

Program-Oriented Funding (PoF)

How Helmholtz funds its research

Conducting research in programs

At the Helmholtz Association, research is organized into programs. The Association designs these programs in accordance with the strategic guidelines formulated by the funding partners in dialog with the Helmholtz Association. Program-oriented funding (PoF) seeks to establish a balance between cooperation and competition: Structuring the research according to research programs enables researchers to pool their expertise across centers and disciplines and enhances their cooperation. At the same time, the programs compete for funding. In addition to these research and development activities (LK I), Helmholtz provides large-scale scientific equipment and large platforms for scientific communities of users that typically include members from around the world (LK II). The six research fields assume the important task of shaping trend-setting focal points for future research, developing system solutions with the best partners, and making a significant impact on the relevant areas.

The PoF process: a two-tier evaluation system

In the previous funding periods, the research programs were financed for five years on the basis of external evaluations. For the fourth program period, the duration will be extended to seven years.

Steps in the procedure toward the fourth round of program-oriented funding



The new PoF procedure is essentially a two-tier evaluation system:

1. The first tier involves a scientific evaluation of the centers and programs at the individual Center level.
2. The second tier involves a strategic assessment of the future programs at the research field level.

Tier 1: The scientific evaluation

The scientific evaluation focuses on scientific performance. Its results help provide insights into the performance both of the respective Helmholtz Center and of the individual programs, which are typically carried out across centers. The scientific evaluation process began in October 2017 and was completed in April 2018. During this process, a total of 32 international evaluations assessed the research centers' R&D activities and user facilities in the six research fields. Each individual evaluation took three to five days. The Association recruited 585 international experts from 27 countries, including 150 women, to act as reviewers. The overwhelming majority of the reviewers came from all over the world: Nearly half (49 percent) were from other European countries, while a further third (35 percent) came from countries outside Europe.

Tier 2: The strategic evaluation

The strategic evaluation, which will be carried out at the research field level, will focus on all of the programs and user facilities that are proposed for the fourth program period (PoF IV). The key aspects of the programs are determined by the management board and discussed on the research field platform, taking into account the recommendations of the scientific evaluation and the strategic guidelines adopted for the research field by the Committee of Funding Partners. This includes designating a program spokesperson and a program steering committee, which will include researchers from the participating centers. The centers determine their participation in the programs. The program spokespersons coordinate the drafting of proposals for the programs in the fourth program period (program proposals) in consultation with all of the centers participating in the respective program. A period of seven years is provided for the programs. The strategic evaluation process is carried out using a detailed qualitative assessment. This assessment is broken down into the following four dimensions at the level of the programs and topics:

1. Assessment of the formulated goals in the context of international developments in the area (taking into account the strategic guidelines and the pact objectives if applicable, as well as the strategy of the Helmholtz Association and the research field),
2. Assessment of the work program which to achieve the objectives (plausibility of the program of work, alignment with the recommendations from the scientific evaluation, originality and appropriateness of the scientific approaches, feasibility in terms of achieving the pursued objectives)
3. Assessment of the competences of the participants in the program and the human and financial resources dedicated to them,
4. Assessment of benefits and risks with regard to the effectiveness of the research.

Outlook and timetable

The Helmholtz Association will carry out the **strategic evaluation** during the period from **September 2019 to January 2020**. The reports provided by international and independent experts will form the basis for the recommendations of the Helmholtz Senate to the funding partners with regard to the funding of the research programs and participating Helmholtz centers. The reports also include recommendations for the further development of the programs and research fields. Following the final decision of the Helmholtz Senate in June 2020, the programs of the now seven-year PoF IV period will start on on January 1, 2021.

Contact

Please see the following link for the contact details of employees in the Research section of the Head Office:

→ https://www.helmholtz.de/en/about_us/the_association/head_office/research/

Further Information:

PoF overview (in German; in English coming soon):

https://www.helmholtz.de/forschung/programmorientierte_foerderung/

Results of the evaluation 2017/18 in all research fields (in German; in English coming soon):

https://www.helmholtz.de/forschung/programmorientierte_foerderung/ergebnisse_begutachtungen_20172018/

Film about the PoF (in German; in English coming soon): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mk_Bh-QyVVI