

Announcement Joachim Herz Award 2025

Future Pioneers in Sustainable Biotechnology

Preamble

The non-profit Joachim Herz Foundation (JHS) was established in 2008 and is one of the largest German foundations. It promotes education, science and, in particular, innovative, application-oriented research at the interfaces between the natural sciences and engineering. Since the beginning of 2023, the JHS has focused its activities on “transfer and innovation”.

In spite of excellent research, comparatively few results are translated into practical applications in Germany. To overcome current global challenges such as climate change or resource scarcity, bold and innovative approaches are needed, which require different perspectives and expertise. The JHS recognizes the urgent need to foster the translation of research results into societal and economical applications. To this end, the JHS has developed innovative funding formats for interdisciplinary and practice-oriented projects in order to break new ground in the scientific landscape.

The Joachim Herz Award is the Foundation's new award, giving a strong signal from the JHS in supporting innovative research projects by up-and-coming talents.

1 Objective and thematic focus

The Joachim Herz Prize honors promising scientists who show outstanding potential in their field of research and whose interdisciplinary research proposal offers solutions to major societal challenges. The highly endowed award enables early-career researchers to further develop their groundbreaking research across disciplines, while also highlighting their dedication.

The Joachim Herz Prize 2025 addresses the topic "Future Pioneers for Sustainable Biotechnology" and is aimed at early-career scientists who want to contribute to a fossil-free future with innovative and sustainable approaches in the field of resource-efficient biotechnologies.

The call for applications is particularly focused on projects that transcend the conventional boundaries of scientific disciplines, incorporating developments from other fields to engineer advanced processes and applications for sustainable biotechnologies. The emphasis is on biotechnological innovations that address ecological and societal challenges, including approaches of microbial material conversion for fossil-free raw materials for the chemical industry and energy sources, as well as biotechnological processes for carbon sequestration and utilization. The award's scope encompasses a wide range of innovative approaches, including resource-efficient production processes, and climate-friendly technologies and applications. Notably, the award places a particular emphasis on recognizing novel approaches that offer substantial contributions to a future that is independent of fossil fuels.

2 Target group / requirements for application

The award is designated for early-career scientists who have obtained a doctorate in the natural sciences or engineering and are engaged in interdisciplinary and applied research.

The award application may be submitted by application or nomination. Individuals deemed ineligible to apply themselves or who do not wish to submit their own application may nominate candidates by providing the nominee's name and contact information.

Individuals and groups of researchers working at universities or other research institutions in Germany (public and private non-profit) are eligible to apply. Researchers from other European countries may also apply or be nominated, if they have taken up a position at a German research institution by the time of the award ceremony.

3 Funding / eligible costs

Volume of funding:

The Joachim Herz Award is endowed with EUR 500,000. The funds may only be used for the specific purpose of scientific research presented in the application. Only pre-competitive research projects are eligible for funding. This means that the project must be at a stage after basic research and before it is ready for the market.

Eligible costs include personnel and material costs, rental of infrastructure and travel expenses. The JHS does not fund overheads of the institution involved in the project.

The grant will be paid to the institution at which the awardees are working at the time of the award. A usage guideline defines the possible uses and specifications (e.g. eligible types of costs) of the awarded funds. The guidelines for the Joachim Herz Award must also be taken into account.

Award ceremony:

The award ceremony will be held on 30th September 2025 in Hamburg.

Associated conference:

In addition to the research funding, the JHS support a multi-day conference in 2026, which will be planned and organized by the awardees in consultation with the JHS. The costs of the conference will be covered by the JHS.

4 Evaluation criteria/ application requirements

The applicant's recognizable potential for excellence and the interdisciplinary research approach of the submitted project outline are the most important evaluation criteria. The evaluation criteria will include but are not limited to:

Groundbreaking nature of the research project

The project outline demonstrates an innovative research approach with the aim of developing pioneering solutions for specific societal challenges.

Interdisciplinarity of the research project

The project described in the project outline employs an interdisciplinary approach that demonstrates the joint potential of the various disciplines.

Potential for excellence

The applicants exhibit remarkable knowledge and considerable promise in their field, even in light of their early career stage. Their prior work provides a robust foundation for their future research endeavors.

Societal relevance

The research project makes a relevant contribution to sustainable development in the area of a fossil-free future.

Sustainability

The research project supports a holistic approach to sustainability that reconciles economic aspects with the preservation of planetary boundaries and social issues and takes a long-term perspective.

Transfer

Preferably, the project outline should include a clear strategy for the utilization of the research results for social or economic purposes.

5 Selection process

All submissions will be formally evaluated by the JHS for their suitability for this call. The person or group with the most promising research project will be selected by a jury of experts in a two-step process. After reviewing the written applications, the jury selects promising applications, and the applicants will be invited to present their project at the JHS. The final selection will be made following the pitches.

The jury is composed of renowned scientists and experts who have demonstrated outstanding achievements and extensive expertise in the thematic focus of the call.

6 Submission of applications

Applications must be submitted via the JHS application portal by 31st March 2025 at the latest. The following elements are mandatory for the application:

- ▶ Generally comprehensible summary of how the project contributes to a fossil-free future (500 characters max. including spaces)
- ▶ Letter of motivation from the applicant(s) (approx. 1 page, max. 4,000 characters incl. spaces)
- ▶ Abstract of the project (0.5 pages, max. 2,000 characters incl. spaces)
- ▶ Description of the scientific project (approx. 5 pages, max. 20,000 characters incl. spaces), under consideration of:
 - Objective(s) of the project in the thematic focus “fossil-free future”
 - Description of the interdisciplinary research program
 - Societal relevance or need for innovation, respectively
 - Sustainability considerations
 - Innovation potential and - if applicable - technological readiness of the planned research
 - Timeline incl. project milestones

- ▶ References/Literature
- ▶ CVs of the applicants (approx. 2 pages each, max. 8,000 characters incl. spaces)
- ▶ Cost plan (JHS template)
- ▶ Consent of the institution to manage the project (template)

7 Important dates

Application phase

- ▶ February 03rd, 2025 - March 31st, 2025

Online information session

- ▶ February 27th, 2025 ([registration](#))

Invitation of the most promising candidates for presentation:

- ▶ May 2025

Project Pitch:

- ▶ June 2025, JHS Hamburg

Announcement of the award winner(s):

- ▶ July 2025

Award ceremony:

- ▶ September 30th, 2025, in Hamburg

8 Contact

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- In case of uncertainty, the German version of this document applies. -