Call for applications
Joachim Herz Award 2026

Preamble

The Joachim Herz Foundation (JHS) was founded in Hamburg in 2008 and is one of the largest German foundations. The Foundation is committed to innovation and supporting the transfer of cutting-edge research into practice so that more research results can be put into practice and generate social benefits. The foundation strengthens start-up ecosystems and works to foster a new generation of entrepreneurial talent dedicated to sustainable business models and radical innovation. The foundation's aim is to provide effective solutions to current challenges such as climate protection, increased resource efficiency, and securing skilled labour. 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.

With the Joachim Herz Award, the JHS aims to send a strong signal in support of innovative research projects by up-and-coming talents and to recognize excellent research approaches that have the potential to generate a particularly significant social impact.

1   Objective and thematic focus

The Joachim Herz Award 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 Award 2025 addresses the topic "Smart use of water" and is aimed at early-career scientists from economics and business administration who want to contribute to social and economic challenges.
Water is an indispensable resource. It is essential for ecological systems, human health, and agricultural and industrial production. However, climate change, overuse, and persistent pollutants are threatening the availability of clean water while simultaneously turning it into a potential threat. Solving problems related to climate change requires innovative solutions based on excellent scientific research, as well as individual risk-taking, social capacity for action, and entrepreneurship.

The award therefore honors innovative and sustainable research approaches that develop solutions for our future and put them into practice.

Possible topics could include for example behavioral innovations to increase efficiency in water consumption, approaches that address the governance of water as a public good, work on digital and urban innovations for water resilience, and the financing and implementation of nature-based water solutions in nature and agriculture, as well as analyses of the development and financing of entrepreneurial and technical innovations in the water sector in general and in particular with regard to water quality and safety.

The call for applications is particularly focused on projects that transcend the conventional boundaries of economics and business administration and draw on developments from other fields to develop advanced methods and applications.

2 Target group / requirements for application

The award is designated for early-career scientists who have obtained a doctorate in economics or business administration and are engaged in interdisciplinary and applied research.
Individuals 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, 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 €500,000. These funds may only be used for the scientific research project described in the application. Only pre-competitive research projects are eligible for funding. This means the project should be past the basic research stage but not yet ready for the market.
Eligible costs include personnel, materials, infrastructure rental, and travel. The JHS does not fund institutional overhead costs.
The grant will be paid to the institution where the awardee is employed at the time of the award ceremony. A usage guideline defines how the awarded funds can be used and what types of costs are eligible. The Joachim Herz Award guidelines must also be taken into account.

Award ceremony:
The award ceremony will be held on August 27, 2026 in Hamburg.

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 social and economic development.

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

— **Transfer**
The project outlines clear transfer efforts aimed at social or economic purposes. This is reflected in the planned use of the prize money.

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 multi-stage 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 March 31, 2026 at the latest (link). The following elements are mandatory for the application:

— **Generally comprehensible summary** of how the project contributes to the smart use of water (500 characters max. including spaces)
— **Letter of motivation** from the applicant (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:
  o Objective(s) of the project in the thematic focus "smart use of water"
  o Description of the interdisciplinary research program
  o Societal relevance or need for innovation, respectively
  o Sustainability considerations
  o Innovation potential and - if applicable - technological readiness of the planned research
  o Timeline incl. project milestones
— **References**
— **CV** (max. 4 pages)
— **Cost plan** (JHS template)

- **Consent of the institution** to manage the project (template)
- **Overview of project partners**

7   Important dates

- Application phase (link)
  January 12, 2026 - March 31, 2026
- Online information session
  February 04, 2026 (registration)
- Invitation of the shortlisted candidates:
  May 2026
- Project Pitch:
  June 10 – 11, 2026, JHS Hamburg
- Announcement of the award winner(s):
  August 2026
- Award ceremony:
  August 27, 2026, in Hamburg

8   Contact

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