



RIFS Fellow Programme: Call for Applications for 2027

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, about ten people (depending on the available budget and costs per fellowship) are invited to join the Institute from across the world. 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.

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.

The proposed project must be complementary to the Institute's work programme and at least two of our research groups. This year, we are especially interested in soliciting proposals that address the following theme:

Sustainability in Tough Times – How to Move Forwards in Times of Backlash?

Sustainability transitions are unfolding unevenly across the world, while the political contestation of their direction, pace, and distributional effects has become increasingly visible. We are especially interested in proposals that explore issues such as:

- (1) How do different forms of backlash interact across societies and scales, from local to global?*
- (2) How do justice concerns across different regions shape support for - or resistance to - accelerated transition dynamics?*
- (3) In what ways do polarization, emotions, and competing narratives influence perceptions of sustainability?*
- (4) What new or unconventional alliances for sustainability are conceivable and needed?*
- (5) How can transdisciplinary research approaches help to identify, mediate, and potentially mitigate backlash against sustainability?*
- (6) What do contemporary challenges to expert authority tell us about changing relations between knowledge and political power, and what are the consequences for sustainability transitions?*

We strongly encourage applicants to contact researchers at RIFS before submitting an application to ensure that their proposal aligns with our work.

Fellowships are usually granted for between six and twelve months, and can be extended for up to 24 months, depending on the availability of funding and the intended work during the possible extension period. Fellows are granted a stipend, with the exact amount determined by their relative seniority and family circumstances. Other benefits may also be provided. Please see our [FAQ](#) section for details.



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:

- **Project proposal:** This is the core document describing your work, as well as your motivation to join the institute as a fellow. Only applications using the [official template](#) will be accepted and submitted to the review process.
- **CV and achievements (max. 3 pages):** Please list your educational background and important career steps and achievements.

You may submit an **optional annex**, where you can list additional information, e.g. a full list of publications, an artistic portfolio, or any other information you would like to add. Please note that this is entirely optional and the external reviewers (see below) will only receive the project proposal.

All documents must be submitted in English. Applications that do not comply with the above requirements may be rejected without review.

The deadline for applications is 23:59 CET on 21 June 2026. Applications must be submitted via our [application portal](#). **Applications submitted by e-mail will not be accepted.**

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 an external review by a jury. In the third step, interviews may be conducted with the most promising candidates if open questions remain. This last stage is scheduled to take place in **November 2026**. A decision will be made in **November or early December 2026**. Successful candidates will begin their fellowships approx. in **Spring 2027** (with 1 April 2027 being the earliest starting date).

RIFS holds two webinars to provide additional guidance for applicants. These will take place on [18 May 2026](#) and [1 June 2026](#) and will also be announced on our website. Please check our [FAQ](#) beforehand, as it may answer most of your question.

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 Privacy Statement for further information.](#)

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