



# Klaus Töpfer Sustainability Fellowship 2027 – Frequently Asked Questions

*Current version: 05.03.2026*

## **1. In what way should the proposed project complement research conducted at RIFS?**

Project proposals for the Klaus Töpfer Sustainability Fellowship do not have to connect directly with the work of a particular research group. However, the project should embrace our transdisciplinary and co-creative approach to research.

## **2. What is the selection process?**

RIFS appoints a selection committee consisting of representatives of the federal and state research ministries, the RIFS advisory board, scientific expertise on sustainability, and the institute's leadership. The committee assesses and decides the selection.

## **3. What are the selection criteria ?**

The key criteria are: (1) originality of the proposal, (2) quality, (3) bridge-building between different sectors of society, (4) complementarity to our work, and (5) potential long-term impact(s) beyond the fellowship period.

Project proposals are assessed based on their potential to drive change towards sustainable development. We are especially interested to know:

- Will your project contribute innovative ideas from your field of expertise, whether from science, civil society, business, politics, art or other areas of society?
- What role do transdisciplinary methods play in your project? Please outline this in your proposal.
- Does your idea address a pressing sustainability challenge and apply a method, communication channel or approach likely to be especially effective? Or does it focus on an under-explored aspect of sustainability?
- What noticeable improvements or lasting impacts will the project likely deliver? If, for example, policy recommendations or a permanent platform are planned, how will they be promoted and monitored beyond the fellowship?

## **4. What does the fellowship stipend cover?**

Fellowship benefits include a monthly stipend and financial compensation to cover additional living costs during the stay in Germany. Please examine our stipend guidelines, available in the FAQ here <https://www.rifs-potsdam.de/de/institut/fellow-programm/faq>.

The Klaus Töpfer Sustainability Fellowship is supported by a discretionary budget of up to 30,000 €, which can be applied to cover travel expenses, publication fees, support for organising workshops, or production costs for artistic work, for example. Spending must comply with RIFS regulations.

## **5. Do I have to come to Potsdam or can I stay abroad?**

Collaboration and exchange between fellows, researchers, and stakeholders are essential. We host regular "Tuesday Talks" and bi-weekly meetings to foster a co-creative environment. Therefore, we expect fellows to be based in Potsdam for the duration of the fellowship and contribute to the institute's work.