

Kickstart Fund

The Joachim Herz Foundation will support up to 15 active or former Add-on Fellows annually through the “Kickstart Fund” until the end of 2027, who wish to pursue a transfer idea as part of their scientific work. The funding includes financial resources as well as additional support services tailored to individual needs for building relevant skills and a suitable network. The goal is to enable transfer projects based on scientific findings that have a societal impact and to bring research results into application. The funding specifically targets projects that are in the early stages and do not yet have sufficient readiness to be considered for other transfer or startup funding.

1 Target Group

Access to the funding is directed at the changing group of active and former Add-on Fellows of the Joachim Herz Foundation. The selection is based on objective criteria aligned with the foundation’s purpose. The funding serves the “promotion of science and research” and thus benefits the public; it does not aim to favor individual persons but focuses on results and structures that benefit society.

2 Readiness Level and Target Vision

The projects are situated in the pre-competitive area. Achievable milestones (e.g., validation of a principle, lab-scale prototype, data package, methodological standards) are considered the target vision during the funding period, rather than “market readiness”. The classification within a readiness level system (e.g., TRL/S-TRL/SEL) and the level aimed for during the funding must be presented in the application (see Section 4).

3 Funding Amount and Duration of Support

The “Kickstart Fund” is aimed at active and former Add-on Fellows who wish to advance a transfer project over a period of six to twelve months. Funding up to €50,000 is available per project and person. These funds can be used for personnel and material costs during the funding period.

Eligible Expenses

Eligible expenses are those that are directly related to the funded transfer project and contribute to further developing the scientific content, transferring it to new contexts, or testing its applicability.

This includes, in particular:

- **Project-related personnel expenses that are professionally justified**, e.g., for scientific staff, costs for (partial) release from teaching obligations, student assistants, or external experts with clearly defined, project-related tasks.
- **Costs for testing, validating, or further developing scientifically based approaches**, e.g., concept studies, feasibility analyses, lab prototypes, or methodological pilot projects.
- **Expenses for project-related consulting or expertise**, such as legal, regulatory, technical, or strategic issues
- **Travel costs and participation fees**, provided they are related to professionally relevant events, networking formats, or training that serve the project goal.
- **Material resources, software, or infrastructure costs**, as long as they can be assigned to the specific project and do not involve the acquisition of economic goods that will be transferred to a company.

Non-eligible expenses are those primarily aimed at economic objectives (e.g., marketing and sales activities, brand building, creation of promotional materials or pitch decks for investors) and measures for the direct founding or establishment of a company, as long as they go beyond a scientifically based testing phase.

4 Application and Selection

Applications can be submitted continuously from February to the end of October each year through the digital application portal. The components of the application are:

- Personal information
- Cover letter with motivation (max. 1 A4 page)
- Description of the transfer project including readiness level and target vision (max. 4 A4 pages)
- Presentation of the intellectual property situation
- Cost plan (max. 1 A4 page)
- Timeline (max. 1 A4 page)
- Curriculum vitae in tabular form including publication list (only "accepted" and "revised and resubmitted/revision" from "peer-reviewed" publications) (max. 4 A4 pages)

The application documents must be complete and submitted within the specified timeframe. Exceeding the indicated length may lead to the rejection of the application. The use of generative models for text and image creation must be transparently disclosed (see also DFG guidelines¹).

¹ DFG - German Research Foundation - AI, ChatGPT, and the Sciences – DFG formulates guidelines for the use of generative models for text and image creation. It must be ensured that "the use of generative models does not infringe on any third-party intellectual property and does not lead to scientific misconduct, such as plagiarism."

The selection is carried out through a two-stage process:

- Preliminary review and initial assessment by the Joachim Herz Foundation
- Written external expert evaluation

The central selection criteria are:

- **Level of Innovation and Originality of the Project Idea.**
How do you assess the level of innovation, and what is your personal contribution to it?
- **Clear Presentation of the Transfer Potential of the Project Idea**
Describe the project idea as well as the unique selling propositions (USPs) of the project. State the transfer goal and the target audience or estimate the market size or market potential. What options for commercialization and further financing do you plan after the funding period, and what steps are planned during the project duration to achieve this?
- **Project partners and relevant experience that increase the likelihood of success**
These can include, for example, cooperation partners from the business sector, transfer support offices of the respective institution, or established contacts with the target group of the transfer project. A letter of intent from the cooperation partners can be optionally attached to the application.
- **Transparent cost and financial planning**
Preferably in tabular format.
- **Funding requirements**
Do the funds from the Joachim Herz Foundation enable significant steps that would likely not be possible without funding?

The final selection is made by the Joachim Herz Foundation based on the evaluation. There is no right to access or justification of the decisions.

5 Allocation, Recipients, and Use of Funds

Funding will be continuously rewarded during the aforementioned period. The allocation occurs within the framework of third-party funding to a German research institution (public-law sponsorship or tax-privileged institutions), where the funded individual is employed—at least for the duration of the funding.

The funds must be used promptly and appropriately within the receiving research institution (no passing on to third parties); unspent funds must be returned.

6 Reporting Obligation

At the end of the funding period, the funded individual must report to the Joachim Herz Foundation at a (virtual) meeting about the progress of the project (presentation).

7 Miscellaneous

The Joachim Herz Foundation reserves the right to revoke the allocation and assert a repayment claim if incorrect or incomplete information was provided in the application, if the approval conditions are not adhered to, or if there are other significant reasons for revocation. There is no entitlement to funding from the Joachim Herz Foundation.

The Joachim Herz Foundation also reserves the right to change these guidelines.

Hamburg, September 2025