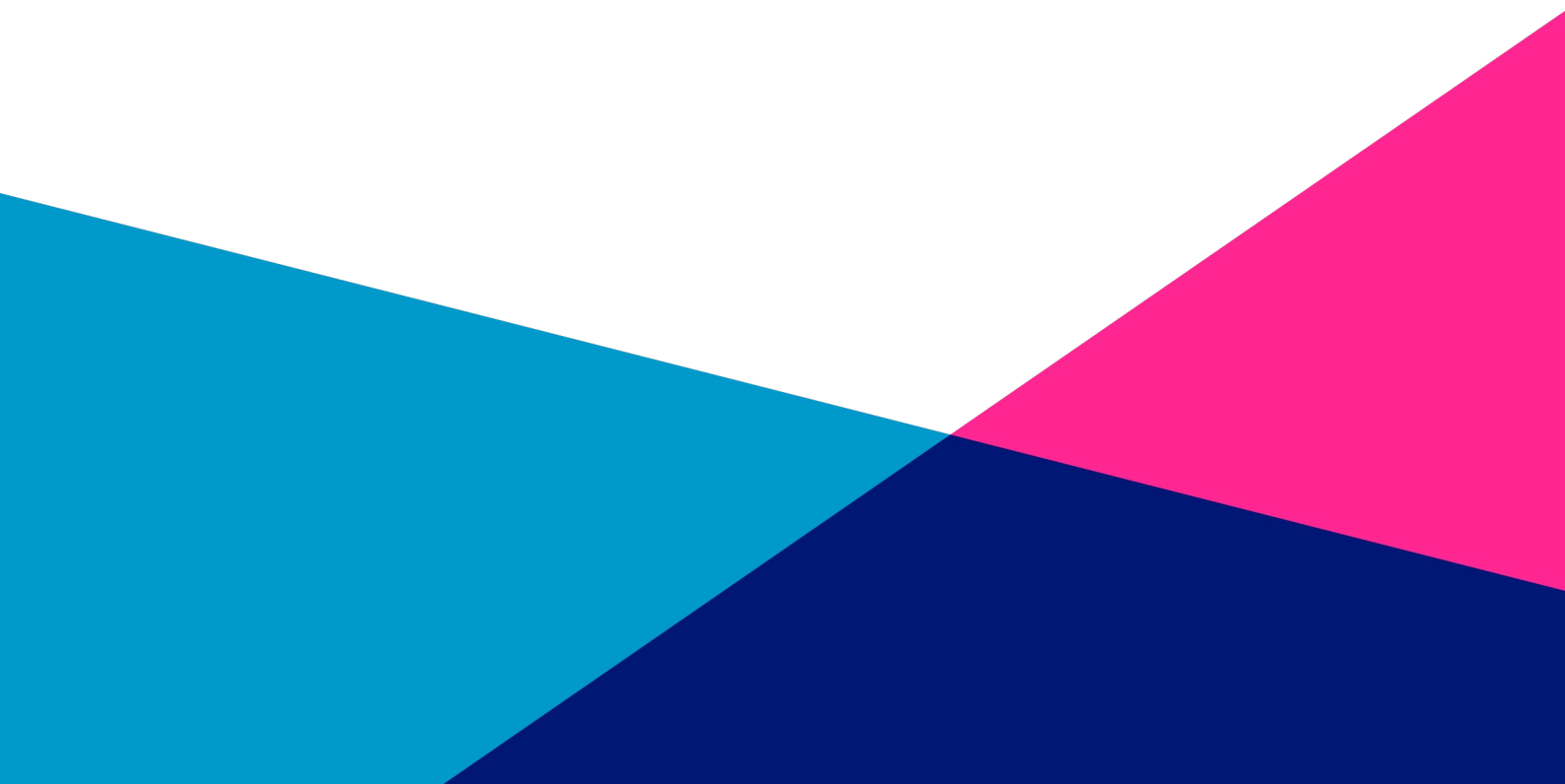


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Application Handbook

# Prototype Fund



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# Introduction

Before we get started:

We provide a translation of our application handbook to support non-native speakers in the application process. However, **we can only accept applications in German!**

We hope this guide is helpful to you, but please use the help of online tools or friends and translate your application. **We will not be able to consider your project for funding if the application is not submitted in German.**

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 project management agency DLR, 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](mailto: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: December 2023 – Application phase for Round 16

## 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. Companies, universities, research institutions and other organizations and associations are not eligible to apply.
- ◆ We cannot fund your project if your application is not fully written in German! During the funding period, we are happy to support non-native German speakers. However, it is mandatory that your application before the funding period and the administrative documents during the funding period are filled out in German.
- ◆ 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)
- ◆ Our [FAQ](#)

# 1.

## General information

---

### *Projekttitel*

---

[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. Topic area

---

## *Welchem Themenfeld ordnest du dein Projekt zu?*

[In English: Which topic area would you classify your project under?]

---

### Why do we ask this question?

At Prototype Fund, all projects are assigned to one of our key areas of funding. Please try to pick the category that best suits your project. You do not have to choose the topic "strategically", this categorization is only relevant for our [accompanying research](#) (in German). The choice you make has no influence on your chances of being funded.

---

### The four topic areas

- ◆ [Civic Tech](#): Civic Tech includes projects that support civic engagement and participation in government decision-making processes and empower citizens (link in German).
  - ◆ [Data Literacy](#): Projects that help users to handle data more competently are part of the Data Literacy category. Data literacy can be promoted through software for collecting, interpreting or presenting data, among other things (link in German).
  - ◆ [Security](#): Software that gives users the ability to assert their right to informational self-determination is part of the data security category (link in German).
  - ◆ [Software infrastructure](#): Infrastructure includes, for example, hosting and protocols that are necessary to be able to use software programs at all (link in German).
-

# 4. 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.
-



# 5. 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!
-

# 6. 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.
-

# 7. 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).
-

# 8. 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 there are no similar projects 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

60 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
-

# 9.

## 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.
-

# 10. 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
-

# 11.

## 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!
-

# 12. Team

---

*Bewerbt ihr euch als Team um die Förderung?*

*Namen der Teammitglieder*

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

Names of the team members

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

---

Why do we ask this question?

This is about the team structure. Although it is still possible to add or replace team members a few weeks after being accepted for funding, the team should be finalized as far as possible at the time of application. 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?

- ◆ Too many team members: Your chances are greater if the teams are not huge.
-



# 13. 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 – max. 950 hours. The maximum funding of €47,500 is calculated on the basis of a full-time position for one person for six months (approx. 950 hours). This corresponds to an hourly rate of €50. Anyone wishing to claim a higher hourly rate must provide invoices to prove that they have already claimed this as a developer. The number of hours and the corresponding funding may, of course, be shared between several team members. All funded projects in a round are entitled to the maximum funding amount, so a high number of hours does not affect your chances of being selected.]

---

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 – 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.
-

# 14. 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 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.
-

# 15. Checkboxes

---

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

[In English: 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 habe die Datenschutzvereinbarung gelesen und stimme der Verwendung meiner Daten im Rahmen der Programmziele des Prototype Funds zu.*

[In English: I have read the data protection agreement and agree to the use of my data in the context of the Prototype Fund's program goals.]

---

Why do we ask this question?

Because data protection is important to us (and the GDPR obviously also requires us to obtain your consent).

---

*Ich bin über 18 Jahre alt und habe meinen Hauptwohnsitz in Deutschland.*

[In English: I am over 18 years old and my main place of residence is in Germany.]

---

Why do we ask this question?

Because we are only allowed to fund you if you are of legal age and the applicant is resident of Germany.

---

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

[In English: I agree to make the project publicly available (e.g. via Github or BitBucket) 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 the following points carefully:

- ◆ My application is entirely written in German.
- ◆ I have read the [notes & funding criteria](#).
- ◆ I am applying for a software project.
- ◆ I am not applying as a company, institution or association, but as a private individual.
- ◆ 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 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 who my target group is/are and thought about how I will 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](#).

Once the applications have been received, the Prototype Fund team will review them and compile a shortlist based on formal criteria. These applications are then presented to and evaluated by the jury.

### If you have applied in February or March

A jury meeting will be held at the **beginning of May** to select the projects that will then be proposed to the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) for funding. The BMBF reviews the proposals. All applicants will receive feedback by the **beginning of June**.

**Important: Please refrain from inquiring about the status of applications before the beginning of June.**

All projects proposed for funding require a formal application. To this end, applicants will take part in our joint application workshop with the DLR Project Management Agency via video call in **mid-June**: Your application must then be submitted to the DLR Project Management Agency by the **beginning of July**, which will review the documents and submit them to the BMBF.

After confirmation by the BMBF, the funding phase can begin on **September 1st** and will start with a kick-off event in Berlin.

**Participation in the kick-off is not optional for funded projects, so please make sure that you can travel to Berlin around September 1st (plus/minus 2 days) if you are accepted.**

The funding phase ends on **February 28/29th** for the winter round. The Demo Day in Berlin will also take place around this date.

One month after the end of funding, i.e. by **March 31st**, the final report must be submitted to DLR so that you can receive the third and final payment.

### If you have applied in August or September

A jury meeting will be held at the **beginning of November** to select the projects that will then be proposed to the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) for funding. The BMBF reviews the proposals. All applicants will receive feedback by the **beginning of December**.

**Important: Please refrain from inquiring about the status of applications before the beginning of December.**

All projects proposed for funding require a formal application. To this end, applicants will take part in our joint application workshop with the DLR Project Management Agency via video call in **mid-December**: Your application must then be submitted to the DLR Project Management Agency by the **beginning of January**, which will review the documents and submit them to the BMBF.

After confirmation by the BMBF, the funding phase can begin on **March 1st** and will start with a kick-off event in Berlin.

**Participation in the kick-off is not optional for funded projects, so please make sure that you can travel to Berlin around March 1st (plus/minus 2 days) if you are accepted.**

The funding phase ends on **August 31st** for the summer round. The Demo Day in Berlin will also take place around this date.

One month after the end of funding, i.e. by **September 30th**, the final report must be submitted to DLR so that you can receive the third and final payment.

# 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](#).

Individuals and small (interdisciplinary) teams can receive financial and non-material support from us to test ideas and develop open source applications in the areas of civic tech, data literacy, IT security and software infrastructure.

You can apply for funding through Prototype Fund twice a year. There is a summer and winter round.

The application period for the summer round starts on **August 1st** and ends on **September 30th**.

The application period for the winter round starts on **February 1st** and ends on **March 31st**.

 [prototypefund.de](https://prototypefund.de)

 [info@prototypefund.de](mailto:info@prototypefund.de)

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

 [@prototypefund](https://twitter.com/prototypefund)

GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium  
für Bildung  
und Forschung