

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

RIFS 2025 CONFERENCE, DECEMBER 3-5, BERLIN, GERMANY

„Sustainability redux: Tough Conversations in Tough Times“

Sustainability, as a guiding concept, seems to be getting driven out of the political arena. Opposition to an inclusive, fact-based exploration of pathways towards a “safe and just space for humanity” is no longer indirect nor tacit; it fuels nationalist and authoritarian counter-responses in a hitherto unthinkable, unconcealed manner. Common values and commonly accepted facts seem to dwindle, narrowing down the room for meaningful conversations.

How can we – supporters of socio-ecologically oriented transformations – foster a just and inclusive transformation in these times of geopolitical crises and backlash?

This conference focuses on the challenges for leading meaningful conversations about sustainability, on specific obstacles and on successful strategies for overcoming them. It aims at identifying means of returning public attention towards the necessary socio-environmental change by bringing together academic and non-academic stakeholders. The conference’s presentation and discussion formats will address the difficulties associated with sustainability governance, research, and communication that we are witnessing in different societal, political, and cultural developments. In particular, it will consider how we, both as communities of practice and as individuals, can advance sustainability in an unfavorable societal and political environment. We will also ask how sustainability research must change in order to achieve impact in the face of new circumstances.

The RIFS 2025 Conference will bring together scientists working on sustainability topics from a wide range of disciplines, along with practitioners from policy, civil society, the private sector, and the arts. It will offer an opportunity to:

- Present and discuss recent scientific findings in an inter- and transdisciplinary setting
- Share and exchange on experiences, challenges, and good practices via facilitated sessions for reflection and interaction
- Meet new people and get inspired

We invite interested researchers and practitioners to submit proposals for contributions to the RIFS 2025 Conference. We are seeking contributions related to debates around ongoing sustainability transitions (e.g., transitions in energy, mobility, industry and agriculture) as well as contributions looking at more overarching themes (e.g., justice, democracy, communication).

The following questions are intended to inspire and guide potential contributions on:

The challenges we face ...

- What does an analysis of the status quo reveal about the tensions within sustainability transformations, and how can reflection on our own actions and failures inform future approaches?
- How can the pursuit of sustainable well being and a good life for all be pursued and (re-)established as a central priority in contemporary social, political, and economic agendas?
- Which roles are being assumed by researchers in contentious societal settings? How do different segments of the population respond differently to different values and components of the sustainability discourse?
- Is speed the imperative or the enemy? How can we navigate the urgency of sustainability transformations while allowing time for participatory processes in affected communities?

...Effective responses, strategies and possible solutions

- What role can science play in facilitating tough conversations in sustainability transformations (e.g. limits on consumption, technological solutions involving clear risks, ...)?
- How are researchers currently contributing in these settings, and where do they need to adapt or reinvent their approaches to remain effective?
- How can democratic societies constructively navigate difficult debates about the transformative steps, trade-offs, and justice implications of sustainability transitions?
- How can novel governance arrangements (including institutional and social innovations, and inclusive policy mixes) facilitate stakeholder exchange and mitigate political tensions?

We welcome proposals for contributions in the following formats:

1. Individual scientific and other expert presentations (including, e.g., presentations from policymakers and civil society representatives)
2. Curated scientific or transdisciplinary sessions
3. Interactive, co-creative, and reflective spaces
4. Exhibition & performance

We welcome proposals that present empirical social research on the above-mentioned questions as well as proposals that focus on concepts, speculation, or the lived professional experience at the interface between science, society, and policy.

If you have relevant research, new applied knowledge and real-world lessons on the current void and tensions in sustainability conversations and how to address it, please consider submitting an **extended abstract** to our conference call **by July 5, 2025**.

SUBMIT YOUR PROPOSAL HERE: conference@rifs-potsdam.de

For proposal requirements please see below

The conference will lead to the establishment of a working group tasked with drafting a strategy paper on 'Tough Conversations in Tough Times,' aimed at both science and practice, as well as the preparation of one to two special issues in peer-reviewed journals featuring selected contributions.

Proposal requirements

1) For individual scientific and transdisciplinary presentations:

These sessions will be organised by topics. Each session will contain oral presentations and a panel discussion of all speakers.

Required information:

- Author(s) and affiliation(s)
- Title(s)
- Abstract (for each suggested presentation, max. 500 words)
- Please make a reference to at least one conference topic or question.

2) For curated scientific or transdisciplinary sessions:

Each session should contain oral presentations and a panel discussion of all speakers.

Required information:

- Organiser(s) and affiliation(s)
- Title
- Abstract (max. 500 words)
- List of speakers (who must submit their individual proposals separately)
- Organiser(s) must be onsite
- Please make a reference to at least one conference topic or question

3) For interactive, co-creative, or reflective spaces:

- Organiser(s) and affiliation(s)
- Title



- Short description (aim, method, relevance, please indicate the required minimum and possible maximum number of participants and form of participation), max. 500 words
- Organiser(s) must be onsite
- Please make a reference to at least one conference topic or question.

4) Exhibition & Performances:

- Organiser(s) and affiliation(s)
- Title
- Short description (aim, method, relevance, expected number of participants and form of participation), max. 500 words
- Organiser(s) must be onsite
- Please make a reference to at least one conference topic or question.