



RIFS Fellow Programme: Call for Applications for 2026

The Research Institute for Sustainability (RIFS) at GFZ Helmholtz Centre for Geosciences in Potsdam conducts research with the aim of investigating, identifying, and advancing development pathways for transformations towards sustainability. Its research approach is transdisciplinary, transformative, and co-creative. The Institute cooperates with partners in science, political and administrative institutions, the business community, and civil society to develop solutions for sustainability challenges.

The Fellow Programme is among our defining features: each year, up to 20 people are invited from across the world to join the Institute. Working closely with our research groups, projects and other fellows, they pursue innovative ideas and topics to advance sustainability transformations. Supported by the Institute in their work and aspirations, fellows are invited to develop their ideas in a supportive international community drawn from all sectors of society. RIFS helps fellows to extend their networks at the national and international levels and provides organizational and financial support for their activities. Fellows will join an ever-growing network of over 300 former fellows from over 50 countries.

We welcome applications **from all parts of society, including science, public administration, the private sector, civil society, media and the arts, and from all parts of the world**. Applicants from the scientific community are expected to have a PhD or similar level of experience when their fellowship commences. Non-academic applicants should have at least three to five years of relevant work experience in their chosen field.

The proposed research or other activities must be complementary to the Institute's work programme. The thematic focus of the proposed project should engage with topics addressed by at least one of the Institute's three overarching Research Themes and should identify at least one Research Group (= organizational level 'below' the Themes) they are particularly interested to work with. Identifying multiple research groups your work connects to is an asset. Applicants are otherwise free in their choice of topic and activities, which may include scientific investigation, the development of policy recommendations or business models, contributing to public discourses and debates, art-making, education and public outreach, or other activities. We strongly encourage applicants to contact researchers at RIFS, ideally at least one group leader level, before submitting their application in order to gain a better understanding of our research and align their proposal with our work.

Fellowships are granted for between six and twelve months. In exceptional and well justified cases, they may be extended for up to 24 months. This decision will be made during the fellowship.

Fellows are granted a stipend during their time at RIFS. The exact amount is determined by the Fellow's relative seniority and family circumstances. Please see our [FAQ](#) section for further details. Fellows may also be reimbursed for relocation and travel expenses (in- and outbound), including the travel expenses of family members. The Institute also has a limited number of apartments at its disposal in Potsdam, which can be requested by Fellows not living in Germany/Europe at the time of their application. We are happy to support fellows in finding appropriate housing in Potsdam/Berlin and in other resettlement matters (such as finding school placements, health insurance, procuring visa/residence titles, etc.). Please contact the [Head of the Fellow Programme](#) for an individual assessment.

Your application must include the following documents as individual PDF files, each not exceeding 5MB:



- **Letter of motivation (max. 2 pages):** Please explain your motivation for undertaking a fellowship at RIFS, your expectations regarding our research, and how we can support your work. Please also specify the Research Theme and Groups that your proposed project would engage with.
- **CV and achievements (max. 3 pages combined):** Your CV (max. two pages) should identify the key stations of your career. Please outline the key achievements of your professional life on a third page. Please refrain from providing personal information such as your age, marital status, number of children, nationality, photos or similar information.
- **Project proposal (max. 5 pages):** Please describe your planned project, including specific activities and outputs. Proposals should be structured as follows: (1) title, (2) abstract (max. 300 words), (3) description of work, including intended outputs/results, (4) time plan and estimated budget. **Please do not include your name or any other personal information** in this document, as your proposal will be submitted for external review (see further below).

All documents must be submitted in English.

Applications not conforming to the above may be rejected.

An application will only be considered complete, if all of the above documents are submitted. You may also submit an optional **annex** (single PDF, max. 10MB), containing any additional information you wish to provide, such as a list of publications, portfolio of artistic output, or other work relevant to the proposal, etc.

The deadline for applications is 23:59 Central European Standard Time on 9 June 2025. Applications have to be uploaded at our [application portal](#). Should you experience technical difficulties with the portal, you can also send your application directly to achim.maas@rifs-potsdam.de.

Applications are reviewed in a three-stage process: In a first step, applications are reviewed internally. The Institute will select a shortlist of applications for external review (incl. motivation, professional background, quality and complementarity of proposal to our work). In the second step, only the project proposals from the shortlist are subjected to a double-blind external review. In the third step, interviews may be conducted with the most promising candidates. This last stage is scheduled to take place in **October/November 2025**. A decision will be made in **November or early December 2025**. Successful candidates will begin their fellowships approx. in **Spring 2026** (with 1 April 2026 being the earliest starting date).

RIFS holds two webinars to provide additional guidance for applicants. These will take place on [12 May 2025](#) and [26 May 2025](#) and will also be announced on our website. Please check our [FAQ](#) and our overview video on the FAQ site before joining the webinars, as they may provide most answers already.

Diversity and equal opportunities are integral components of our human resources policy. We explicitly welcome applications from all qualified individuals, regardless of their ethnic or social origins, nationality, gender, sexual orientation and identity, religion/belief, age or physical characteristics. Persons with a registered severe disability status (whether in Germany or abroad) will be given preferential consideration in the event of equal suitability and qualification in accordance with the provisions of the German Social Code IX. If you have any questions, please contact our representative for the disabled at sbv@gfz-potsdam.de, who will be happy to assist you in the further application process. In case of further queries regarding gender equality, please do not hesitate to contact our Equal Opportunities Officer at gba@gfz-potsdam.de. Your personal data will be processed for the



purpose of conducting the selection procedure on the basis of Art. 6 para. 1 b, Art. 88 GDPR in conjunction with Art. 26 of the Data Protection Act for the State of Brandenburg. After completion of the procedure, application documents will be deleted in compliance with data protection regulations. [Please see our GDPR Statement for further information.](#)

In case of any further queries, please contact [Achim Maas, Head of the RIFS Fellow Programme.](#)