

Call for applications for the “Best Minds” funding programme: Leibniz Junior Research Groups

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1. Aims of the programme

The Leibniz Association seeks to recruit extremely promising, talented junior researchers from Germany and the rest of the world, and therefore offers them attractive conditions such as early independence, competitive facilities and networking opportunities.

As part of the Leibniz Junior Research Groups funding format, younger researchers are to be given the opportunity to pursue their own research projects and establish themselves in their respective fields – including through additional research projects (acquired through the DFG, ERC, etc.). The recommended career step following on from the Junior Research Group should be an appointment to a professorship or a comparable, independent academic activity (e.g. within an academic institution, commercial company or research infrastructure).

Through its Leibniz Junior Research Groups programme, the Leibniz Association is able to present itself at international career fairs and accelerate the internationalisation of the Leibniz Institutes and the Leibniz Association as a whole.

2. Scope of the programme

The funding goes towards the establishment of a Junior Research Group and the provision of essential resources. This includes personnel costs for the group leader, two or three doctoral candidates and, in some cases, for postdoctoral group members, as well as for adequate equipment and facilities.

Duration of funding: Five years (two of which are funded by the relevant Leibniz Institute)

3. Eligibility criteria

In general, candidates should have obtained their doctorate no more than five years ago¹. They should have a track record of outstanding academic work in their field. Candidates already working at Leibniz institutions can be nominated.

4. Applications

Applications must be directed to the Senate Competition Committee (SAW). The application text and all documents must be submitted in English. The chairperson of the SAW will decide on any potential exceptions. The Leibniz Association Headquarters will provide an application template for every project proposal.

The proposed project must meet the following requirements: the application for the establishment of a Junior Research Group must encompass a five-year programme of work. The detailed project proposal must follow the structure of the template provided and should not exceed a total length of 12 pages (excluding the bibliography). Administrative information and the financial plan are submitted directly via the electronic application system. This results in a total volume of approximately 20 pages (excluding attachments). The structure of the application is as follows:

- A) The candidate's academic qualifications (weighting 40%)
- The candidate's curriculum vitae and academic achievements, including mention of their top ten publications (as an appendix in one document)
 - An appraisal of their academic achievements in the form of at least two current letters of recommendation
- B) The candidate's proposed research project and its significance for the Leibniz Institute (weighting 40%)
- Statements by the candidates regarding their proposed research project and their motivation to conduct research at the Leibniz Institute in question, including:
 - A summary of the planned project, including its research question and methods
 - An introduction to the academic field
 - A work programme with milestones and work packages
 - A rationale for the originality and innovative nature of the research project
 - An explanation of the research project's relevance in terms of its contribution to solving current academic and social, ecological or economic problems
- C) Structural efficacy (weighting 10%)
- A concept outlining the candidate's scientific independence within the institute and how the project will be integrated into the institute's research landscape
 - A description of the contribution to the internationalisation of the Leibniz Institute
 - Explanation of supporting measures in terms of adhering to the Leibniz equality standards² and the institute's equality concept when setting up the Junior Research Group
 - Explanation of the consideration given to the Leibniz career guidelines³

¹ Child-raising adjustment: add two years per child under the age of 12.

² [Leibniz Equality Standards](#)

³ [Career Guidelines of the Leibniz Association](#)

- Adherence to the Leibniz recruitment standards⁴ in the selection procedure
- Integration in the academic system: planned national and international collaborations

D) Implementation and finances (weighting 10%)

- Assurance of follow-up funding from the Leibniz Institute, including its extent
- Presentation of the intended use of the funding in a finance plan which encompasses the direct and indirect project-related costs over the duration of the funding period, including an indication of the annual staff costs, material costs (including travel costs) and investments and a brief justification of their necessity
- Description of the quality assurance measures (e.g. adherence to the rules of good scientific practice)

For additional general information, please see the applicant guidelines for the Leibniz Competition.

5. Criteria for assessing applications

Academic excellence is the necessary criterion for funding.

The assessments should be guided by the following criteria that underpin the SAW evaluation.

Assessment of the suggested leader of the Leibniz Junior Research Group:

- Academic performance, based on the number, quality and impact of publications, invited talks, and funding obtained from third parties
- The candidate's career status and future career prospects

Assessment of the academic project:

- Academic and methodological quality by international standards
- The research project's chances of success: maturity of the project, specificity of the work programme and feasibility of the project
- Originality and level of innovation
- Relevance: contributions to solving current academic and social, ecological or economic problems

Structural efficacy:

- A concept outlining the candidate's scientific independence within the institute and how the project is integrated into the institute's research landscape
- Internationality: the funding of foreign candidates and candidates with international experience is explicitly encouraged
- Contribution to implementing the Leibniz equality standards and realising the Leibniz diversity objective
- Consideration of the Leibniz career guidelines
- Adherence to the Leibniz recruitment standards
- Integration in the academic system: planned national and international collaborations

Assessment of the planned implementation and financial planning:

⁴ [Standards for the appointments to academic management positions within the Leibniz Association](#)

- Assurance of follow-up funding from the Leibniz Institute, including its extent
- Appropriateness of the cost and finance plan and of the quality assurance measures

6. Reporting and quality assurance

After two years, the funded projects will provide the SAW with an interim report (of no more than five pages in length, excluding all appendices), which focuses particularly on the extent to which the milestones formulated in the application have been achieved. The SAW will take note of the report and, where required, provide recommendations for the project. After the end of the funding phase, a final report will be submitted to the SAW. All researchers involved in the project commit to conduct their research in compliance with the rules of good scientific practice.⁵

7. Contact for questions and advice on applying

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⁵ [Guidelines of the Leibniz Association on Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice](#)