



RMU-Exploratory

Competition

Darmstadt/ Frankfurt am Main/ Mainz January 2026

Call for Proposal Thinking Tomorrow Today – Exploration

(Deadline: 7 April 2026)

Sometimes, scientific change is revolutionary. Fundamental innovations can occur in various dimensions – methods, topics, technologies or interdisciplinarity. The Rhine-Main Universities aim to develop new, promising research fields in the medium term that emerge within the RMU through new interactions across the boundaries between disciplines.

The aim of “Thinking Tomorrow Today” is to establish, through interrelated program lines/funding measures, research groups that define such new, promising research fields and work on them together. These research groups consist of participants from at least two of our universities. External cooperation partners can also be involved but will not receive RMU funding.

Program Line Exploration

The starting point for the funding is *funding line 1 “Exploration Funding”*: Groups of RMU scientists are to be enabled to discuss and clarify initial ideas over a funding period of six months and to develop these ideas into an ambitious vision for an aspirational research field. Selected visions for such research fields will then, if the RMU receives funding as a University Excellence Consortium, receive substantial funding for another three years (*funding line 2 “Acceleration”*) plus another two years (*funding line 3 “Scale-Up”*). Continued funding serves to help implement innovative research work in the research field defined and, in this manner, establish the RMU as a center for the new research field over the course of five years.

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Terms

- Applications are accepted from groups of scientists from the Rhine-Main Universities who belong to at least two of the three universities. The topic must also have the potential to involve all three universities. The group set-up must be interdisciplinary. Initially, each group should consist of a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 6 principal investigators (PIs).
- As the outcome of a TTT project, the persons receiving funding will develop a vision for the research field in question, which they submit in writing at the end of the project. This written statement also serves the comparative assessment of the various visions developed that compete with each other in the application for funding for initial implementation in funding line 2 "Acceleration". Details on the form of this statement will be announced at a later stage.
- The maximum funding amount per project is 50,000 euros. For 2026, the total sum available is 300,000 euros.
- Generally, the funds can be used flexibly within the scope of the financial regulations of each university. Funds serve in particular to connect the people involved, for example through workshops, invitation of experts or visits to external partners. Funds must be used in their entirety until the end of the funding period on 31 December 2026 and cannot be transferred to the following year.
- Applications can be submitted in digital form until 7 April 2026 to: koordination@rhein-main-unis.de
- The selection decision will be taken by the RMU Board of Directors. The Vice Presidents for Research can involve internal or external experts in preparation of the decision. The RMU Board of Directors reserves the right to not grant the funds available in their entirety. Applicants will be informed of the decision by early June 2026.



Application (in English)

Scope: max. 5 pages, font type and size Arial 11 pt, line spacing 1.5 lines

Structure:

- **Persons involved (in tabular form)**

- principal scientists involved
- external cooperation partners, e.g. from non-university research institutions or acknowledged national or international universities (as proven by a letter of intent)
- additional scientists to be involved in the event of a positive funding decision
- additional external cooperation partners to be involved in the event of a positive funding decision

- **Description of the topic**

Please describe the topic, addressing the following aspects:

- scientific target pursued with the topic
- classification and/or link to the RMU research profile
- novelty of the topic as compared to existing research fields within the RMU, on a national and on an international level.
- significance of interdisciplinarity for the topic
- added value of including external cooperation partner(s)
- Which big, societal, economic, scientific or technological challenge is to be addressed with the topic?

- **Measures during funding (in tabular form)**

Please indicate which measures you want to implement on your way to developing a vision for the research field and which costs will be incurred for each of these measures (rounded value). Please list the funding applied for separately for each university.

Annex

- CVs of the principal scientists involved with the 5 most relevant publications
- if applicable, letter of intent from the external cooperation partner(s)