In founding the Berlin University Alliance, Freie Universität Berlin (FU Berlin), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (HU Berlin), Technische Universität Berlin (TU Berlin) and Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin have set the ambitious aim of jointly turning Berlin into an integrated research environment that is specially dedicated to addressing global grand challenges.

The Alliance is dedicating an initial stage of this initiative to the discussion of social cohesion. Both a descriptive and normative term, social cohesion has been at the center of vigorous debates on democracy, the future of technology and industry, diversity, heritage, migration, social and economic transformation, environmental and resource conflicts, digital spaces, resistance, resilience, health and much more. At the interface between academic perspectives – the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and engineering sciences – social cohesion is a highly topical research area that requires innovative perspectives as well as interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary access points. To comprehensively examine social cohesion requires integrated collaboration by a multitude of players from within and beyond research.

First “Grand Challenge Initiative” of the BERLIN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE

CALL FOR PROPOSALS
Exploration Projects on the topic of Social Cohesion

Call opens: 17.02.2020, 2pm
Call closes: 04.05.2020, 2pm
Earliest start of funding: 01.07.2020
Duration: 3 years
Funding volume: up to 450,000 euros per annum

Berlin University Alliance Grand Challenge Initiatives

Through the founding of the Berlin University Alliance, Freie Universität Berlin (FU Berlin), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (HU Berlin), Technische Universität Berlin (TU Berlin), and Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin have set themselves the ambitious joint goal of establishing Berlin as an integrated center of research dedicated to addressing global challenges – Grand Challenges – in a unique way.

In its first ‘Grand Challenge Initiative’ (GCI), the Berlin University Alliance is dedicating itself to the analysis, understanding and future of social cohesion. Social cohesion is not something that can be taken as given; it has to be constantly renewed and recreated. Many of the challenges currently faced, whether environmental, economic, social or political, appear to be weakening and endangering social cohesion. In complex specialized societies, issues such as multiculturality and mobility, global digital networking, lives lived simultaneously in virtual and geospatial worlds, parallel worlds of national organizations and economic, technical or political globalization, environmental disasters and democratic upheaval present opportunities, but also bring with them challenges for social cohesion. Social cohesion represents a research field of great current relevance at the interface...
of the different perspectives of the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, requiring innovative perspectives and interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches as well as the close collaboration of a wide range of researchers.

Objective of the funding program

Exploration Projects aim to establish interdisciplinary research associations in Berlin dedicated to issues of social relevance which coordinate and link the research undertaken by members of the Berlin University Alliance. By doing so, they contribute to the development of the Grand Challenge Initiatives of the Alliance and strengthen Berlin as a center of research. Networking with business partners and/or social groups relevant to particular issues to address Grand Challenges as effectively as possible throughout the course of an Exploration Project is a goal we very much wish to pursue.

The Berlin University Alliance is funding Exploration Projects on social cohesion within its first Grand Challenge Initiative. The Alliance is also seeking to facilitate top level research to analyze the conditions and influencing factors of social cohesion, to gain an understanding of developments and changes and to develop recommendations and new approaches.

The overarching aim is to understand the global preconditions, dynamics, perspectives and limitations of social cohesion and demonstrate suitable solution structures for the future sustainable success and stability of society. The research projects will also contribute to making Berlin a significant center for innovative research on social cohesion.

Accordingly, funding is focused on topics that require new and innovative methods, questions, work directions and approaches. In adopting this approach, the Alliance is explicitly supporting high-risk undertakings with innovative approaches. At the same time, the funded Exploration Project should also facilitate the development of long-term research projects and financing structures.

Object of the funding program

The funded research projects contribute to the analysis of the prerequisites of social cohesion at the interface between the different perspectives of the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, an understanding of the changes occurring in social cohesion and the effects of social, natural or technical influences.

In keeping with its cross-cutting theme of ‘diversity and gender equality’, the Berlin University Alliance’s research projects should also examine the relevance of diversity for social cohesion and make clear in their conception their commitment to a research culture which values diversity of opinions, perspectives and experience. The Alliance’s research projects should also seek to advance an integrative academic community where all members are equally valued and integrated and able to pursue their intellectual goals.

Reflecting the Berlin University Alliance’s internationalization strategy, the research projects could also serve to strengthen international partnerships – in particular the Berlin-Oxford cooperation initiative.

Knowledge exchange and teaching & learning are integral elements of the Excellence proposal and as such constitute key activities of the Berlin University Alliance. It is an explicit aim to link the Alliance’s various objectives. Initiatives for exchange formats and innovative teaching practices are therefore very much welcome in the context of the Grand Challenge Initiatives’ call.
The four main focuses of this funding program are:

1. Developmental dynamics and negotiations of social cohesion
   - More closely defining the term and what is understood by it in an interdisciplinary sense, taking account of its empirical foundation
   - Negotiating social cohesion in an urban society
   - Dimensions of class, gender, ethnicity and age for social cohesion
   - Historical and cultural dimensions of social cohesion
   - Socio-ethical norms and techniques for the attribution of responsibility

2. Challenges and potential of social cohesion
   - Challenges and potential of technology development for social cohesion, e.g. the processes of digitalization
   - Challenges and potential of lifestyles, education, nutrition and physical practices for social cohesion
   - The weakening of social cohesion as a result of polarization in politics, the economy, religion, etc.
   - Social cohesion in everyday life and communication

3. Local and global dimensions of social cohesion
   - Potential, challenges and new forms of social cohesion through transnationalization, globalization and migration
   - Potential, challenges and new forms of social cohesion through ecology and climate change

4. Creating social cohesion
   - Innovative technical, scientific and medical opportunities for creating social cohesion
   - Social cohesion in the working environment
   - Social cohesion through infrastructures, logistics, etc.
   - Creating social cohesion through institutions, law and politics, in participative structures and social movements
   - Care and the shift in the gender division of labor as challenges for social cohesion

The funding program of the Berlin University Alliance’s Grand Challenge Initiative Social Cohesion supports Exploration Projects which pursue novel research topics on the principle of close interdisciplinary collaboration. Funding is targeted for projects which transcend the borders between disciplines and their different methodologies and which seek to benefit from interdisciplinary approaches. Transdisciplinary collaboration with partners from industry and relevant social groups is encouraged.

**Nature, scope and level of funding**

Exploration Projects are based on a three-year funding period. No option to extend this funding period is envisaged. Projects can be approved if the applicants convincingly demonstrate that they can develop issues, perspectives, networks and ideas for usage to create a new and sustainable area of research. Funding in an Exploration Project serves to explore the longterm sustainability of an idea. Projects can be extended in the event of absenteeism due to sickness or family issues (pregnancy, parental leave, etc.). No additional funding will be made available, however, for any such extensions.
A maximum of 450,000 euros per annum is available for each Exploration Project, in other words a maximum of 1.35 million euros for the three-year funding period. Funding will be made available to the member institutions of the Berlin University Alliance for this purpose as budget resources.

Based on the budgetary requirements of the particular Alliance institution, funding may be applied for to cover staff costs for academic staff (including student staff) and, to a lesser degree, for non-academic staff, for equipment and investment resources (excluding construction costs) as well as rental costs. Funding is also made available for networking and activities benefiting public relations.

Doctoral candidates can be employed as part of an Exploration Project on the condition that their contract can be guaranteed for the entire duration of the project. In such cases where the doctoral phase exceeds the standard period for a doctorate of three years covered by the project, proof of financing for the doctoral candidate beyond the period of the project must be provided.

Coordinative tasks are to be undertaken by academic staff; positions for office staff may not be applied for for this purpose.

A budget plan must be provided confirming how funding will be divided among the Alliance institutions participating in the application. It is not possible to make substantial changes to this once funding has been approved. In exceptional cases, applicants’ own positions may also be financed. This, however, is not possible if you are the main applicant.

Funding may be carried over to the next financial year up to a maximum of 20% of the annual total for the duration of the project if requested by 1 September of the year.

Requirements / Eligibility

Professors and postdoctoral researchers working at Alliance institutions (Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Technische Universität Berlin and Charité – Universitätsmedizin) are eligible to apply. Financing of the applicant’s own position must be guaranteed for the entire duration of the project (by means of a work contract). As funding is intended for the development of longterm perspectives, the majority of applicants should be employed on a permanent basis. Should the contract of one of the applicants be fixed-term and scheduled to expire before the scheduled end of the project, a letter from the relevant dean, president or chair of a board may be appended to the proposal confirming that the position will be guaranteed until the end of the project.

Applying postdoctoral researchers in the early phases of their careers are required to provide proof of academic independence according to the criteria of their discipline (e.g. junior research group leader, Emmy Noether Groups, etc.). Qualification phases for post-docs are particularly desirable as part of the application process. It is also possible for applicants at this stage of their careers to obtain financing for their position if they make a strong enough case.

Researchers from Germany and abroad as well as partners from industry can participate in projects as co-applicants, but are not eligible for funding. Members of non-university research institutions in Berlin which are not affiliated to the Alliance institutions may participate only as cooperation partners and must provide their own funding. Any third-party co-applicants must provide proof of their own funding contribution when submitting their proposal (this can include funding for their own position). It is also possible to nominate additional external cooperation partners. These partners are not required to present proof of their funding contribution. Depending on the procurement laws for budgets at the individual Alliance institutions, it may also be possible to commission work from external sources.
Affiliated institutes (German ‘An-Institute’) are not per se eligible to apply. Individual persons, e.g. professors at an An-Institute affiliated with an Alliance institution are, however, eligible to apply. Doctoral candidates and individuals who have completed their doctorates but are still awaiting doctoral certificates (Dr. Designatus) are not eligible to apply.

Group applications must consist of at least 6 and a maximum of 12 researchers. The group must include applicants from at least two Alliance institutions. In the interests of advancing the careers of early career scientists, it is desirable that the application consortium includes at least one researcher at an early stage of their career (post-doc, junior professor or W2 professor). However, in the interests of sustainability, it is important that applicants are available to participate in the longterm realization of the project.

It is not possible to participate in more than one project within the Exploration Projects Social Cohesion call.

**Application procedure**

Proposals can be submitted in either German or English.

Proposals have to be submitted via the following online portal: https://portal.bihealth.de/Portal/SitePages/Home.aspx.

*If you do intend to submit a proposal, we kindly request you to inform us of this in good time (by 15.03.2020)* so that we can arrange suitable expert assessors for your proposal. To do so, please write to grand-challenges@berlin-university-alliance.de stating the topic of your proposal and a provisional list of PIs.

The proposal must include

1. Proposal
   - Presentation of the question and objectives of the Exploration Project as it relates to the topic of social cohesion.
   - Presentation of research gap
   - Presentation of the main interdisciplinary perspectives and if applicable the transdisciplinary approaches to be pursued
   - Presentation of the planned procedure, including schedule and work packages/contributions of each applicant
   - Details regarding quality assurance, including criteria for monitoring quality assurance
   - Details of diversity strategies and measures
   - Details of open access strategies and measures
   - Presentation of how the project will contribute to the goals of the Exploration Projects
   - Presentation of how the project will contribute to knowledge exchange formats
   - Output and sustainability strategy or perspectives for anchoring the project (e.g. longterm research strategy or plans for anchoring the project and obtaining subsequent third-party funding)

2. Further documents to be submitted
   - Short applicant CVs focusing on their five most important publications on the topic to be addressed by the project
• Costs projection including an explanation and justification of costs as well as details of co-financing by the participating institutions or third-party funding
• List of cooperation partners
• Index of cited literature
• Statement provided by the relevant dean’s office or equivalent institute concerning basic equipment (rooms etc.)

A form for applicants can be found online. Further details are provided in the online portal.
We would also like to draw your attention to the FAQs for the main call, which can be found on the Alliance website.

Selection procedure
The selection process is two-stage. Firstly, all proposals will be assessed by an expert committee that consist of international experts in the field of social cohesion as well as experts from the Berlin University Alliance. Up to 15 proposals will be selected and invited to a project pitch to be held at the beginning of June. Selected representatives from other steering committees will also attend the pitch in an advisory capacity. The PIs will present their projects to the selection committee. It is planned to fund five projects. The earliest start of funding will be 1 July 2020.

Funding criteria
In addition to excellence in research, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and networked approaches are of particular importance for the Exploration Projects funding program.

The main funding criteria are:

A (key funding criteria)
• Convincingly demonstrating that a new field of research in interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary cooperation will be opened up by the Exploration Project
• Diversity of the group members

B (essential requirements for funding)
• Research
  o Quality and originality of the research program by international standards
  o Coherence of the research program and the research productivity of the cooperation
  o Convincing presentation of research gap
• Participants/personnel
  o International competitiveness
  o Promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity
• Appropriateness of the funds applied for

C (additional criteria)
• Contribution of the research program to the Alliance’s Grand Challenge Social Cohesion
• Research excellence of the participating researchers
• Promotion of early career scientists and their independence
• Management, quality assurance, science communication
Contact persons

The central contacts for your questions are the academic coordinators of Steering Committee 1 at grand-challenges@berlin-university-alliance.de.

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