

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

We've collected the most common questions to help you navigate the application process with ease.

ELIGIBILITY

Q1: Who can apply to Helmholtz project calls?

Applicants must be Helmholtz scientists/employees, meaning they hold an employment contract with a Helmholtz center. All proposals must involve at least two different Helmholtz Centers to ensure cross-center collaboration. If you also meet all the other thematic and general requirements, you are eligible to apply for a project. In addition, other Helmholtz centers or external partners from research or industry can be involved. Please check our website [Helmholtz Associated Centres](#) for more information.

Q2: Can I submit a proposal with a university or external partner?

Yes, in addition to the minimum of two partners from different Helmholtz centres, external partners (e.g. universities, research institutions, companies, or non-profits) can join a proposal. However, funding is only granted to Helmholtz Centres. External partners may be involved in a project, but they cannot apply independently.

Q3: Can I participate in multiple proposals?

Yes, you may participate in more than one proposal, as long as you can clearly manage your time and resources across all projects. It is also recommended to limit the thematic overlaps between proposals.

Q4: Does my project topic fit the criteria?

You can intersect any topic, as long as you retain the focus on AI and ML and the focus on data analysis, method application and method development (or similar).

Q5: Does the call support machine learning hardware-related proposals?

We typically do not support projects planning to use funds to acquire hardware. There are sufficient available Helmholtz hardware resources so project funding requests for hardware are unnecessary. However, projects developing (SoTA) hardware as an outcome etc. are welcome to apply to the call.

Q6: I submitted an application in a previous project call that was not funded. Now I would like to resubmit it. Is this possible?

Yes, resubmissions are welcome and encouraged. You will be required to submit a resubmission statement with your application, see call text for detailed requirements for resubmissions.

TIMELINE AND PROCEDURE

Q8: How often are project calls launched?

Most project calls are announced annually, typically in the second or third quarter of the year. The annual call with the deadline will be published on our website at www.helmholtz.ai.

Q9: When is the final deadline for submission?

Please check the annual call announcement. Documents can be uploaded on the given date until 11:59pm CET.

Q10: When will decisions be announced?

For every call there is a timeline with estimated dates, including for the funding decision. Please check the website. Usually the funding decisions are announced by the end of Q1 of the following year.

Q11: How long can my project run, and when are first results expected?

Funded projects may run for a maximum of 3 years. First practical results — such as deliverables, milestones, or early prototypes — are generally expected within the first year after funding begins.

PROPOSAL DOCUMENTS AND APPLICATION

Q12: What is the current Helmholtz AI project call criteria? How likely will the Helmholtz AI project call criteria change in the future?

The Helmholtz AI steering board reviews the Helmholtz AI project call criteria annually. To stay up to date, please check the Helmholtz AI project call and template document each year.

Q13: What formats do I have to follow when submitting an application?

Please check our website for all project call related documentation, information and templates. All criteria are listed in the main document.

Q14: Where can I add a reference list and appendices?

The proposal's main body is limited to 5 pages. It is best to use these 5 pages for the most important points. The (short) bibliography/references can be included in the appendix under the "Appendix H - Reference List" heading (see "Template_1.1_Application.docx" in the project call documents and templates folder [here](#)). In the application tool, there is a tab for "documents" where you can attach further project information and graphics. If uploading to "documents" please merge all additional documents into one PDF file.

Q15: How detailed should the work packages be described in the appendix?

The work packages should be described briefly as:

- a) A goal-describing title or sentence ('objective')
- b) An outline of the tasks (1 to approx. 5) using key points/key words ('tasks')

The deliverables can be described in a descriptive sentence (e.g. 'provision of dataset on xyz platform' or 'publication of benchmarked algorithms').

Q16: Can I have work packages dedicated to preparing datasets (e.g. preprocessing and labeling)?

The focus of your project should not be on data generation, labeling, cleaning or similar, but could be a minor part of a successful project. Therefore, a work package on dataset preparation could be included (if necessary), as long as the wider project focus is retained and apparent.

Q17: Where do I submit the abstract?

The abstract only needs to be submitted in the online submission system. You should not include this additionally on your cover page.

Q18: Where can I find PoF-IV research fields?

Please visit the website of [Research Fields - Helmholtz](#) for more information.

Q19: What is the format of the CV?

A CV template is provided on the website, in addition to the call text and application template. Each CV should be written in English, scientific in nature, and no longer than one page. Please note that your CV should also contain references to relevant accomplishments beyond scientific papers and citation metrics (e.g. software packages, policy papers, standards, datasets, patent filings, entrepreneurship, and industry collaborations).

Online Application portal

Q20: How can we upload the document in the application portal?

You can upload the document in the application portal via the following steps:

1. Please login to the application portal.
2. Go to "my proposals".
3. Choose your project.
4. Choose the menu "documents" and upload the document (pdf) there

Q21: Who can register and submit the application?

The main contact person of the project can register and submit the application. The coordinating PI or scientific coordinator can also do so.

Support Letters

Q22: Who is required to sign the letter of support?

A letter of support is needed from each of the participating Helmholtz centers. As described in the call, the letters have to be signed by the center's board of directors (DE: "Vorstand"). A letter from the head of the institute is unfortunately not sufficient.

Q23: Do we need to provide a letter of intent/support from our external academic/industrial partners?

No. A letter of support is not required from external academic or industrial partners. Only letters from participating Helmholtz Centres' boards of directors are required.

Q24: Does the original letter from the Board need to be mailed, or will a scan suffice?

A scanned copy is sufficient for the application.

Ethics Assessments

Q25: Can the ethics assessment be conducted by the applicant/project PI or should the relevant department of the corresponding center be contacted?

There is no requirement for this assessment to be done by an ethics-relevant department of your center, the applicant can also complete this. However, it is a good idea to check with your center for existing guidelines, protocols and in-house experts on these types of statements. Note that claiming 'no ethical implications' will not be accepted or considered a thorough ethics assessment.

PARTNERS / COLLABORATIONS

Q26: What is the maximum number of PIs and experts that can join a proposal?

The maximum number of PIs that can be registered in the project portal is 8. One of the PIs has to be registered as the coordinating PI (you can do this in the online application form) and at least 2 PIs need to be from two different Helmholtz centers. The maximum number of external experts is 6.

Q27: Who can be an external partner?

Academic institutions, companies or non-profits can be external partners.

Q28: Are external partners expected to contribute financially?

There are no financial contributions expected from external partners.

Q29: Do potential external partners make their own contract with Helmholtz or are these partners handled as subcontractors of one of the Helmholtz centers which submit the proposal?

A contract will be only made with the submitting Helmholtz centers. The centers must take care of communication and agreements with external partners.

Q30: How do we find a suitable project partner at another Helmholtz center for the project call?

Firstly, please visit our website [Helmholtz Associated Centers](#) for more information on Helmholtz centers and partners.

Secondly, we suggest that you engage with us. For example, i) attend our events, ii) work with consultants, iii) check Helmholtz AI associates.

Thirdly, please attend our Project Call Information Events. There will be opportunities there to pitch your project idea and look for potential partners.

Finally, we have recently established a collaborative workspace on Mattermost for prospective partners to network. You can pitch your project ideas to other Helmholtz researchers and look for complementary expertise. To access the channel follow this [link](#).

Q31: Does the lead researcher have to be a PI? Can a non-permanent employee be an applicant (and PI)?

There are no restrictions; what's important is the ability to procure a letter from the center's board vouching for matching funds. If you are unsure, first contact your local administration. You should be able/allowed to host your own projects depending on the governance of your host institution and on your qualification.

Q32: Do both of the Helmholtz centers need to focus on AI methods, or can the goal also be the transfer of knowledge of AI methods from center 1 to center 2?

Both are valid. The original idea was to bring method expertise and domain data together to confer knowledge to both sides.

Q33: Is it possible to incorporate an existing consultation with Helmholtz AI Consultants into the application?

It is possible and highly encouraged. Asking if consultants are involved in the project is part of the application form.

Q34: Is it advantageous to have industrial partners? Would we need an IP statement?

As projects are for early, high risk/high gain projects, industry/SME partners are not required. However, it may be advantageous to include such a partner if it fits into your project design. For IP issues we strongly recommend that you talk to the experts at your center/host institution.

Q35: How must AI/ML expertise be represented within the consortium? Can it come from an external partner?

Every project must demonstrate sufficient AI/ML expertise within the consortium. This can be provided by:

- A dedicated AI/ML partner, or
- A team that combines both domain knowledge and AI/ML expertise.

Two centers with only domain expertise (e.g., environmental research) are not eligible — the required AI/ML competence must be part of the project partners.

External partners with AI expertise may be included, and this is acceptable. However, they cannot receive INF funding; INF funds are only available to Helmholtz Centers.

FINANCING

Q36: Is the 250K from INF the total budget for all participating centers? Or each center gets 250K from INF?

The 250k from INF is the budget ceiling for the entire project, i.e. for all participating centers. It would have to be complemented by at least the same amount in matching funding or in-kind contributions as is common for all INF funded projects.

Q37: Where is the 250k matching money coming from? Helmholtz core function or can it be third party funding?

Third party funding cannot be used for matching funds, based on the rules of (most) funding agencies.

Q38: Is it possible to concentrate the funding on 1 center?

Contribution must be (mostly) balanced, e.g. 70/30 is the maximum imbalance permitted.

Q39: What elements are not eligible for funding?

Data collection, preparation, cleaning or validation and indirect costs. Moreover, there is no funding for investments (e.g., GPU hardware, infrastructure) and overhead costs are not eligible and should not be included in the budget.

Q40: What counts as in-kind funding?

This could include contribution of work hours of funded staff or data- or compute time with a plausible cost report.

Q41: How are approved funds distributed among project partners?

In accordance with the processes of the Initiative and Networking Fund (INF), approved funds are paid to the coordinating Helmholtz Centre. It is then the responsibility of the coordinating centre to distribute the funds to the participating project partners according to the financial plan.

Q42: Can I submit the same proposal to other funding lines at the same time?

No. Proposals submitted for this call must not be under consideration by any other funding line within the Helmholtz Association or elsewhere. If a proposal was previously submitted and rejected, it may be resubmitted.

MISCELLANEOUS

Q43: Is there an add on opportunity this year?

No, this year's project call welcomes projects of all topics from Helmholtz employees/scientists as long as they retain the focus on AI and ML and the focus on data analysis, method application and method development (or similar).

Q44: Do you have any tips for successful applications?

Read the entire Project Call application and follow the instructions carefully. Missing or incorrect documents (e.g. going over the 5-page main proposal limit, putting unrequested information on your cover page, or forgetting to include the board letter) will lead to delays in processing your application. Pay close attention to the scoring and exclusion criteria. When writing your proposal, be clear and concise, and establish your major points in a logical way. A lot depends on the way you represent your main project objectives. The goals of the project should be clear and the milestones/deliverables should be clearly mentioned. The innovation and ambition of your project should be easily discernible to the extent that it is even apparent to AI experts from outside of your domain.

Q45: Where can I find successful project applications from previous years?

You can find successful projects from previous years on our website: [Successfully Funded Projects 2024](#).

Q46: What is the necessary scope for funding? Is only the development of AI-functionality fundable or also its assurance for safety-critical use-cases?

The panel consists of groups of experts not focused on a particular domain; if you present a good case, it will likely be recognised as important.

Q47: Do the applications get reviewed by the same set of reviewers, or are the reviewers different?

A number of proposals will be assigned to each reviewer to review; all proposals will then be reviewed by several reviewers. The ranking is then determined in a structured discussion by the entire panel of reviewers.

Q48: We/I have been awarded a Helmholtz AI Project in the past. Is it possible to apply for a follow-up project which would build upon the progress we have made so far?

From an administrative (INF) perspective, it is possible to be funded multiple times. The new application would need to convince the panel on the basis of the call criteria. It should be ensured, for example, that it is a truly novel, high-risk and high-gain project, that the composition of the project partners makes sense or, where necessary for expertise/implementation, could be flexibly adapted.

Q49: What happens to the project results after the project period?

The project results are to be made available for use in Helmholtz AI and the Helmholtz Association in the medium term. This means, e.g., that software and algorithms must be open source (complying with an OSI approved license) and methods, reference data, reports and publications of the project results must be open access.

Q50: I have further questions, where can I find out more or who can I contact?

See the [Project Call webpage](#) for further information including the call text and application templates.

For formal questions regarding this call, please contact projects@helmholtz.ai.