



BERLIN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE

BERLIN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE – CHICAGO RESEARCH COLLABORATION INITIATIVE

2026 Call for Applications

The Berlin University Alliance (BUA) is launching a call for applications to support innovative research collaborations between faculty members from Berlin and Chicago (University of Chicago + Northwestern University). This initiative is a continuation of the [University of Chicago's call in the summer of 2025](#) and aims to explore the potential in the Berlin and Chicago research ecosystems for closer cooperation, foster new research partnerships, and lay the groundwork for larger collaborative research ventures.

At the same time, University of Chicago PIs can also apply to the [2026 IIRP grants](#) for projects starting in July 2026 through June 2027.

OBJECTIVES

This grant program supports the development of early-stage research partnerships between BUA and UChicago or Northwestern faculty through:

- Establishment of new or strengthening of existing research collaborations across disciplines
- Fostering interdisciplinary research partnerships that address significant intellectual challenges
- Generating preliminary data and results that will lead to external funding applications
- Promoting academic and institutional partnerships between Berlin and Chicago

ELIGIBILITY

Applications are open to pairs of co-Principal Investigators (PIs), with:

- One PI based at the University of Chicago or Northwestern University (tenure-track, tenured, research scientist, or equivalent senior academic position)
- One PI based at a BUA institution (Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Technische Universität Berlin, or Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin) BUA faculty must hold a valid employment contract at the time of application and project implementation.

Requirements:

- Both PIs must provide a brief Curriculum Vitae (1–2 pages, without publication list)
- Applicants must confirm institutional support from their respective institutions
- Faculty must remain employed at their respective institutions throughout the funding period for funds to be dispersed



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FUNDING

- Maximum Award: €22,500 per project
- Implementation period: March 2026 – August 2026
- Expected Number of Awards: Up to 3 grants will be awarded
- Currency: Funding will be provided in EUR to the BUA-based applicant

Eligible Expenses:

- Travel and accommodation for collaborative visits
- Organization of workshops, seminars, or collaborative meetings
- Research materials and supplies (limited amount)
- Communication and coordination expenses
- Catering and other associated costs in Chicago can be covered by this grant (invoiced to the Berlin institution).

Ineligible Expenses:

- Faculty, postdoctoral, or graduate student salaries and stipends
- Laboratory equipment or major capital investments
- Conference attendance (unless integral to the collaborative project)

FUNDING TIMELINE & ADMINISTRATION

For BUA institutions: Upon completion of the selection procedure, funds will be allocated to the relevant BUA institution's cost center (*Kostenstelle*) as budget funding (*Haushaltsmittel*). Funds must be expended by August 31, 2026. All receipts and expense statements must be submitted to the respective BUA institution's travel office or finance department by August 31, 2026 at the latest.

Travel expenses will be calculated according to the German Federal Travel Expenses Act (Bundesreisekostengesetz).



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EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated and selected by a committee comprising representatives from the Berlin University Alliance; on the basis of the following criteria:

- Originality and intellectual merit of the proposed research and the importance of the collaborative approach
- Novelty of collaboration: Strong preference for new partnerships or projects not previously supported by the Summer 2025 UChicago call.
- Interdisciplinarity: Projects that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries are particularly encouraged
- Feasibility and cost-effectiveness of the proposed activities
- Realistic timeline and clear deliverables
- Mutual benefit and balanced representation of both institutions
- Potential for impact, including plans for joint publications, presentations at conferences, or joint submissions to external funding agencies
- Capacity to secure external funding in the long term based on this collaboration
- Involvement of graduate students or early-career researchers, where relevant

SELECTION PROCESS

An evaluation committee comprised of faculty and senior administrators from the Berlin University Alliance will review all proposals. The committee will rank proposals according to the criteria outlined above and make funding recommendations together with final recommendations from UChicago or Northwestern University respectively.

Applicants will be notified of the selection committee's decision by March 6, 2026.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

All proposals must include the following documents:

1. Completed Application Form (provided separately) outlining:
 - Project Title and Keywords (3–5 keywords describing the research field)
 - Research objectives and significance
 - Rationale for the partnership and complementary expertise of the PIs
 - Planned collaborative activities and their timeline
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- Expected outputs and outcomes (e.g., joint publications, workshop proceedings, grant proposals)
 - How the project addresses the goal of exploring cooperation potential between the Berlin and Chicago ecosystems
2. Budget and Justification (template provided separately)
- Itemized budget breakdown
 - Justification for each expense item
 - Total requested amount (not to exceed €22,500)
3. Curriculum Vitae for Each PI (1–2 pages each, without publication list)

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Applicants should submit the complete application package in a single PDF or as separate PDF files via email to:

martin.spiess@berlin-university-alliance.de

Submission Deadline: February 13, 2026, 15:00hrs Central European Time

Late submissions will not be accepted. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit well in advance of the deadline to allow for technical difficulties.

TIMELINE

Event	Date
Call for Applications Opens	January 19, 2026
Application Submission Deadline	February 13, 2026
Notification of Award Decisions	March 6, 2026
Project Start Date	End of March 2026
Project End Date	August 31, 2026



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CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions regarding this call, please contact:

Berlin University Alliance:

Martin Spieß

martin.spiess@berlin-university-alliance.de

GENERAL PROVISIONS

- Applicants must comply with all applicable legal requirements and regulations in their respective countries.
- BUA reserves the right to request clarification or additional information from applicants.
- The institutions are not obligated to fund any proposals, regardless of quality.
- All funded projects must acknowledge support from the Berlin University Alliance and the University of Chicago/Northwestern University in any resulting publications or presentations.
- Principal Investigators are responsible for ensuring compliance with their respective institutions' research integrity and ethical standards.