

CZS Wildcard

Programme to encourage
unconventional ideas



Call for proposals for interdisciplinary
consortia

Published on: 08 February 2024
Application deadline: 6 May 2024

1 Focus and objective

One 'Wild' Idea – Three Scientists – Maximum Freedom

With the CZS Wildcard funding programme, Carl-Zeiss-Stiftung (CZS) is creating an opportunity to freely pursue research ideas at a very early stage. The goal is to support unconventional 'wild' ideas in the STEM field with a high potential for innovation. CZS Wildcard is aimed at interdisciplinary consortia comprised of three scientists with projects that are radically new and, therefore, particularly bold. The CZS relies on the intuition of the scientists. No individual preparatory scientific work is required. A simplified application procedure and uncomplicated funding modalities lay the foundation for maximum freedom.

2 Subject and scope of funding

The application must describe a specific research project in natural sciences, life sciences and/or engineering sciences (STEM fields) at the interface of two or more disciplines that are intended to be pursued during the funding period.

Funding can be requested for up to a total of

EUR 750,000.

The funding period is two years. The earliest possible project start date is 1 January 2025 and the project must start by no later than 1 March 2025. A cost-neutral extension beyond the funding period is not possible.

The following costs are supported

- Personnel funds for scientific and technical personnel in the research group (e.g. postdocs, doctoral students, assistants). The CZS expects the contractual working time of doctoral candidates to match the amount of work associated with the activity, which may mean full-time positions. Furthermore, it expects that the

employment contracts of scientific employees are concluded for the entire period of the respective qualification phase regardless of the duration of the project funding.

- Material resources (this also includes travel funds, resources for scientific communication, networking activities, etc.)
- Investment funds

In addition to the requested project funding, the Carl Zeiss Stiftung will contribute an overhead lump sum amounting to 20 per cent of the project funding amount. The university will be responsible for deciding how to use overhead the lump sum, in consideration of the legal requirements. Please observe the instructions to that end in the application guidelines.

3 Eligibility to apply

CZS Wildcard is aimed at scientists from STEM disciplines who have completed a PhD. The application must be submitted by an interdisciplinary consortium comprised of at least three scientists. They must represent at least two STEM subjects according to the DFG (German Research Foundation) subject classification system¹.

All applicants must be employed for at least 50% of a full-time position at their respective institution until at least 31 August 2025. For applicants with a temporary employment status, the employer must guarantee that the applicant will be employed for the entire duration of the project in the event funding is received.

Applicants may only be involved in one CZS Wildcard application. Scientists currently funded as part of the CZS Wildcard programme are not eligible to apply. Applicants whose application was rejected in a previous CZS Wildcard call for proposals may not submit an application with the same content.

¹ In this context, interdisciplinarity is understood to refer to interaction between scientific subjects according to the DFG subject classification system. Interdisciplinarity is ensured, for example, when scientists from the fields of biochemistry and biophysics work together (cf. https://www.dfg.de/dfg_profil/gremien/fachkollegien/faecher/)

Applications are submitted by the spokesperson of the consortium. His/her university will be the grant recipient of the project. The spokesperson must work at a state university or university of applied sciences of the states Baden-Württemberg, Thuringia, or Rhineland-Palatinate (CZS funding states).

The following universities and universities of applied sciences may provide the consortium's spokesperson and are thereby entitled to submit a maximum of **two applications** each.

This does not limit other scientists at the respective university from participating in further CZS Wildcard consortia:

- **Universities in Baden-Württemberg:** Freiburg, Heidelberg, Hohenheim, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Konstanz, Mannheim, Stuttgart, Tübingen, Ulm
- **Universities of applied sciences in Baden-Württemberg:** Aalen, Albstadt-Sigmaringen, Biberach, Esslingen, Furtwangen, Heilbronn, Karlsruhe, HTWG Konstanz, Mannheim, Nürtingen-Geislingen, Offenburg, Pforzheim, Ravensburg-Weingarten, Reutlingen, Rottenburg, HdM Stuttgart, HfT Stuttgart, Ulm
- **Universities in Thuringia:** Erfurt, Ilmenau, Jena, Weimar
- **Universities of applied sciences in Thuringia:** Erfurt, Jena, Nordhausen, Schmalkalden
- **Universities in Rhineland-Palatinate:** Kaiserslautern-Landau, Koblenz, Mainz, Trier
- **Universities of applied sciences in Rhineland-Palatinate:** Bingen, Kaiserslautern, Koblenz, Mainz, Trier, Worms

Up to 1/3 of the scientists in the consortium may be employed at

- a non-university research institution and/or
- a university or non-university research institution with headquarters outside the three abovementioned federal states or abroad and/or
- belong to a discipline outside the STEM subject spectrum.

In total, a maximum of 33% of the approved funding may go to members of the funded consortium who are employed at research institutions with headquarters outside of Baden-Württemberg, Thuringia or Rhineland-Palatinate (in Germany or abroad). All members of the consortium have to be employed at a public or a non-profit (“gemeinnützig”) research institution.

The application must be accompanied by *letter(s) of intent* (LOI) from the university, university of applied sciences or non-university research institution at which the scientists of the applying consortium are employed. In the letter, they undertake to offer the scientist the appropriate conditions for independent research work, to grant budget autonomy within the scope of the legal provisions and to organise the administrative handling of the project (administration of funding, etc.).

4 Selection procedure and criteria

The selection process consists of two stages.

- All applications which are submitted undergo a double-blind peer review process. This means that the reviews for the pre-selection are prepared without knowledge of the applicants’ identity. Based on the expert opinions, a scientific selection committee selects the most promising applications.
- The selected consortia will be invited to present their project to the selection committee during a two-day selection event. The selection event will take place face-to-face on **23 and 24 September 2024** in Stuttgart. At least two scientists from a consortium must participate in the selection event.
- The presented applications will be evaluated by the selection committee. In addition, there will be a mutual evaluation of the participating consortia.
- Based on the evaluations, the CZS will make the final funding decision, which will be announced on site at the end of the selection event.

There is no entitlement to funding. Rejection decisions will not be justified. No information will be given about the selection committee's evaluations, the result of the mutual evaluation or the total score achieved.

In reviewing applications, priority will be given to the following:

- The originality and unconventional subject of the research project
 - What is the research idea? For example, is a novel approach, hypothesis and/or method being introduced?*
 - What is radically new about the approach?*
 - Is there an issue with very few existing projects, a lack of literature or other scientific results in the area of the research project?*
 - What are the competing approaches and how does the new idea stand out from them?*
- The potential of the research project
 - What indicates that the idea will be successful?*
 - Does the idea have the potential to bring about a transformation of a scientific topic or pave the way for a new research area or a new method/technology?*
- A risk assessment (the programme targets high-risk project ideas)
 - What makes the project particularly risky?*
 - What challenges can be expected?*
- The interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach of the application
 - How do the different disciplines contribute to realising the shared idea?*

5 Application

The deadline for application submissions is

6 May 2024.

Applications received after this date will not be considered.

Applications must be submitted starting 1 April 2024. You can find the link on the website of the call: <https://www.carl-zeiss-stiftung.de/en/programme/czs-wildcard/programme-to-encourage-unconventional-ideas>

If you have any questions, please contact Dr Karla Hillerich or Dr Phil-Alan Gärtig at wildcard@carl-zeiss-stiftung.de

CZS is hosting a Q&A session on Zoom on 10 March from 3 to 4 pm via the following link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89216085431>

Meeting-ID: 892 1608 5431

The presentation of the most promising consortia will take place during a two-day selection event on **23 and 24 September 2024** in Stuttgart. Whether or not a consortium is invited to the selection event will be communicated in mid-July 2024. The funding decision will be announced on 24 October 2024 at the end of the selection event.

Application guidelines

1 General formal requirements

- The application can be written in German or English.
- The application templates must be used for the application.
- Arial font, font size 10 and single line spacing must be used for the application.
- The application, including all the required documents, must be submitted to the CZS exclusively electronically
- All files must be available without password protection or access restrictions for reading, copying and printing. All files must be made available to the CZS by email (as an attachment or in the form of a link) to förderantrag@carl-zeiss-stiftung.de.

2 Documents to be submitted

The completed and signed application documents must be submitted by **6 May 2024**.

The application must include the following documents:

1. PDF with master data (Template A_Master data) - **will not be forwarded in the peer review process**

Title: *Short title_master data*

- a. Completed datasheet
- b. LOI from all participating scientific institutions (one page each).

In the letter, they undertake to offer the scientist the appropriate conditions for independent research work, to grant budget autonomy within the scope of the legal provisions, and to organise the administrative handling of the project (administration of funding, etc.).

- c. Confirmation of the employment relationship of all applying scientists (informal).

It must show that all applicants are employed for at least 50% of a full-time position at their respective institution until at least 31 August 2025. For applicants with a temporary employment status, the employer must guarantee that the applicant will be employed for the entire duration of the project in the event funding is received.

- d. if applicable: Statement on doctoral positions applied for:

The CZS expects the contractual working time of doctoral candidates to match the amount of work associated with the activity, which may mean full-time positions. Furthermore, it expects that the employment contracts of scientific employees are concluded for the entire period of the respective qualification phase regardless of the duration of the project funding.

- i. How does the project fit in with the individuals' qualifications? A project like CZS Wildcard carries an increased risk of failure, which could lead to a lower number of publications among the doctoral candidates.
 - ii. What is the duration of the contracts and contractual working time of the doctoral candidates who will work on the project?
- e. Short CVs of all applicant scientists, including up to three relevant publications (max. 1 page per CV).
- f. Signed declaration of consent to the collection and processing of data
- g. if applicable, additional attachments

2. A PDF file (Template B, application text) - **will be forwarded in the peer review process → anonymously**

Title: *Short title_application*

- a. Application text
- b. Financing plan (**anonymised** please without names of scientists or institutions)

3. Financing plan as Excel file (template attachments) - **will not be forwarded in the peer review process**

- a. The financing plan must indicate which institution will receive which funds.
- b. The personnel costs must be calculated according to the regulations of the applying institution(s). Projected salary increases must be included for the second project year.
- c. The overhead lump is automatically calculated for each project year from the sum of the funding applied for and is added to the total funding amount. In the view of the Carl-Zeiss-Stiftung, the following costs are included in the overhead lump sum and therefore cannot be requested as part of the project funding:
 - Costs from a business perspective that are based on internal cost allocation, unless they are based on project-specific expenditures (such as data centres or other scientific services)
 - Expenditures for construction and furnishing measures and rent
 - Expenditures for general institutional equipment (such as IT infrastructure, office furniture, and protective clothing), for office material, postage and telecommunications fees, or internet access
 - Expenditures for devices not directly connected with the project
 - Expenditures for completing or repairing devices not directly connected with the project
 - Operational and maintenance costs (such as electricity, gas, water, and coolants)
 - Contributions to property insurance, expenditures for letters of protection, memberships
 - Fees collected by authorities in connection with the implementation of the project
 - VAT amounts, insofar as input tax can be deducted

Please note: Only the German version is legally binding.

Data protection notice

To be able to process the application, it is necessary for the Carl-Zeiss-Stiftung to store and process the personal data you provide in the application. This concerns your name, current activity/position, gender, address (work and/or personal), telephone number (work and/or personal), email address (work and/or personal).

The data processing is carried out on the legal basis of legitimate interest within the meaning of Art. 6 para. 1 lit. f) GDPR. Upon expiration of a reasonable period after the end of the procedure, the Carl-Zeiss-Stiftung will delete the personal data stored in connection with your application.

The data is saved on the Carl-Zeiss-Stiftung server and may only be viewed by authorised persons. If third parties are used to process the data, GDPR-compliant commissioned data processing contracts are in place with them. We hereby confirm that the IT measures we use are carried out on the basis of the applicable laws and are necessary in order to implement the selection procedure. Beyond this, the user's consent is required for any further data collection. The data is automatically deleted six months after completion of the assessment procedure.

You can object to the data processing at any time during the procedure. However, it will then no longer be possible to further participate in the selection procedure. Furthermore, if necessary, the data that is collected may be rectified or erased or the collection of this data may be restricted.

Complaints, information requests and other matters are to be directed to us using the contact details below

Carl-Zeiss-Stiftung
Matthias Stolzenburg
Breitscheidstraße 10
70174 Stuttgart, Germany

or by email to datenschutz@carl-zeiss-stiftung.de