The **DFG Cluster of Excellence TransforM** is inviting applications for up to

20 Seed Grants for 1-Year Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Researcher Positions

About the TransforM Seed Fund

We are inviting applications for up to 20 short-term ("seed fund") researcher positions for PhD candidates and post-doctoral researchers. For a duration of up to 12 months, this seed fund will support early career researchers to develop their independent research proposals within TransforM's scholarly community and submit them to external funding organizations for further funding. In the event of a successful application, the researchers and their projects will remain affiliated with the TransforM Cluster.

- PhD candidates are expected to develop an externally funded scholarship application for a PhD research project (e.g., for the German Academic Scholarship Foundation or other foundations, DAAD, or in support of ongoing project proposals by TransforM PIs)
- Post-docs are expected to prepare and submit a third-party funded project proposal, including funding for their own position, to funding bodies like DFG, BMFTR, Volkswagen Foundation etc.

The ideal starting date for the seed fund positions is March, 2026. During the seed funding period, awardees will be affiliated with one or several TransforM PIs and their respective research groups. They will participate in the TransforM research community and events, and contribute actively to knowledge exchange and collaborative formats across the cluster.

About TransforM

TransforM – the Munich Center for Transformative Technologies and Societal Change – is a new social science research cluster funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) as part of the Excellence Strategy. TransforM tackles the dual challenge of advancing fundamental social science for highly technologized societies and rethinking technology development through a social science lens. As an interdisciplinary social science cluster with a principal focus on technology, our goal is to augment current theories and methods to comprehensively understand and help shape transformative technology to better serve diverse societal needs. Better knowledge about why, when, and how technologies become socially transformative will enhance our ability to assess and inform transformation pathways 'all the way through' – from the early stages of their emergence to their wider socio-economic impact.

TransforM is deeply embedded in Munich's vibrant innovation ecosystem. Anchored by two of Germany's leading research universities – Technical University of Munich (TUM) and Ludwig Maximilians University (LMU) – as well as an exceptional concentration of non-university research institutions concerned with technology and innovation (including the Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition, the Deutsches Museum, the ifo Institute for Economic Research, the ZEW Leibniz Centre for European Economic Research, and UnternehmerTUM, among others), the cluster brings together an unrivaled depth and diversity of social science expertise focused specifically on technology.

www.transform-cluster.de

We Offer

- Up to 12-month of seed funding for a researcher position at Technical University of Munich (TUM) or a TransforM partner organization
- Positions will be funded according to TV-L based on experience and level of qualification (typically 0,75 TV-L E13 for PhD position, 1,0 TV-L E13 for postdoc position)
- Structured mentoring and proposal-development support by TransforM PIS
- Integration into one of TransforM's project groups and PI networks
- Access to workshops, seminars, proposal coaching, and professional development formats
- The opportunity to work within a unique interdisciplinary research community concerned with social science questions about technology and innovation

Your Profile

We invite applications from researchers interested in the transformative technologies and societal change from across the social sciences and humanities. We specifically seek candidates working on topics that align with TransforM's research mission and thematic priorities. These include (but are not limited to):

- The 5 TransforM Focus Areas:
  - Opportunity & Design
  - Complexity & Resilience
  - Justice & Equity
  - Responsibility & Legitimacy
  - Trust & Governance
- The 4 TransforM Nexus Infrastructures:
  - Public Technology Lab
  - Real-Time Response Team
  - Startup & Industrial Exchange Hub
  - Transformative Technology Observatory

Qualifications:

- **Doctoral seed grant:** A completed or near-finished Master's degree in social science or humanities, including fields such as Science and Technology Studies (STS), Political Science, Economics, Management, Public Policy, Innovation Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, History of Science, Geography, Law or a related field (for candidates without a degree in the social sciences or humanities, a demonstration of sufficient qualification is expected);
- **Postdoctoral seed grant:** A completed/submitted dissertation in social science or humanities, including fields such as Science and Technology Studies (STS), Political Science, Economics, Management, Public Policy, Innovation Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, History of Science, Geography, Law or a related field (for candidates without a dissertation or degree in the social sciences or humanities, a demonstration of sufficient qualifcation and subject-specific expertise is expected);
- Excellent knowledge of the topics, theories and methods of the discipline you are applying in;
- Previous experience with social science questions concerning technologies is an advantage;
- International experience is an advantage;
- Demonstrated ability to work in a collaborative, multi-disciplinary environment is an advantage;
- **Established links to a TransforM PI are helpful, but not required.**

Application Process

Application Deadline: Jan 23, 2026
Interviews will be conducted within two weeks after the deadline.

Ideal starting date of seed fund positions: March 2026

Please send your **complete application as a single PDF document** to karolina.knittel@tum.de with the **subject line "TransforM Seed Fund Application"**, including the following components:

- Short cover letter (max. 1 page) – please indicate the external funding organization and call you will be targeting, if known
- Curriculum vitae (max. 3 pages)
- Sketch of proposal idea for further development into a full proposal for funding application during the seed-fund period based on the following template: https://transform-cluster.de/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/TransforM-Seed-Fund-Project-Template.docx
- Names of 1-2 references with a brief description of your relationship to them
- Optional: Relevant certificates

Applications will be evaluated based on:

- Quality, originality, and feasibility of the proposed research
- Fit with TransforM's thematic mission and research environment
- Fit with research activities by TransforM PIs
- Potential for securing external funding within 12 months
- Academic excellence and professional trajectory

TransforM is committed to building a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace. We strongly encourage applications from individuals from underrepresented or marginalized backgrounds, including—but not limited to—people of different ethnicities, nationalities, gender identities, sexual orientations, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The position is suitable for people with severe disabilities, and we are committed to providing reasonable accommodations throughout the recruitment process and employment. Applicants with severe disabilities will be given preference in hiring when their suitability, qualifications, and professional performance are essentially equal. The Technical University of Munich aims to increase the proportion of women; applications from women are therefore expressly encouraged.

Contact

Prof. Dr. Sebastian Pfotenhauer (TransforM Speaker) and **Dr. Caitlin Corrigan (Managing Director)**
Technical University of Munich
TUM School of Social Sciences and Technology
Augustenstr. 46
80333 Munich, Germany

Please address any questions regarding the seed fund to: contact@transform-cluster.de

Note on data protection: As part of your application, you provide personal data to be processed at Technical University of Munich (TUM). Please note our data protection information in accordance with Art. 13 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) on the collection and processing of personal data in the context of your application. By submitting your application, you confirm that you have taken note of TUM's data protection information.