



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE

Directorate S – Innovation in Science and Policymaking
Centre for Advanced Studies

Call for Expressions of Interest

Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships 2026

Purpose of the call

The Collaborative Doctoral Partnership Programme (CDP) is a JRC initiative aimed at establishing strategic collaborations with Partner Institutions, including higher education institutions and research organisations. Through the programme, Partner Institutions collaborate with the JRC to jointly design, host, and supervise doctoral research projects of common interest.

For the purposes of this programme and subsequent call, the term Partner Institution includes both higher education institutions and research organisations that fulfil the eligibility criteria defined in the next section.

The CDP provides a unique opportunity for Partner Institutions to tap into the JRC's robust research capacity and expertise while gaining a deeper understanding of research needs throughout the European policy cycle. The CDP promotes mutual enhancement of related skills and competences, combines existing knowledge and capacities, and enhances networking in key scientific areas.

This ultimately provides high-quality policy-oriented research opportunities for doctoral candidates and equips them to navigate the science-policy interface.

Scope of the call

Successful applicants will have the opportunity to establish a scientific collaboration with the JRC at an institutional level. This collaboration will support the development of PhD projects of common interest, which will be jointly designed, hosted, and supervised.

The CDP does not involve any transfer of funds between the Partner Institution and the JRC. Each institution will cover the costs related to the doctoral student during the period spent at the respective institution. Whilst staying at JRC premises, the JRC will employ the doctoral student under the national employment law of the site where they will be assigned and cover related employment costs including salary, necessary training and work-related travel costs.

Doctoral students partaking in the CDP will spend anywhere between 12 and 24 months of their PhD project at one of the JRC sites in Ispra, Petten, Geel, Karlsruhe, Brussels or Seville, and the remaining time at the Partner Institution. The hosting JRC site will depend on the specific project and is indicated in the call documents.

In addition, the doctoral students will become part of the CDP community, which meets regularly and provides an additional platform to develop the capacity to provide scientific support to policy and use transferable skills in science communication and knowledge management.

The 2026 CDP Call for Expressions of Interest provides the opportunity to collaborate with the JRC on 8 collaborative research themes.

Eligibility

The Call for Expressions of Interest is directed at Partner Institutions, including higher education institutions and research organisations, that wish to organise PhD projects with their JRC counterparts. Partner Institutions should fulfil the following criteria at the closing date of the Call and for the entire duration of the CDP Agreement with the JRC (at least 5 years from the time of signature):

1. Originate from an EU Member State or country associated to the EU Research Framework Programme in force. In the case of nuclear collaboration topics, the partner institution should originate from a country associated to the Euratom Research and Training Programme;
2. Have the necessary administrative autonomy to sign agreements with external partners;
3. Be able to host and train PhD candidates; and
4. Be accredited to award doctoral degrees. Partner Institutions that are not accredited to award doctoral degrees may still apply provided that they have an agreement with a Partner Institution that is accredited to award doctoral degrees and fulfils all other criteria. In case their application is successful, the JRC will sign the CDP Agreement with both Partner Institutions.

An eventual CDP agreement is concluded at the institutional level and may support collaborative projects within multiple schools or faculties within the same institution. Applications can therefore be submitted by a group of researchers, on the condition that they are affiliated with the same institution.

All applications will be checked for eligibility. Applicants with non-eligible applications will be informed after closure of the call.

Application timeline

The application deadline is **25 September 2026, 23.59 (CET)**.

The results of the call will be announced, and feedback will be shared with the applicants by December 2026. This will allow for the consecutive definition of the PhD projects, signing of the CDP agreement and selection of the doctoral students by the start of the academic year. Partner Institutions can, in agreement with their JRC counterparts, decide to postpone the start of doctoral projects to fit operational needs and possibilities.

Application process

Applications are to be submitted as an online application form completed by the Partner Institution before the indicated deadline. The link to the online application form is available on the CDP website for the duration of the call.

The 2026 Call for Expressions of Interest is formulated around eight Collaboration Themes. Applicants may submit one proposal for each Collaboration Theme. When multiple proposals from the same Partner Institution are successful, a single CDP agreement covering multiple Collaboration Themes will be concluded with the JRC.

The JRC is looking to establish new CDP partnerships around each Collaboration Theme, with each theme resulting in up to four collaborative PhD projects. The themes and corresponding projects are distributed across all eight scientific Directorates of the JRC.

Through these new thematic CDP collaborations, the JRC is pursuing robust partnerships with HEIs that go beyond individual research groups. We strongly encourage researchers from different groups, faculties, and schools within the same institution to submit a joint proposal.

Incomplete proposals not complying with the instructions in the online application form will be considered not eligible and will not be evaluated.

In case of questions on the CDP programme or issues with online application form (EU Survey), applicants are welcome to contact the JRC at JRC-CDP@ec.europa.eu.

Collaboration Themes

Code	Collaboration Theme
26.B	Autonomous discovery for integrated EU policy modelling
26.C	Leveraging AI in energy and mobility systems
26.D	AI, geospatial intelligence, and environmental policy integration to enhance ecosystem resilience
26.E	AI-enabled resilience, security and sustainable infrastructure
26.F	Leveraging AI and data standards to advance disease prevention, detection, and treatment
26.G	Data-Driven and AI-Enabled Approaches for Nuclear Science and Technology
26.S	Leveraging AI to Improve Policy Design and Evaluation
26.T	Complex AI systems' evaluation

Selection criteria

The JRC will assess all eligible proposals according to the following selection criteria:

- **Research** (50 points), assessing the quality and relevance of the applicant's expertise and research practice.
- **Collaboration** (30 points), assessing the applicant's experience in collaborative research projects and policy-oriented research.
- **Organisation** (20 points), assessing the applicant's capacity and infrastructure for hosting doctoral fellows.

The application form to be filled out contains questions that are organised around each of these selection criteria.

Implementation

Upon closure of the call, the JRC will inform applicants who submitted non-eligible proposals and proceed to assess eligible proposals according to the selection criteria.

The selected candidates are invited to set up a CDP partnership with the JRC. This entails:

- The **CDP Agreement** follows a standard template, as published together with the Call for Expressions of Interest on the CDP website.¹ There is one template for Partner Institutions from EU Member States and another one for Partner Institutions from associated countries. Both the JRC and the Partner Institution will sign the CDP Agreement. In case the Partner Institution is not accredited to award doctoral degrees directly, the associated Partner Institution that will award the degree will also sign the CDP Agreement. CDP agreements have an initial duration of 5 years, and can be renewed, amended or extended to accommodate possible future PhD projects beyond the initial collaboration.
- The **Multi-Annual Work Programme** is jointly prepared by the researchers of the Partner Institution and the JRC. It describes the Collaboration Theme(s), PhD topic(s) and expected outputs of the collaboration. The Multi-Annual Work Programme will be added to the CDP Agreement as Annex B.
- The Partner Institution and the JRC agree on the **modalities for the selection of the doctoral student**. The suggested modalities by the JRC are part of the CDP Agreement templates. The agreed upon modalities will be added to the CDP Agreement as Annex C. Following the completion and signature of the CDP Agreement by both parties, the Partner Institution and JRC start recruiting doctoral students for the collaborative PhD projects.

Website: [Collaborative Doctoral Partnership \(CDP\) programme - Joint Research Centre](#)

Email: jrc-cdp@ec.europa.eu

⁽¹⁾ The JRC is a public institution ensuring equal treatment of all applicants. Therefore, changes to the contractual conditions deviating from the template would only be admissible for imperative reasons in order to take into account the particular situation of the HEI or university and their PhD arrangements and/or legal circumstances that would otherwise impede participation.