

## PROGRAM INFORMATION

Berlin, October 7, 2025

## SCIENCE X MEDIA TANDEMS 2026

## 1. Preamble

In addition to its innovation and research funding, Stiftung Charité established a new focus area "Open Life Science" in 2022. It is the foundation's contribution to making the life sciences in Berlin more comprehensible, accessible and participatory for the public at large, thereby strengthening the reputation of the Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin and partner institutions as well as the trustworthiness of their scientists. In order to reach these aims, Stiftung Charité begins its Open Science work at the interface between science and the media, promoting innovations and improvements in science communication while considering social diversity in particular. All of the programs in this focus area are designed to achieve the statutory purposes of Stiftung Charité, i.e. supporting education, science and research and/or the advancement of the public health system and/or public healthcare.

Funding "science x media tandems" is an effort directed at individual projects and people. Structural support for life science communication in Berlin complements this effort in the form of the ["Wisskomm@Charité"](#) program as the other part of the foundation's Open Life Science engagement. Stiftung Charité envisages the development of a funding program for participatory research in the future.

Stiftung Charité is convinced that opening the life sciences can only succeed if internally, the scientific community works in a trustworthy and transparent manner. Making data and publications freely available contributes to building trust and transparency. Along with established processes of ensuring the high quality of scientific work, Stiftung Charité therefore sees Open Data and Open Access as important prerequisites for opening up the life sciences to society. However, the foundation does not place the promotion of Open Data and Open Access as well as scientific rigor and academic integrity in the center of its Open Life Science approach, but refers to other funding and training opportunities for this, as offered e.g. by the [QUEST Center for Responsible Research](#).

## 2. Funding objectives

Science x media tandems consist of two people, a (life) scientist based in the Berlin area and a media professional. The program is open to all researchers at Charité including those based at the Berlin Institute of Health at Charité (BIH) and the Charité's German Heart Institute Berlin (DHZC) as well as researchers from Max Delbrück Center (MDC), regardless of their career stage, prior experience in the field of science communication, or specific discipline. Media professionals, too, are eligible for the program regardless of their experience, media background (e.g. in journalism or science communication, news or science journalism, traditional or social media), employment situation (e.g. freelance or staff journalists), and current location.

Forming a science x media tandem serves the purpose of increasing the participants' understanding of the conditions, paradigms and inherent logics of the respective other domain; the tandem person

from the life sciences will gain a greater understanding of the media, the tandem person from the media industry a greater understanding of science. In sum, participants' skills and knowledge in the field of science communication will attain a new quality. To reach these aims, the funding primarily provides the tandem partners with protected time, secondarily with the material resources necessary to turn a successful application into reality. The science x media tandem program thus fills a funding gap – giving committed individuals the time and resources needed to carry out high-quality science communication in the life sciences.

The scheme offers tandem partners the freedom to work together creatively on a project of their own choosing and design. Each project is individual yet following a clear timeline. A project can serve

- the purpose of **systematically reflecting about science communication** (e.g. via reciprocal on-site visits, shadowing each other at work or taking part in a training course, plus the subsequent documentation of the experience in form of an article, radio piece or essay on science communication), or
- the purpose of **contributing to science communication in an innovative manner** in the areas of the health or life sciences, respectively (e.g. special media coverage in print, online, TV or radio, podcast, social media takeover, film, exhibition).

Hybrid projects joining reflection and content work are also possible. It is both applicants' potential and motivation to apply themselves to good and innovative (life) science communication that influence the funding decision. Other criteria are the fit of the tandem partners and their specific ideas and aims for the envisioned project. Ideally, the tandem partners remain in productive dialogue with one another, accompany each other in their professional development beyond the end of the funding period and continue the collaboration where viable.

Stiftung Charité boasts a network of individual media representatives as well as organizations from the media industry and the world of science communication which the foundation can utilize to help the search for a suitable tandem partner. The two-stage application process provides for the possibility of an ideas stage in which Stiftung Charité supports the formation of possible future tandems as far as possible.

### **3. Funding volume**

Stiftung Charité funds undertakings of various duration and intensity. Projects can take two to nine months; they can be carried out *en bloc* or spread across a time of up to two years. The envisioned duration and temporal division of each project must suit the aims of the undertaking and must be outlined clearly in the application.

The grant amounts to a maximum of 15,000 euros per month of the project. In conjunction with the maximum possible length of a project, this results in a maximum amount of 135,000 euros per science x media tandem. The funding can only be spent on the project applied for; the exact use of the funds is regulated in the section following.

Scientists and media professionals may use the designation “funded by Stiftung Charité in a science x media tandem” for the duration of their collaboration.

Follow-up funding cannot be requested.

Applications submitted and rejected in previous rounds of this call may only be resubmitted if they have been significantly revised in terms of content.

### **4. Application of funds**

Funding may consist of

- a) the remuneration of both tandem partners' working hours required to carry out the project, up to a maximum of 10,000 euros per month in total, as well as
- b) additional project-related expenses of up to 5,000 euros per month.

This results in a maximum amount per tandem of 15,000 euros/month of the project.

In cases of successful applications, Stiftung Charité provides the funding in form of a lump-sum payment to the institution at which the researcher works. The life sciences institution administers the funds. Stiftung Charité and the tandem partners will not take up contractual relations of any kind. All necessary arrangements are to be made directly between the members of the tandem, the scientific host institution and possible employers of the media professional.

The tandem partners themselves agree on the exact procedure for their payment (see (a)) with the scientific institution and possible employer(s) of the media professional. Two models are conceivable: Their current employer continues to pay the individual's existing salary; the scientific institution reimburses them. The individual will thus be guaranteed protected time for their work on the project ("reimbursement model"). Alternatively, the individual receives a remuneration for the duration of the project, e.g. by way of a fee contract with Charité or one of the defined partner institutions, or employment as a staff member within a third-party funded project ("remuneration model"). If the media professional is self-employed, the remuneration model seems the suitable choice. Each person's reimbursement or remuneration should be based on their (average, if fluctuating) salary or income at the time of the application, but may not exceed it.

The distribution of the funds for personnel costs mentioned under (a), accumulating to a maximum amount of 10,000 euros per month, can in principle be determined freely. However, in the interest of collaborating on an equal footing, it is recommended that the funds will be allocated in as equal as possible a manner. Should the application request a significantly lower or indeed no share of the funds for one of the two tandem partners, it must be ensured that the commitment of this person can be guaranteed otherwise, i.e. that they will nevertheless participate fully in the realization of the project as proposed in the application.

The funds mentioned under (b), amounting to an extra 5,000 euros per month and tandem max., can be applied for and used to cover further costs associated with the realization of the project. This may include both further personnel costs for the employment of staff in the project or expenses for e.g. external services, necessary consumables, training or travel. In justified exceptions, a part of the funds listed under (a) may also be used to employ further staff. In any case, the tandem partners must be heading the project.

## **5. Eligibility requirements**

The application for a science x media tandem is to be submitted jointly by both tandem partners, one being a scientist from Charité (including units such as the Berlin Institute of Health at Charité (BIH) or the Charité's German Heart Center Berlin (DHZC)) or a researcher working at Max Delbrück Center (MDC), the other being a media professional.

Scientists of all career levels and disciplines are eligible to apply. They must have a current employment relationship with one of the above-mentioned institutions for at least the duration of the proposed project. This condition does not apply to doctoral candidates at the same institutions. However, if they are not employed by one of the institutions, they cannot obtain any personnel funding through the program. Additionally, the completion of the doctorate must not occur before the end of the project. Support for the proposed project from doctoral supervisors, research group leaders, clinic directors, or center management is required.

The media professional can be a science journalist, but may equally work for other departments (incl. in the newsroom) or other sectors of the media. From established media outlets to social media, from mass media to specialist journals, the most diverse areas of professional activity are conceivable so long as, in principle, they cover the communication of scientific work. The media professional may be employed by a medium in Germany or abroad, or freelance for such a medium; they may be starting out their career or already have significant professional experience.

The scientist acts as lead applicant. Their institution becomes the grant recipient in case of funding.

## **6. Proposal and assessment criteria**

There are two stages to the application process, with differing requirements:

### **I. Ideas stage (*optional*):**

In a first, entirely optional phase, (life) scientists at Charité or MDC have the opportunity to submit their idea for an envisaged science x media tandem without already knowing or being able to name a specific tandem partner from the media industry. Media professionals, too, are invited to submit ideas for relevant projects without knowing or being able to name a tandem partner from the Berlin life sciences at this stage.

Within its means, Stiftung Charité supports the search for a suitable tandem partner until the end of the calendar year. At this stage, Stiftung Charité does not yet evaluate whether the ideas outline merits funding but merely uses it to support the search for a tandem partner with whom it would subsequently be possible to apply for funding (stage II).

If you already know who you will apply with as your tandem partner, please do not submit an ideas sketch. The submission of an ideas sketch does not improve the chances of the subsequent full proposal – nor will it reduce them.

### **II. Application stage:**

Eligible applicants apply for funding as a science x media tandem. The final, full application consists of:

1. a description of the proposed project (including statements of personal motivation as well as a description of the innovative character and particular value of the project),
2. a work plan and schedule,
3. a budget breakdown (required funding),
4. a portrayal of the applicants' professional careers and previous areas of focus (i.e. CVs – preferably excluding photo, marital status or denomination – incl. a list detailing a maximum of five publications that are particularly relevant in the context of this call). Please refrain from sending complete lists of publications. Only the requested selected publications will be considered in the selection process.

Applications are to be made using the [online portal](#) to which we link on our website. Please note that you must register when using it for the first time.

Criteria for the evaluation of the applications are:

1. Quality and novelty of the project, in particular regarding:

- a. Its potential for improving current practices in science communication or science journalism
  - b. Addressing and involving social groups that have not yet been reached, or only to a limited extent, by science communication
  - c. Fit of idea, medium and target group(s)
2. Feasibility of the project and its potential to continue in some form
3. Qualifications and previous experience of both applicants (assessed in relation to each individual's career stage)
4. Fit of the tandem partners to each other
5. Expected individual gain in the tandem partners' understanding of science or the media, respectively

## 7. Selection procedure

Stiftung Charité reviews for form all applications that have been submitted within the deadline. Formally admissible applications go to a selection panel appointed by Stiftung Charité, which, in accordance with the objectives of the tandem program, is composed of life scientists as well as representatives of the media and experts in science communication or science communication research. The panel evaluates the eligibility of the proposed projects guided by the criteria detailed above and makes funding recommendations to the Board of Trustees. Stiftung Charité's Board of Trustees makes the final funding decisions.

## 8. Deadlines / dates

|                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5 Nov 2025,<br>12:30-1:30    | <a href="#">Online information session</a> for interested researchers and media professionals                                                                                                      |
| 7 Nov 2025,<br>12:00 midday  | <b><u>Ideas stage (optional):</u></b><br>Deadline for ideas outlines by individuals without a tandem partner, send to <a href="mailto:stiftung.charite@charite.de">stiftung.charite@charite.de</a> |
| Nov – Dec 2025               | Where necessary, Stiftung Charité supports individuals in finding a media professional or scientist, respectively, to team up with.                                                                |
| 30 Jan 2026,<br>12:00 midday | <b><u>Application stage:</u></b><br>Deadline for full applications, written in tandem                                                                                                              |
| March/April 2026             | Selection panel sits                                                                                                                                                                               |
| End of May 2026              | Announcement of funding decisions                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 1 June 2026                  | Earliest possible start of funding                                                                                                                                                                 |

## 9. Contact

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