Deutsches Komitee für Nachhaltigkeitsforschung in Future Earth

Call for proposals: DKN working groups

8 June 2026

The German Committee Future Earth (Deutsches Komitee für Nachhaltigkeitsforschung in Future Earth, DKN) is setting up new working groups to further advance sustainability science in Germany and to support researchers working on topics related to sustainability and sustainable development.

Proposals for setting up a working group can be submitted to the DKN secretariat by 24 August 2026. Successfully established working groups receive funding to finance working group meetings and a round table meeting; in addition, applications may be made concerning partial funding for publications and research assistants. The term of a working group is two years. An extension is possible in justified cases.

1. Aims of a working group

By establishing working groups, the DKN promotes the development of research topics in the international context of sustainability research.

Working groups established under this call for proposals

- contribute to an innovative research area of sustainability science, which is described in the proposal concerning its scientific relevance,
- contribute to a significant impact of German research within the international research landscape and pursue both content-related and research-strategic objectives,
- should develop strategies for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaborative projects and/or
- aim to prepare or develop a research project,
- engage in substantive dialogue with the DKN on issues relating to sustainability science.

References are also desirable

- to topics from the Sustainability Science Summit 2025 (Blome et al. (2025): Advancing Sustainable Development: Sustainability Science Summit 2025),
- to the DKN position paper "Research priorities for sustainability science" (Jacob et al. (2022): Research priorities for sustainability science. German Committee Future Earth, Hamburg, Germany)
- and/or to focus topics within the international Future Earth network and/or the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP).

2. Assessment criteria

- Scientific significance: How do the working group's activities contribute to the further development of sustainability science?
- Degree of innovation in terms of a topic not yet established in Germany (or globally), including the relevant research gaps and research questions
- Comprehensible explanation of the working group's objectives and an approach for achieving these objectives, including a coherent work plan and schedule
- Interdisciplinary networking: description of the interdisciplinary networking perspectives to be created by the working group

- Consideration of the strategy for transdisciplinarity in relation to procedures in the field of 'co-design' and 'co-production'
- Explanation of the involvement of early-career researchers, supported by concrete measures
- Academic qualifications and previous work of the applicants

The group's work is to be concluded with a concrete output, to be agreed upon at the first working group meeting. This may, for example, be a publication, a research grant application, or a research project with a clear perspective for a funding proposal.

3. Funding

In general, successfully established working groups receive funding for two meetings of the working group members (max. 9 individuals) and for organizing a round table meeting (max. 30 individuals) within a period of two years. In addition, applications may be made concerning partial funding for publications and research assistants. During the term of a working group, an extension is possible in justified cases.

4. Selection process and framework conditions for integration into the DKN

1. Before applying, please contact the DKN secretariat for a preliminary consultation.
2. The DKN members discuss and evaluate all working group proposals based on the assessment criteria and decide on their establishment. If necessary, additional experts will be consulted.
3. If your proposal is accepted, the DKN will set up the working group.
4. The DKN secretariat and, as a rule, a committee member (acting as a liaison/mentor) will attend the working group meetings. The DKN secretariat will provide organizational support to the working groups.
5. During DKN meetings, the spokespersons report regularly on the working group's progress. An interim written report is to be submitted 12 months after the working group is established.
6. The working group ends after 24 months. The intended output/product must be completed and sent to the DKN within three months after the end of the working group term.

5. Eligibility to apply and participate

Applications for working groups can only be submitted by scientists working at German research institutions. The working group should not have more than 9 members, and it should comprise members from at least 3 different institutions. Depending on the research question, the group setup should be as interdisciplinary as possible. Besides scientists from universities and research institutions, experts and stakeholders from other fields who can make a relevant contribution can also be involved. In addition, further experts who could contribute when required should be mentioned (especially as participants of the round table). The selection of persons should consider gender and diversity aspects and promote cooperation between universities and non-university research institutions. To a limited extent, guests from abroad can also be invited to the round table.

6. Content and outline of the application

1. Title of the working group topic
2. List of working group members (name, institution, department; max. 9 people)
3. Abstract (approx. half an A4 page)
4. Description of the initial situation in terms of content, the state of research and the

research questions regarding an innovative area of sustainability science; where applicable, link to a topic from the DKN Summit 2025 or the DKN Position Paper (2022) (max. 2 A4 pages)
5. Presentation of the goals, content, and tasks of the working group, as well as its intended product
6. Description of the planned approach
7. Strategy for "co-design" / "co-production"
8. Strategy for the integration of early-career scientists
9. Description of the expected interdisciplinary networking perspectives and of the potential for internationalization
10. Work plan and schedule

The application must not exceed 8 A4 pages.

Appendix:

- Contact details of the spokespersons (name, first name, address, e-mail, phone)
- Short CV of the designated two spokespersons
- Brief summary of the expertise and skills relevant to the working group held by all working group members
- Suggestion for the possible extended group of experts (max. 30 individuals)

7. Submission and deadline

Please send your application (in German or English) in the form of a PDF document to the DKN secretariat by 24 August 2026 via e-mail: info@dkn-future-earth.de. Please also take the opportunity to seek advice in advance and schedule an appointment.

Contact:
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