Call innovate! Fund 2025

New perspectives for biogenic resources

Preamble

The non-profit Joachim Herz Stiftung (JHS) was established in 2008 and is one of the largest German foundations. It is committed to innovation and the transfer of cutting-edge research so that more research findings can be put into practice and generate societal benefits.

Despite excellent basic research, comparatively few research results find their way into practical applications in Germany. In order to overcome global challenges such as climate change or resource scarcity, bold and innovative approaches are needed, which can be developed in particular by bringing together different perspectives and competences. The JHS recognises the urgent need to specifically promote the use of research results for social and economic 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.

1 Objective and thematic focus

With the innovate! Fund, the JHS supports interdisciplinary research groups with a focus on the natural sciences and engineering who want to develop their research in an application-oriented way and thus contribute to a fossil-free future.

This year's call focusses on the innovative use and production of biogenic resources, particularly in areas that have been heavily reliant on fossil resources to date. This includes resource-efficient approaches such as the utilisation of biogenic residues and waste materials or projects on new possibilities for coupled and cascade utilisation. The development and testing of innovative cultivation systems, pioneering approaches to multifunctional land use and the utilisation of new types of biomass are also possible.

2 Target group / requirements for application

The Innovate! Fund is aimed at groups, also with members of different institutions, of at least three researchers with a doctorate from different disciplines, with a focus on the natural sciences and engineering, working at universities or other research institutions (public or private non-profit organisations) in Brandenburg, Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein or Saxony-Anhalt.

Researchers from other European countries or from other German states are also eligible to apply, provided that they have started their research at a research institution in one of the above-mentioned states by the time the contract is concluded.

3 Funding / eligible costs

As part of the application for the innovate! Fund, a total of up to 1 million euros in funding can be applied for over a maximum project duration of five years. Only pre-competitive research projects are eligible for funding. This means that the project must be at a stage after basic research and before market maturity (usually technology readiness level 3-6).

Eligible costs include personnel and material costs, rental of infrastructure or travel expenses. Purely administrative costs of the institution involved in the project (overheads) are not eligible. The grant will be paid to the organisation of the main applicant(s) based on a grant agreement.

4 Evaluation criteria

The main evaluation criteria are the innovation and transfer potential as well as the scientific quality of the proposed project. The evaluation criteria include at least:

Innovation potential
The project outline is characterised by an innovative research approach with the aim of developing cutting-edge solutions for specific societal challenges. The project is characterised by a high degree of originality.

Scientific transfer
The project outline shows a clear strategy for the use of the research results for social or economic exploitation.

Interdisciplinarity
The project described in the project outline takes an interdisciplinary approach, using the joint potential of the various disciplines.

Scientific quality
The project outline contains a clear research question derived from the current state of research. The applicants' methods and their approach are sound and appropriate to address the research question(s).

Qualification of the applicants
Applicants demonstrate outstanding knowledge and promising development potential in their field. Their previous work and activities provide an excellent basis for their future research projects.

Societal relevance
The research project makes a societally relevant contribution to sustainable development in the field of a fossil-free future.

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

5 Selection process

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

The jury is composed of eminent scientists and experts who are recognised for their outstanding achievements and extensive expertise in the thematic focus of the competition.

6 Submission of applications

Applications must be submitted in writing via the JHS application portal by 30 April 2025 at the latest. The following documents must be submitted with the application:

- Generally comprehensible summary of how the project contributes to a fossil-free future (500 characters max. including spaces)
- Abstract of the project (approx. 0.5 pages, max. 2,000 characters incl. spaces)
- Description of the scientific project, answering the following questions (approx. 7.5 pages, max. 30,000 characters incl. spaces)
- Societal relevance (approx. 0.5 pages, max. 2,000 characters incl. spaces):
  - What societal challenge does your project address?
  - What problem do you want to solve with your research?

Innovation potential (approx. 1 page, max. 4,000 characters incl. spaces):

- Depending on the nature of the project: Who or how many people would benefit from your solution? How big is the market for your approach?
- What is innovative/new about your research approach?
- What is special about your project; why does it no longer fit into traditional basic research funding programmes?
- To the extent possible, how would you rate the current technological readiness level of your project? *(no basis for assessment)*

Aims (approx. 0.5 pages, max. 2,000 characters incl. spaces):

- What is the main objective of your project?
- How does your project contribute to the vision of a fossil-free future?

Description of the Interdisciplinary Research Programme (4 pages, max. 16,000 characters incl. spaces):

- Why do you need perspectives from different disciplines for your project and how does your project benefit from them?
- How is collaboration between the members of the research groups organised; is there experience of previous collaboration?
- What is the current state of scientific and technological research in your field?
- How do you intend to achieve the stated objective of your project?
- What challenges do you need to overcome during your project?

- How do you ensure the robustness of your approach?
- Are there alternative approaches?

Transfer strategy (approx. 1 page, max. 4,000 characters incl. spaces):
- How do you ensure that your project addresses actual needs in societal and economic practice?
- How do you maintain contact with potential stakeholders in the implementation of your solution?
- How do you plan to take your research into practice?
- Assuming success: How scalable/transferable would the results of your project be?

Sustainability considerations (approx. 0.5 pages, max. 2,000 characters incl. spaces):
- To what extent is your approach suitable for long-term societal/economic practice?
- How do you balance economic, environmental and social concerns?

- Rough schedule with milestones
- References
- 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:
- March 3rd, 2025 – April 30th, 2025

Online information session:
- March 27th, 2025 (registration)

Invitation of the most promising candidates for presentation:
- July 18th, 2025

Project Pitch:
- August 2025, in Hamburg

Start of funding:
- From November 1st, 2025

8 Contact

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