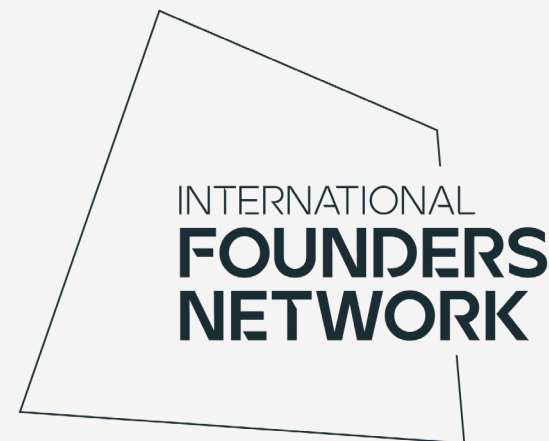


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Financing your business

A handbook for international researchers aiming to start a business

by internationalFOUNDERS Network



Your Path to Starting a Business in Germany

Are you an international researcher thinking about starting your own business in Münster/Germany? Whether you've just arrived or have been here for a while, this handbook is for you. Entrepreneurship opens exciting doors, but it also comes with challenges—like figuring out how to fund your idea, understanding legal requirements, and turning your vision into reality.

This guide will walk you through the key steps and resources available to help you succeed.

The first chapter shows you how to finance your startup through different funding options and resources.

**Let's lay the foundation
for your success
together!**





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Funding Options

For Start-ups

1. EXIST Business Start-up Grant
2. EXIST Transfer of Research
3. EXIST Women
4. Founder Scholarship NRW
5. Go-Bio Initial
6. Start-up Transfer NRW

For self-employment (but not freelance)

1. EXIST Women
2. Start-up grant from the Federal Employment Agency
3. ERP-Founders Credit





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For Start-ups

1. EXIST Business Start-up Grant



Who?

- ✓ Team of up to 3 people
- ✓ One member should be currently studying or have a university degree.
- ✓ Cannot work more than 5 hours per week alongside the scholarship.

What?

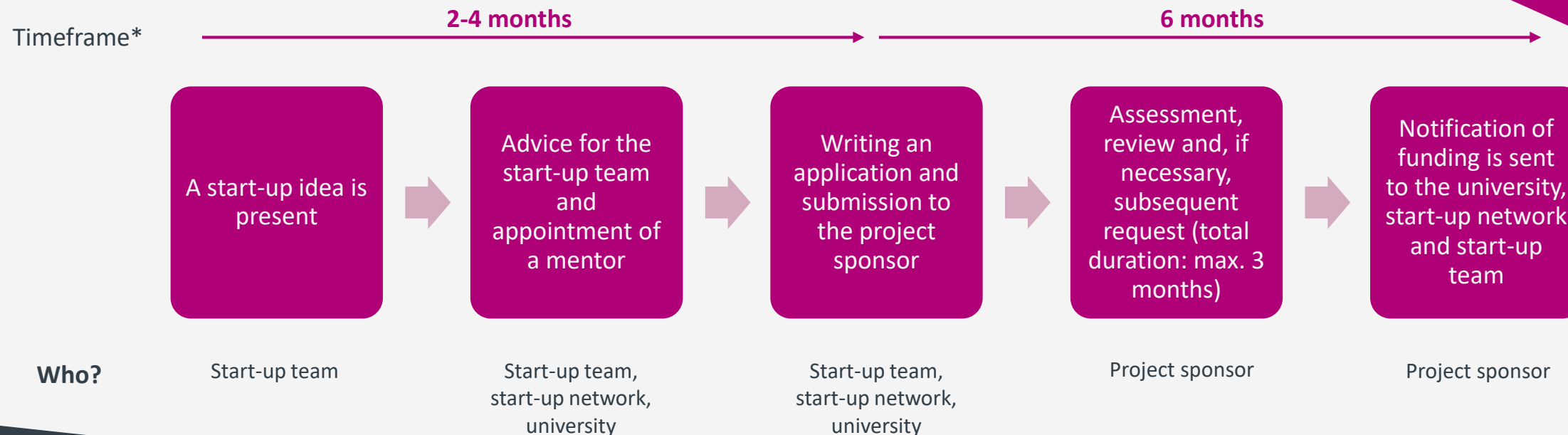
- ✓ Innovative, technology-oriented start-up projects or knowledge-based services with a scientific basis.
- ✓ Cannot be generating revenue yet.
- ✓ Funding is only possible if a corporation has not yet been established (GbR permitted).
- ✓ A professor as a mentor is necessary for the application process.

How?

- ✓ Max. 12 months
- ✓ €1,000 for students, €2,000 for technical employees, €2,500 for graduates with a Bachelor's degree, €3,000 for doctoral graduates.
- ✓ A bonus of €150 per child per month is granted for dependent children.
- ✓ €10,000 material funding for individuals and up to €30,000 for teams.
- ✓ An additional grant of up to €5,000 is available for consultancy services.
- ✓ Individual coaching and support from the network included.

Find out more [here](#).
Book an appointment with
REACH [here](#).

1. EXIST Business Start-up Grant



A valid residence permit is required throughout the entire process.

2. EXIST Transfer of Research



Who?

- ✓ Up to 4 people (max. 3 scientists)
- ✓ Team members must have an academic degree (at least a Master's degree/diploma).
- ✓ Business management expertise must be present in the team.
- ✓ Project manager must have experience in project management.
- ✓ The individuals who are sponsored must be fully involved in the initial phase of the project.

What?

- ✓ Innovative product or process ideas that require at least 1 to 1.5 years of development work.
- ✓ The idea must arise from a research project in which at least one team member was involved.
- ✓ Cannot be generating revenue yet.
- ✓ Funding is only possible if a corporation has not yet been established (GbR permitted).
- ✓ A professor as mentor is required for the application.
- ✓ The proof of concept (proof of principle) must already have been provided.
- ✓ The situation regarding property rights should already be clarified.

How?

- ✓ Funding period: minimum of 18 to a maximum of 36 months
- ✓ The remuneration of the team members in accordance with the collective agreement is paid for the entire duration of the project.
- ✓ Two phases
 - ✓ The first phase generally provides funding for up to 18 months, or up to 36 months for particularly complex projects.
 - ✓ In the second phase, a maximum of €180,000 can be applied for over a period of up to 18 months.
- ✓ A maximum of 75% of the specific costs of the project will be covered.
- ✓ The funding does not have to be repaid.

Find out more [here](#).
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REACH [here](#).

2. EXIST Transfer of Research

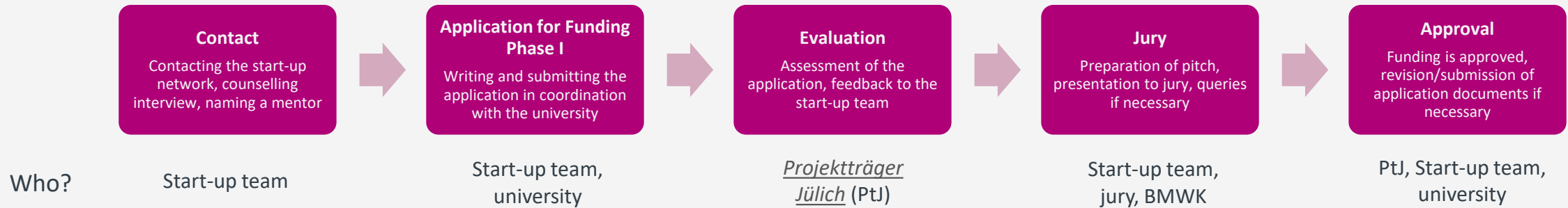
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Phase I

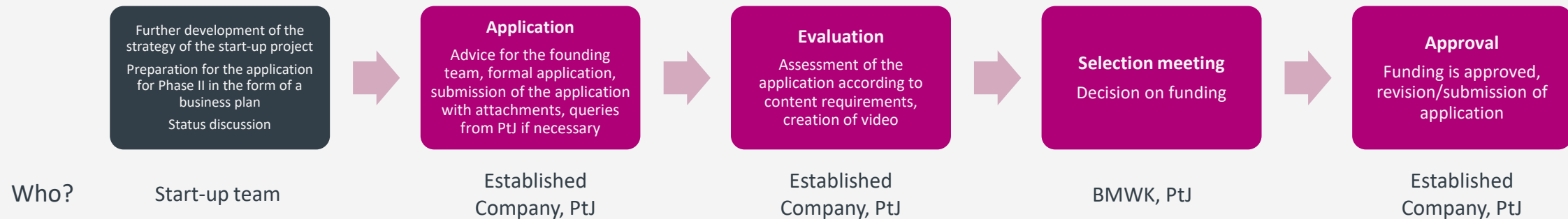
timeframe*

2-4 months

9 months



Phase II



The grant is awarded on an ongoing basis, but there are specific application deadlines when submitted proposals are reviewed collectively. These deadlines are: March 31, August 31 and November 30.
Applications can be submitted at any time, but they are reviewed after the respective cutoff dates.
It is advisable to contact REACH early to receive guidance and assistance with the application process.

*Details are subject to change and may be approximate.

3. EXIST Women



Who?

- ✓ Women who are
 - ✓ Graduates (even if graduated more than 5 years ago)
 - ✓ Scientists
 - ✓ Students (at least 50% of studies completed)
- ✓ Women with professional qualifications
- ✓ Cannot work more than 20 hours per week alongside the scholarship.

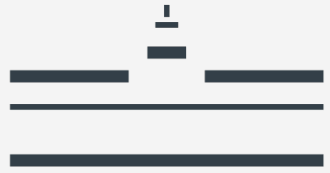
What?

- ✓ Support for women with or without a concrete startup idea.
- ✓ Open to all topics and technologies.
- ✓ Focus on fostering motivation, creativity, and innovation.
- ✓ No previous startup founded with the current idea.
- ✓ No prior startup funding from federal or state programs.

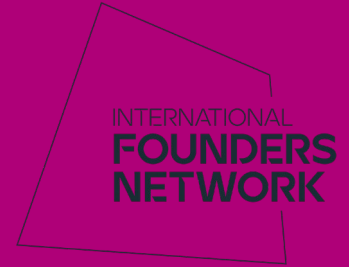
How?

- ✓ Three-month scholarship: €1,000/month for students, €2,000/month for vocational training graduates, €2,500/month for university graduates, €3,000/month for PhD holders
- ✓ One-time grant: €2,000 for material expenses
- ✓ A bonus of €150 per child is granted for dependent children.
- ✓ 12 months program overall
 - ✓ Mentoring, coaching, workshops, and networking opportunities
 - ✓ Access to workspaces in incubators
 - ✓ Structured in three phases: Qualification, Development, Implementation

Find out more [here](#).
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REACH [here](#).



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4. Founder Scholarship NRW

Who?

- ✓ Team of up to 3 people
- ✓ Residence must be in North Rhine-Westphalia.
- ✓ Cannot work more than 15 hours per week alongside the scholarship.

What?

- ✓ Start-up projects that have NOT yet been founded or were founded no more than twelve months ago.
- ✓ Future-oriented technologies, innovative services and processes
- ✓ If NOT previously established, the company must be formally founded within the first six months (a GbR is sufficient)

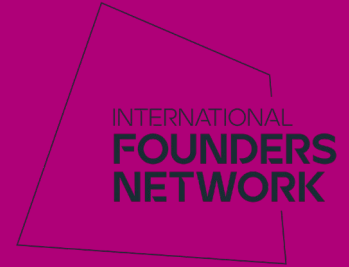
How?

- ✓ Monthly €1.000 gross per person
- ✓ Funding period is one year.
- ✓ Individual coaching and support from the network included.
- ✓ The scholarship can NOT be combined with other subsidies such as EXIST, BaFöG etc.

Find out more [here](#).
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REACH [here](#).



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5. Go-Bio Initial

Who?

- ✓ Funding is designed for master students, doctoral candidates or postdocs who can imagine a career away from traditional academia, but also for experienced professionals.
- ✓ Team building during exploratory and feasibility phase.

What?

- ✓ Identification and further development of life science exploitation ideas.
- ✓ Preferably from the sectors therapeutics, diagnostics, research tools and platform technologies.
- ✓ Bioeconomy ideas canNOT apply for Go Bio (Initial) but can apply for the Bioeconomy Ideas Competition.

How?

- ✓ There is an annual application deadline, which ends on **February 15**.
- 1. Exploratory phase:
 - Building on initial scientific findings.
 - A potential commercialization idea should be developed, as well as a revenue strategy and necessary partners identified.
 - The funding is provided by the university or a research institution for a period of up to twelve months.
- 2. Feasibility phase:
 - Development work is to be carried out until proof of principle is achieved.
 - Funding is available for individual or collaborative projects lasting up to 24 months.
 - Companies can also be involved.

Find out more [here](#).

(only in German)

Book an appointment with
REACH [here](#).



6. Start-up Transfer NRW

Who?

- ✓ Research and educational institutions in NRW.
- ✓ Founders must be employed at these institutions.
- ✓ No company may have been founded based on the business idea before the funding period.
- ✓ Exclusions: Shelf companies, takeovers, mergers, business splits (§123 UmwG).
- ✓ No diversification: Existing businesses cannot expand via this program.

What?

- ✓ Business concepts based on research and development results or research know-how using the research infrastructure.
- ✓ Development of services, processes, or products to the point of market maturity.
- ✓ Testing of start-up ideas (proof of concept, prototyping, validation of the start-up idea).
- ✓ Preparation of the start-up (further development of the business plan and the business concept).

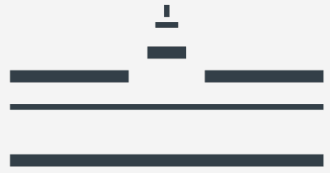
How?

- ✓ Funding requirement is a business plan for the subsequent start-up and growth phase.
- ✓ Funding of up to €270,000 for projects with a funding period of no more than 24 months for the following expenses:
 - ✓ Personnel lump sums
 - ✓ A flat-rate overhead allowance
 - ✓ Project-specific material and equipment expenses
 - ✓ Investments and expenses for external services
 - ✓ Expenses for property rights
 - ✓ Expenses related to the further development of the business plan and the business concept

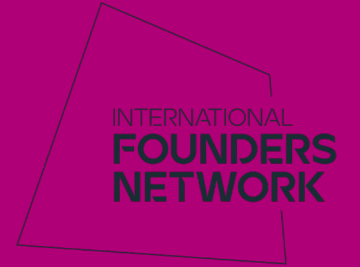
Find out more [here](#).

(only in German)

Book an appointment with
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**For self-employment
(but not freelance)**



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1. EXIST Women



INTERNATIONAL
**FOUNDERS
NETWORK**

Who?

- ✓ Women who are
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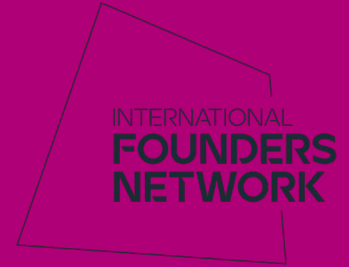
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REACH [here](#).



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2. Start-up grant from the Federal Employment Agency

Who?

- ✓ Unemployed individuals receiving unemployment benefits (ALG I).
- ✓ At least 150 days of remaining unemployment benefit.
- ✓ Must start a full-time self-employment to end unemployment.
- ✓ International applicants:
 - ✓ Valid residence permit allowing self-employment.
 - ✓ Good German language skills recommended.
 - ✓ Support available through the IQ Network for foreign entrepreneurs.

What?

- ✓ Support for transitioning from unemployment to full-time self-employment.
- ✓ Financial aid for living expenses and social security during the start-up phase.

How?

- ✓ Phase 1: 6 months of support
 - ✓ Monthly grant equal to last unemployment benefit + €300 for social security.
- ✓ Phase 2: Optional 9 months extension
 - ✓ €300/month for social security if business progress is proven.
- ✓ Application steps:
 1. Consultation with employment agency.
 2. Submit business plan and expert opinion.
 3. Online application via employment agency portal.
 4. Approval and payment after evaluation.

Find out more [here](#).
(only in German)



3. ERP-Founders Credit

Who?

- ✓ Individuals starting a business or freelance activity in Germany.
- ✓ Non-EU citizens need a valid residence permit allowing self-employment.
- ✓ German proficiency is recommended.

What?

- ✓ It is a government-backed loan program by the KfW Bank to support start-ups, freelancers, and small businesses in Germany.
- ✓ For young companies: Businesses operating for less than 5 years.
- ✓ For small businesses: Companies with fewer than 50 employees and an annual turnover or balance sheet of max. €10 million.
- ✓ For investments and operating costs

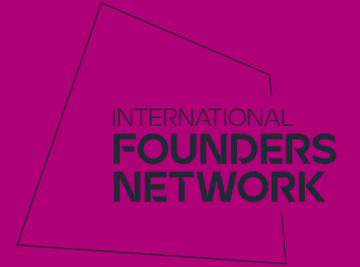
How?

- ✓ Loan amount: Up to €125,000 per applicant.
- ✓ Term: Choose between 5 or 10 years, including 1–2 repayment-free years.
- ✓ Interest rate: Low fixed rate for the entire term.
- ✓ Risk coverage: KfW covers 80% of the credit risk, making it easier for banks to approve the loan.
- ✓ Application: Must be submitted through a house bank, not directly with KfW.

Find out more [here](#).
(only in German)



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Helpful links and resources

All funding options:

- ✓ [EXIST - University-Based Business Start-Ups](#)
- ✓ [Founder Scholarship NRW](#)
- ✓ [GO-Bio Initial](#) (only in German)
- ✓ [Start-up Transfer.NRW](#) (only in German)
- ✓ [Start-up Grant](#)
- ✓ [ERP Founders Credit](#) (only in German)

Other useful links:

- [Network IQ](#)
- [Financing a business - Wir gründen in Deutschland](#)
- [REACH - 5 good financing options for start-ups in the early stages](#)
- [Finanzieren & Fördern - Gründerplattform](#) (only in German)
- [New venture Financing | REACH Academy](#)

Are you a migrant founder with your start-up already on the market?

[Apply now](#) for the Spring Batch 2025 of the [The Migrant Accelerator](#)

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