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Connectom

# Networking- and Innovation Fund

Call for Tenders 205

The Connectom Fund offers seed funding for joint research between hessian.AI members and other colleagues from participating universities. It is financed by the state of Hesse and is announced and carried out by the Technical University of Darmstadt as the lead partner of hessian.AI. The fund is used to support projects across the entire spectrum of research, teaching, demonstrator/prototype development or application with up to EUR 100,000 per project. The call for proposals is open to all topics and directions. The focus of the current call is on funding projects between hessian.AI members and establishing hessian.AI as a vibrant research community (with or without partners from the AI ecosystem). A total of EUR 1,200,000 is available to finance projects (personnel, material and investment funds). Both smaller and larger projects can be funded. Examples from basic and application-oriented research include:

- Research projects that initiate collaboration between working groups
- Research projects at the interface of AI and application
- Organization and implementation of conferences, workshops, etc.
- Demonstrators, e.g. for the recruitment of young AI talent or for outreach activities; prototypes for research purposes or third mission activities
- Validation projects, which contribute to the transfer of research results into application and are intended to stimulate start-up activity
- Science communication projects
- Innovative teaching projects

Application guidelines

Eligibility criteria

The Connectom Fund offers funding for projects by hessian.AI members, it is possible to involve other colleagues at the participating universities.
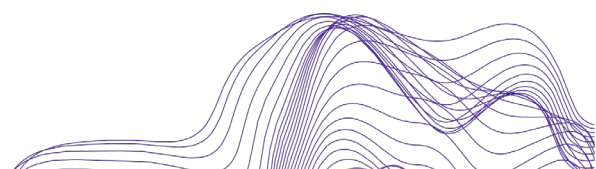
Professorial hessian.AI members and DEPTH junior research group leaders are eligible to apply. At least half of the funds must be used to finance costs incurred by hessian.AI members.

Researchers from institutions not involved in hessian.AI can be involved in the project as cooperation partners and be funded, for example by financing travel and accommodation costs for students or researchers. In principle, however, only Hessian universities can be recipients of funding.

Application procedure

The Connectom Fund calls for tenders are sent by e-mail to hessian.AI members and via the university management of the universities involved in hessian.AI or the persons responsible for internal university communication.

The consortia prepare draft proposals in German or English, with a maximum of three pages, which should be based on the attached template.

The electronic submission of the draft proposals must be sent to Dr. Christof-Matthias Neubrand (christof-matthias.neubrand@hessian.ai) by **28.02.2025** using the subject "hessian.AI: Connectom Fonds - Förderantrag 2025". Submissions at a later date cannot be considered.

Selection procedure

The proposals are evaluated by a selection committee made up of representatives from the universities participating in hessian.AI. The members of the selection committee evaluates the proposals submitted on the basis of the following criteria:

- Significance for the focus of hessian.AI or the goals set with hessian.AI in the entire spectrum of research, teaching, continuing education, third mission, transfer and foundation
- Contribution to the network/collaboration of hessian.AI members and plausibility of the sustainability of the collaboration
- Multiplier effects, contribution to increasing the visibility of hessian.AI and networking with leading national and international institutions
- Appropriate consideration of the respective state of the art, knowledge gain, innovation potential as well as the project-relevant skills of the applicants
- Promotion of interdisciplinary and cross-institutional cooperation
- Sustainability and prospects for follow-up funding through third-party funding

If applications are submitted by members of the selection committee, the spokespersons can entrust other center members with their review.

Feedback to the consortia (acceptance or rejection of funding) is usually given within one month of the submission deadline. Contracts may need to be concluded for the onward transfer of funds.

Project duration, allocation and use of funds

The funding period begins at the earliest when funding is awarded to the consortium; it can be seen from the letter of approval. It ends on December 31, 2025.

Call for funds

The funds are drawn down by means of a request for funds, which has to be sent to the hessian.AI office on the basis of the letter of approval. The letter of approval also states the budget available to the individual participating scientists for the project.

Use of funds

Only direct costs that are directly related to the project are eligible for funding. The funds must be used in accordance with the approval. Funds can only be settled during the approval period, i.e. by December 31, 2025 at the latest (the invoice date applies). The invoice date may not be before or after the approval period.

Up to 10% of an expenditure type (personnel, material resources, investments) can be reallocated between expenditure types without prior consultation with the hessian.AI office. Reallocations for the procurement of computing infrastructure are not permitted. Larger reallocations are not envisaged.

When using the funds, the provisions on the use of state funds must be observed. An overdraft of funds is generally not possible and may have to be offset by other state funds. Attention is drawn to the right to audit the use of funds. Once the funding period has expired and the final report has been submitted, any remaining funds may no longer be used. Unused funds must be returned.

Personnel funds may only be used in accordance with the regulations on the expenditure of state funds. If you have specific questions, please contact the personnel departments of the respective institutions. The basis for calculation is the actual personnel costs of the respective university. In the case of vacant positions (NN personnel), the relevant average personnel costs must be used when applying/calculating.

Material expenditure must be directly related to the project. It is assumed that the basic equipment and standard devices will be provided by the universities. Costs for the purchase of literature can only be applied for in justified exceptional cases.

Visibility

For larger projects, the willingness to present the project at a hessian.AI event or other publicity measures is expected. As used to in science, hessian.AI must be appropriately named as the funder of the funded project. A mention or use of the logo is expected in publications, publicity measures and applications.

Final report

The final report must be submitted one month after the end of the term specified in the letter of approval. It consists of an accounting report on the use of funds and a final report on the content. The accounting statement of use comprises the clear overall statement of all funds spent in the project; it contains the accounting statements of use of all participating institutions including the respective confirmations by their third-party funding departments. A template for the expenses list is provided in the form of an Excel file. The content of the final report is an informal short report (1 page) containing key project results and an abstract (max. ½ page), which can be used and published for external communication (e.g. hessian.AI website, blog posts or hessian.AI annual report). The final report can be written in German or English. The abstract should be submitted in both German and English.