



Application Handbook

Prototype Fund



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Introduction

This handbook explains how to correctly fill in the application form for Prototype Fund and gives tips and advice on how to write the best possible proposal for your project.

The handbook is structured so that you can either read it as a whole to prepare for your application, or use it as a reference if you get stuck with certain parts of the application. You will find a page for each section of the application in this handbook, which you can find using the table of contents.

Throughout this handbook, there are many references to "we". This refers to the various stakeholders who organize and facilitate the Prototype Fund: The Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the DLR Projektträger, the support and accompanying research team of the Open Knowledge Foundation Germany and, of course, our jury who select the projects.

The handbook is updated on an ongoing basis. If you have any further questions, please refer to our [FAQ](#) or contact the Prototype Fund team at info@prototypefund.de.

At the end of this document you will find a [checklist](#). Please read it carefully to avoid mistakes that could lead to the direct exclusion of your application.

[Here](#) you can find more information about the application timeline and the funding terms.

Version: November 2024 – Application phase for Class 1

Funding criteria

Before we go into the detail of each of the questions on the application form, here is some important information that you should be aware of before applying for the Prototype Fund.

Please note: the following eligibility criteria must be met before an application can be considered! Unfortunately we often cannot consider great and exciting applications because these criteria are not met. We really don't want that to happen! So please be careful and don't make these mistakes when applying.

- ◆ We only support the development of free and open source software. This means: no hardware, no software that will not be released under a FOSS license, no campaigns, etc.
- ◆ We only support individual developers or small teams of up to four people. Companies, universities, research institutions and other organizations and associations are not eligible to apply.
- ◆ Applications should be comprehensible: You should write comprehensibly so that even someone who is not an expert in the field of the project can understand what you want to do. We recommend having the application proofread by an external person before submitting it.

Resources for a good application

- ◆ This handbook!
- ◆ Our [notes](#) on the submission process
- ◆ [Examples](#) (in German) of good applications (we have funded these projects). Please note that these applications were submitted for a slightly different version of the Prototype Fund. Although the content of the applications does not entirely fit our current criteria, they are nonetheless worth reading to understand what we expect.
- ◆ Our [FAQ](#)

1.

General information

Projekttitlel

[In English: Project title]

Regardless of whether it is the final name of your project or a working title, we would like to know what your project is called at this stage. The title can still be adjusted in a later step after your project has been accepted, when the formal application is submitted.

Name für den Account

[In English: Name for the account]

The user account on the application platform will be created under this name. This can be a real name, a pseudonym or a team name.

Vorname / Name

[In English: Surname / Name]

Even if you have created the account with a pseudonym or team name, we would like to know the full name of the main contact person for the application.

E-Mail-Adresse

[In English: e-mail address]

How can we notify you of our decision to accept or reject your application? Here you can enter the e-mail address of the main contact person for the application or an e-mail address that can be used to reach the entire team. Please make sure you check this mailbox regularly so that you don't miss the application workshop if your proposal is accepted!

Hast du einen Account bei GitHub, BitBucket oder einer ähnlichen Plattform? Wenn ja, gib bitte den entsprechenden Link an.

[In English: Do you have an account with GitHub, BitBucket or a similar platform? If so, please provide the link. (optional)]

Please enter the personal Github account (or Bitbucket, Gitlab etc.) of the main contact person for the application – the link to the project will be requested in a later step. If you do not have a Github or similar account, you can leave the field blank. If you do have one, however, we recommend that you share the link here. This will help the jury to better understand you and your work.

2. Project description

Beschreibe dein Projekt kurz.

[In English: Briefly describe your project.]

Why do we ask this question?

First we would like to know what you want to build during the 6-month funding period. Try to describe as concretely and simply as possible what software you want to work on and why this is important.

In short: **What** do I want to do?

Length

100 words

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ A brief description of what goals you want to achieve with your software project

Note: These are examples, you do not have to address all points.

- ◆ A brief description of how your software project should work
 - ◆ The backstory of your idea: How did you come up with it? In what context should the project work?
 - ◆ Why you think the project is important
-

What don't we want to read here?

- ◆ A project description that is only technical (this will come later)
 - ◆ A description that forgets to mention how the software solves the described issue
-

3. Social issue

Welche gesellschaftliche Herausforderung willst du mit dem Projekt angehen?

[In English: Which social issue do you want to address with the project?]

Why do we ask this question?

All projects supported through Prototype Fund have a clear social added value. Here we want to understand how you want to contribute to solving a social issue with your project.

In short: **Why** is your project important for society?

Length

175 words

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ A short, concise and clear description of the social issue you have identified
 - ◆ Why this issue urgently needs to be solved
 - ◆ The current situation: What is missing to solve the issue?
 - ◆ Why software can contribute to solving the issue
-

What don't we want to read here?

- ◆ Tech-solutionism: We don't expect magical solutions, but practicable approaches.
-

4. Technical realization

Wie willst du dein Projekt technisch umsetzen?

[In English: How do you want to realize your project on a technical level?]

Why do we ask this question?

Time for the technical aspects! Even if detailed questions are often only clarified during the funding phase, you should already be able to roughly explain how you will implement the project at the time of application. Based on your description, we need to be able to assess whether the project is feasible in this form and whether your plan to use various technical components makes sense.

In short: **How** will the project be implemented?

Length

175 words

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ Concrete information on the tech stack: programming languages, frameworks, libraries, details on infrastructure, etc.
 - ◆ Projects you want to build on – we firmly believe that you don't always have to reinvent the wheel!
 - ◆ Concise sentences that make it clear how the tools will be used
-

What don't we want to read here?

- ◆ Plans that are too vague: Terms such as "a website", "an app" are not sufficient to be able to evaluate the project technically.
 - ◆ A mere list of tools – write sentences!
-

5. Current status

Hast du schon an der Idee gearbeitet? Wenn ja, beschreibe kurz den aktuellen Stand und erkläre die geplanten Neuerungen.

[In English: Have you already worked on the idea? If so, briefly describe the current status and explain the planned new features.]

Why do we ask this question?

Some grantees have been working on their project for a long time, others apply with a new idea and familiarize themselves with the topic during the funding period. Both approaches – and everything in between – are perfectly fine. There is no right or wrong: we just want to understand the project and estimate the time required for implementation.

For projects that have been running for some time, we recommend making it clear how the part to be funded is clearly distinct from the rest of the project. For example, it may be a new feature or module – an "improvement to the existing software" is not sufficient for funding.

In short: **What** is the status of your project?

Length

100 words

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ If the project already exists: What has been accomplished so far, what will be different after the funding phase?
 - ◆ Even if the project does not yet officially exist, have you already worked on it, tried it out, discussed it?
 - ◆ Just "no" is fine if the project has not yet been worked on.
-

What don't we want to read here?

- ◆ The Prototype Fund supports software, which means that we can only select projects that mostly involve development work for funding. Existing projects where, for example, "only" documentation, release and marketing are planned are unfortunately not eligible.
-

6. Link to the project

Link zum bestehenden Projekt (falls vorhanden) (optional)

[In English: Link to the existing project (if available)]

Why do we ask this question?

Because it's always helpful if we can see exactly what you're working on! Feel free to share a link with us where we can view the current status of the project, even if it's just notes or a "quick and dirty" attempt that you're not (yet) proud of. This helps to understand the project better!

In short: Quite simply – the **link** to the project.

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ A link to a project page, to a slide deck, to a Github repository, to a demo server, etc.
-

What don't we want to read here?

- ◆ A link to another project that has nothing to do with the application, but shows your own experience in other software projects (this will come later).
-

7. Innovation

Welche ähnlichen Ansätze gibt es schon und was wird dein Projekt anders bzw. besser machen?

[In English: What similar approaches already exist and what will make your project different or better?]

Why do we ask this question?

Here we would like to check whether you have looked into the available alternatives. Have you researched if the software you want to build already exists? It is very rare that no similar projects are to be found. Are the existing projects still active, are they available under a FOSS license, how does your project differ from the existing approaches? Also often relevant: Why don't you want to or can't you build on specific existing projects?

In short: **What** makes your project different from what already exists?

Length

100 words

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ Examples of projects that are similar to your idea and why they do not address the problem you want to solve
 - ◆ What is different and better about your project than existing alternatives?
-

What don't we want to read here?

- ◆ The unsubstantiated claim that no projects are comparable to yours. This does not make the project appear more innovative, but will rather look like the application is not so well thought through
-

8.

Users & target group

Wer ist die Zielgruppe und wie soll dein Projekt sie erreichen?

[In English: Who are the potential users of your project and how do you want to reach them?]

Why do we ask this question?

We want to understand if you have thought about who will use your project. And we want to know how you want to reach these users!

In short: **Who** is the project important **for**?

Length

100 words

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ Clearly defined user groups, whether niche or broad – both can be appropriate, depending on the project.
 - ◆ Ideas on how to reach these users
 - ◆ Information about existing contacts, project partners, communities
-

What don't we want to read here?

- ◆ Vague plans: You want to give talks at conferences? Give an example. Are you looking for project partners? Name some possible organizations, communities or companies you would like to get in touch with.
-

9. Milestones

Skizziere kurz die wichtigsten Meilensteine, die im Förderzeitraum umgesetzt werden sollen.

[In English: Briefly outline the most important milestones that are to be implemented during the funding period.]

Why do we ask this question?

Milestones always give us a good insight into how you proceed with the implementation of a project and how you structure your work. Of course, the milestones may change slightly during the funding period, as unforeseen obstacles can always be encountered during the development of prototypes or certain steps may prove to be superfluous. Simply try to estimate as well as possible what your funding period might look like.

In short: **When** should the individual steps of the project be implemented?

Length

100 words

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ A list of milestones as planned for the six-months funding period. We like to see numbered steps or bullet points here.
 - ◆ Rough timelines (e.g. in weeks or months) are also very helpful for us.
-

What don't we want to read here?

- ◆ "1/ Backend, 2/ Frontend" or "1/ Programming, 2/ User Testing, 3/ Launch" - this is too vague to be able to evaluate your plan.
-

10. Team

Bewerbt ihr euch als Team um die Förderung?

Für Teams: Namen der Teammitglieder

[In English: Are you applying for funding as a team?

For teams: Names of the team members (binding statement)

Note: Teams can consist of up to 4 people.

(optional – please leave blank only if you want to apply alone)]

Why do we ask this question?

This is about the team structure. Team members cannot be added or replaced after funding has been approved. This is the only way we can assess whether all the skills in the team are available to carry out the project.

Length

30 words

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ Names of the team members, position in the team (e.g. back-end developer, designer, expert for XYZ), if possible please include a link to a Github account or similar
 - ◆ Evidence that you have built an interdisciplinary team to cover all aspects of your project, if applicable, is always positive
-

What don't we want to read here?

- ◆ Teams consisting of more than four people
 - ◆ Team composition that are not final: Teams will be funded according to the information provided in the application.
-

11. Experience

*An welchen Software-Projekten hast du / habt ihr bisher gearbeitet?
Bei Open-Source-Projekten bitte einen Link zum Repository
angeben*

[In English: Which software projects have you worked on so far? For open source projects, please provide a link to the repository

Note: Please provide a maximum of 3 project examples (with name and/or link to the repository) (optional)]

Why do we ask this question?

We want to be able to assess whether you are technically capable of implementing the project.

In short: **What** experience is relevant for your application?

Length

100 words

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ Project names with links and a brief description of the extent to which you have worked on the project – e.g. maintainer, regular contributor, designer or you simply made a few pull requests.
 - ◆ A short description (one sentence) of the project, if no public link to the project can be provided.
-

What don't we want to read here?

- ◆ More than three projects per team member
 - ◆ Long descriptions
-

12. Work hours

Wie viele Stunden willst du (bzw. will das Team) in den 6 Monaten Förderzeitraum insgesamt an der Umsetzung arbeiten?

[In English: How many hours in total do you (or does the team) plan to work on the realization of the project during the 6-month funding period?

Note: Please enter a number only – max. 950 h for one person or max. 1,900 h for teams.

The maximum funding is €47,500 for one person or €95,000 for teams. Read [here](#) how the funding amounts are calculated.]

Why do we ask this question?

We would like to know how much time you need to complete the project and assess whether your plans are realistic.

In short: **How much time** do you need to implement the project?

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ Just the number of hours is enough!
-

What don't we want to read here?

- ◆ A number higher than 950 for one person or 1900 for teams – this is the upper limit for funding.
 - ◆ A very low amount of hours (less than approx. 250 hours) for which the administrative effort of the grant is not justified.
 - ◆ A "strategic" underestimation or overestimation of the workload. A project has no more chance of being funded if you plan more or fewer hours. However, we will assess whether the planned amount of time is realistic.
 - ◆ A number of hours per week: The total number of hours for the funding period should be written here.
-

13. Motivation

Erfahrung, Hintergrund, Motivation, Perspektive: Was sollen wir über dich (bzw. euch) wissen und bei der Auswahl berücksichtigen?

[In English: Experience, background, motivation, perspective: What should we know about you and take into account when assessing your application?]

Why do we ask this question?

We are interested to hear why the project matters to you. Are you personally affected by the problem you want to solve? Do you have experience that is key to the project? Have you been working on the topic at hand for some time, are you an expert in the field? Here you can provide us with all the information that is important for our review.

In short: **What** should we know about you?

Length

100 words

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ Personal experience, relevant (technical or other) knowledge, information about the team structure, background information about the project
 - ◆ We like to call this question a "wild card": You decide what else we should know about you and the project!
-

Second Stage

Note: The Prototype Fund allows you to request an extension. These four additional months are intended to help you make technical improvements and, more importantly, ensure that your project is sustainable. Depending on the project, this could involve preparing to set up a company, extensive user testing, building a community, etc. If you are planning to apply for the second phase of funding, you should let us know now.

The maximum number of hours for the Second Stage is calculated based on the hours from the first funding phase. That means that you can request up to 100% of the sum in the Second Stage if you requested 100% in the regular funding phase, up to 50% in the Second Stage if you requested 50% in the regular funding phase, etc.

The decision on the extension and the exact funding amount will be made in the fourth month of funding.

Further information can be found on our website under [Second Stage](#).

14. Second Stage funding

Beantragst du die viermonatige Second-Stage-Förderung nach Ablauf der sechsmonatigen regulären Förderung?

[In English: Do you apply for the four-month Second Stage funding extension after the six-month regular funding ends?

Why do we ask this question?

For formal reasons, you have to decide at the application stage whether you want to apply for Second Stage funding. The aim of the four-month extension is to ensure that the project is sustainable.

Now is the time to think about whether work other than writing code would be useful to your project after the regular funding phase. Does the project need time to build a community, found a company or a non-profit, conduct an intensive user testing and design phase, or develop a campaign or communication strategy in order to continue to exist in a stable manner after the funding phase?

In short: Does the Second Stage **make sense** for your project?

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ A yes or a no – either is fine with us. Not every good project needs Second Stage funding.
-

What don't we want to read here?

- ◆ "I'm not sure yet." You have to convince us now that your application is well thought out. During the funding time, a final decision will be made as to whether an extension makes sense for your project. You can find more information about the Second Stage [on our website](#).
-

15. Second Stage milestones

Skizziere kurz die wichtigsten Meilensteine, die in der viermonatigen Verlängerung deines Förderzeitraum umgesetzt werden sollen.

[In English: Briefly outline the most important milestones that are to be implemented during the four-months funding extension period.]

(optional – mandatory if you are applying for Second Stage funding)

Why do we ask this question?

Milestones always give us a good insight into how you proceed with a project and how you structure your work. Just as for the regular funding period, this helps us to evaluate your project plans for the Second Stage funding.

As this regards the second part of the funding period, we are aware that a number of things may still change in the meantime. Simply try to estimate as well as possible what your Second Stage funding period might look like.

In short: **When** should the individual steps of the project be implemented?

Length

100 words

What do we like reading here?

- ◆ A list of milestones as planned for the four-months funding period. We like to see numbered steps or bullet points here.
 - ◆ Rough timelines (weeks or months) are also very helpful.
-

What don't we want to read here?

- ◆ A focus on programming work. In the Second Stage funding period, the primary focus is on making the project sustainable through other types of activities. Any programming work done in the Second Stage naturally arises from the regular funding period and is, for example, based on feedback or user testing.
 - ◆ "1/ Community building, 2/ Advertising" - this is too vague to be able to evaluate your plan.
-

16. Checkboxes

*Ich habe die Checkliste für Bewerber*innen gelesen.*

[I have read the checklist for applicants.]

Why do we ask this question?

We often cannot consider good applications due to formal errors or a lack of understanding of what is and is not eligible for funding – we really don't want that to happen!

Ich bin über 18 Jahre alt und habe meinen Hauptwohnsitz bzw. den GbR-Sitz meines Teams in Deutschland.

[I am over 18 years old and my main place of residence is in Germany or the GbR of my Team is based in Germany.]

Why do we ask this question?

We can only fund you if you are over 18 and the main applicant is based in Germany. Team members from other EU countries can be funded if the GbR is based in Germany.

Ich bin damit einverstanden, die Projektergebnisse unter einer Open-Source-Lizenz (z. B. MIT Lizenz), öffentlich zugänglich (z. B. über Github/Gitlab/Codeberg) zur Verfügung zu stellen.

[I agree to make the project publicly available (e.g. via Github/Gitlab/Codeberg) under an open source license (e.g. MIT license).]

Why do we ask this question?

We only support free and open source software projects. FOSS software can be further developed by anyone who can write code and has access to the Internet. This enables broad participation and ensures that resources are used efficiently.

Checklist: I have checked carefully that...

- ◆ I have read the [Prototype Fund website](#) and I am familiar with the new focus and structure of the fund.
- ◆ I am applying for a software project.
- ◆ I am not applying as a company, institution or association, but as a private individual. My team consists of a maximum of four members.
- ◆ My application is entirely written in German or English.
- ◆ I have written my application in such a way that even someone who is not an expert in my field can understand what I want to do.
- ◆ In doing so, I answered the questions: What (do I want to do?), How (will I implement my project?), Why (is this needed?), Who (is my target group?).
- ◆ I have considered whether Second Stage funding might be useful for my project. If so, I have applied directly for this funding. I understand that I cannot receive Second Stage funding later if I do not apply for it now.
- ◆ I had my application read by an external person. An external view can provide good indications that, for example, something is not clear or important information is missing.
- ◆ I have provided a link to a website (Github/Gitlab/Bitbucket or similar). This helps the jury to understand that I am competent to implement the project.
- ◆ I have described the technical implementation of my project in concrete terms: specific tools, programming languages, libraries, architecture, etc.
- ◆ I have identified my target audiences and thought of how to reach them.
- ◆ I have listed the milestones for the implementation of the project. "1/ Backend, 2/ Frontend" is not sufficient for the application.
- ◆ I have checked whether there is already an open source version of my project. It is better to acknowledge the existence of similar projects and explain how your project differs from them than to pretend they don't exist – or to refrain from applying if you realize that your idea is not significantly different from existing tools.
- ◆ I have assessed that my project can be implemented in the number of hours I have indicated.

After the application

You can find the timeline for the application and the funding period [here](#).

Selection Phase

January 2025 - April 2025

After receiving the applications, the Prototype Fund and DLR Projektträger teams review them and create a **shortlist** based on formal criteria. The shortlist is then presented to the jury and evaluated by them. The **jury meeting** will take place at the beginning of February. 25 to 30 projects will be selected and proposed to the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) for funding. The BMBF reviews the proposals. All applicants will be notified of the decision in **March**.

Important: We kindly request that you do not enquire about the status of your application before mid-March.

Formal Application

April 2025

All projects proposed for funding now require a formal application. To this end, applicants take part in our **formal application workshop** (Antragsworkshop): the formal application must be submitted to the BMBF by mid-April so that it can be fully reviewed and approved by the start of the funding phase.

Kick-Off Workshop

around June 1st, 2025

The **Kick-Off workshop** marks the official start of the funding phase. All projects in the class get to know the Prototype Fund team, the DLR Projektträger and each other, receive further information about the funding period and sharpen the vision for their project.

Funding Phase

June 1st, 2025 - November 30th, 2025

During the **funding period**, the grantees work intensively on their projects. They are in contact with the rest of their class and the Prototype Fund team. They are also entitled to coaching in the areas of project management, usability, branding, founding, etc.

Selection Second Stage Funding

September 2025

All those who have applied for a ten-month funding period submit a presentation and present their projects in an (online) **selection meeting**. Based on the submission and the presentation, a committee of jurors, the Prototype Fund and the DLR Projektträger will decide on further funding for a period of four months.

Demo Day

around December 1st, 2025

The **Demo Day** is a public event where all grantees present their experiences and project results as demos, in lectures or on panels after the six-month funding phase.

Second Stage

December 1st, 2025 – March 31st, 2026

During the **four-month Second Stage**, selected projects work on making their project usable and known. The focus is on user testing, community building and public relations, or financial security. Technical work is less of a priority.

Second Stage Final Workshop

around April 1st, 2026

The **final workshop** of the Second Stage will be semi-public, with selected guests invited by the projects and program participants. The focus will be on detailed project presentations and an in-depth discussion of the results of the Second Stage.

The Prototype Fund



The **Prototype Fund** is a funding program of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), which is managed and evaluated by the Open Knowledge Foundation Germany.

The Prototype Fund is the first low-threshold funding program for independent developers and small teams creating innovative open-source software. We provide the tech-savvy civil society with access to the resources and processes needed for developing user-centered, innovative software projects.

Since 2016, we have funded almost 400 projects. As a learning funding program, we have repeatedly made adjustments to become more efficient and effective. Now we are taking the next step and implementing some changes. For the future funding phases, we are focusing on funding data security and software building blocks.

Apply with your ideas for innovative open source software in the public interest! You will receive up to €95,000 in funding over 6 months or €158,000 over 10 months. We will also provide you with coaching, consulting and networking opportunities.



new.prototypefund.de



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[@prototypefund@mastodon.social](https://mstdn.social/@prototypefund)

GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung