total period of up to 24 months. If the review is unsuccessful, the project duration will be shortened to no more than 18 months, and the remaining approved funds will be reduced to 25–40%. The external reviewers will submit a recommendation, while the final decision will be made by the Helmholtz Head Office.

At the end of the overall funding period, which may not exceed 24 months, a brief final report of no more than five pages must be submitted together with the final statement of expenditures. The report must describe the key project activities, milestones, and results. It must also be accompanied by separate documentation of the market exploration activities conducted, a list of contacts made with potential transfer or commercialization partners, and, if available, a product, service, or application concept in the form of a commercialization brief or a transfer and commercialization strategy.

7. Financial and Project Management

Funding Agreement

If the proposal is approved, a funding agreement will be concluded between the Helmholtz Association and the Helmholtz Center employing the applicant. By submitting the proposal, the Center commits to providing its own contribution of at least 25% and to passing the full amount of the grant funds on to the applicant.

If the Helmholtz Center's co-financing contribution is replaced by payment commitments from an industry partner, this arrangement must be governed by a separate agreement between the Helmholtz Center and the industry partner. Financial participation by an industry partner does not automatically confer exclusive commercialization rights. However, a right of first negotiation or a most-favored-nation clause may be agreed upon.

As a general rule, the application and the NKBF 2017[3] will form part of the grant award notice.

Fund Requests and Milestone Achievement

Funds may be requested as needed and in accordance with the actual progress of the project. They will be disbursed in installments, generally at intervals of three to six months. Disbursement of funds is not explicitly tied to the achievement of milestones. Each request for funds must be based on the most recently updated statement of expenditures („*zahlenmäßiger Nachweis*"). However, any request for funds following the first 12 months of the project, or a few weeks thereafter, is conditional on a positive mid-term review (see above).

The milestones must be defined by the applicant in the proposal. Their achievement will be reviewed as part of project monitoring. At least three milestones must be defined for the first 12 months of the project. Disbursement of the first installment is conditional on the submission of a milestone plan that has been coordinated with the selected external project advisor or mentor and the Center's transfer office.

The project lead must promptly report the achievement of each milestone to the Helmholtz Head Office in a concise project status report of no more than one page, to be submitted through ProMeta. In addition, the Center's transfer office or the external project advisor or mentor must provide a brief written assessment.

Performance Monitoring and Project Completion

Project performance will be monitored through the continuous review of milestones, a mid-term review conducted halfway through the funding period (after 12 months) and the final report.

Successful completion of a validation project must be documented in a final report confirmed by the Center's transfer office. The final report must be accompanied by separate documentation of the market exploration conducted and the commercialization plan (see above). This documentation is intended to assess the project's level of commercial viability and demonstrate that the project objectives have been achieved.

Project Support and Management Assistance

The project lead will be supported by internal and external project advisors or mentors. Staff members of the Center's transfer office should serve as internal project advisors or mentors. For external support, a suitably qualified person with industry experience should be engaged as an external project advisor or mentor (see above).

The responsibilities of the external project advisor or mentor include, in particular, providing guidance on market exploration and the development of a transfer and commercialization strategy, as well as facilitating contacts with interested parties and potential transfer or commercialization partners. They also include assessing milestone achievement and providing a statement as part

[3] NKBF 2017 https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/shareddocs/bekanntmachungen/de/2017/10/1429_bekanntmachung.html

of the status seminar. A detailed requirements profile will be provided upon request.

Transfer and Commercialization Prospects Following the Validation Project

The goal of the validation project is to create the conditions for the project results to be applied or commercialized as directly and promptly as possible. Timely transfer or commercialization should therefore be pursued following completion of the validation project. Ideally, specific transfer or commercialization options should be assessed and prepared during the project, particularly in its final phase. These options include, in particular, commercialization through a collaboration agreement or licensing agreement with an industry partner, as well as the establishment of a spin-off.

Further commercialization or application must be supported by the technology transfer office of the relevant Helmholtz Center. If desired by the parties involved, transfer or commercialization may also be supported by the project advisors or mentors or by suitable third parties, such as patent commercialization agencies.

If immediate transfer of the project results through licensing, collaboration, or the establishment of a spin-off is not yet possible following completion of the validation project, a realistic follow-on strategy must be presented. This strategy should identify the additional steps required to bring the results to application or market readiness. These may include suitable follow-on funding opportunities, transfer programs, or other follow-on measures, such as Helmholtz Enterprise, SPRIND, or comparable programs.

The proposal must provide a clear and plausible description of the prospects for further transfer or commercialization following completion of the validation project. In particular, it must address:

- The applications, user groups, customers, markets, industries, or public-sector functions to be addressed by the project results
- The scientific, technical, economic, or societal benefits expected from further transfer or commercialization and the anticipated advantages over existing solutions, technologies, or processes
- The principal transfer or commercialization pathway through which the results are to be utilized, such as collaboration, licensing, establishment of a spin-off, product, process, or service development, use by public-sector organizations, or a follow-on project
- Whether intellectual property rights, patents, software, data, materials, or know-how are expected to be relevant to subsequent transfer or commercialization and how they may be used, protected, licensed, or shared
- The principal risks to subsequent transfer or commercialization that can already be anticipated

Appendix: Submission of Applications and Video Pitches

Validation project applications must be submitted through ProMeta, the IVF project management platform. An online submission form will be provided on the ProMeta platform. Further information is available in the document “Submitting Applications through ProMeta.” Files must be named clearly and descriptively according to the format [project acronym–Center abbreviation, e.g., GAIN-HGF]. This ensures that each project can be clearly assigned to the relevant consortium of the leading Helmholtz Center.

The ProMeta project management platform is available at https://ivf.helmholtz.de

General Information on Video Pitches

As no in-person presentation before the selection panel is planned during the application phase, applicants may present their validation project in a video pitch of no more than five minutes. Submission of a video pitch is optional.

The video pitch is intended to give the project lead and, where applicable, other project team members an opportunity to present the validation project in their own words. This allows the selection panel to gain a personal impression of the applicants and their connection to the validation project.

The video pitch should convey the essence of the validation project. This includes, in particular, the compelling idea, the key added value, and the success-critical approach to achieving a market-ready implementation. It should also make clear what particularly qualifies the project team to carry out the project.

An elaborate video production is not expected. A simple recording that presents the project’s key content clearly and understandably is sufficient. Applicants may design the video as they see fit and add further elements. Only the content presented will be evaluated; the creative or technical quality of the video production is not an evaluation criterion.

We recommend recording a presentation using a common videoconferencing service such as Webex, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom, optionally incorporating a PowerPoint presentation. Alternatively, the project presentation may be recorded in a lecture hall or on a stage.

The video must be submitted in MP4 format. To ensure broad compatibility, the video should be encoded using H.264/AVC and the audio using AAC. A resolution of 1,920 × 1,080 pixels (Full HD/1080p) is recommended. The file size must not exceed 150 MB.

The video file must be made available through a suitable web or cloud service. The submitted link must be accessible without registration, allow the file to be downloaded, and remain valid until the selection process has concluded.