

The path from Postdoctoral Researcher to Research Leader with INM's Rising Stars Program

Leading a research group as a principal investigator is a common long-term career aim among postdoctoral researchers.

The career paths from postdoc to research leader can be very different but having experience in following areas is important for any path:

- i. performing research at highest level,**
- ii. realizing a research project independently,**
- iii. attracting funding through a successful grant application,**
- iv. managing budget and cooperations and**
- v. communicating research output as corresponding author.**

To support senior postdoctoral researchers with a strong determination to pursue their next step to research leaders at INM, the institute has established its "Rising Stars" program. Qualified postdoctoral researchers with a strong CV and a concrete project and career perspective in mind towards an independent position as research leaders, can apply to two years funding for their own position to develop their independent research profile. Within this program, INM provides additional resources, mentoring opportunities, and visibility to help the applicant leverage its position and accelerating the next career step. The support package is specific to each candidate and can include, for example:

- i. performing research at highest level,**
- ii. realizing a research project independently,**
- iii. attracting funding through a successful grant application,**
- iv. managing budget and cooperations and**
- v. communicating research output as corresponding author.**

Both internal and external applicants are eligible for this program. The maximum duration of the respective measure is 2 years and can be prolonged in special circumstances (e.g., parenthood-related part-time work). Researchers that have exhausted the timespan for fixed-term contracts according to the Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz (German Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act) are not eligible for the Rising Stars Program.

Postdoctoral researchers interested in the Rising Star program should first discuss their career plan with the Head of the Scientific Unit that would host them and based on this evaluate their realistic chances of success. Approaching the WGF for an informal discussion is highly recommended at this stage. A short written, free-format application including the CV of the applicant (2 pages + publication list), the concrete career steps and milestones to be targeted in the 2 years' time scale (1 page), and a 5 year perspective at INM (1 page) should be sent to the Scientific Directors. The application should elaborate how the planned research contributes to building an own profile and how it differentiates from the research in the host scientific unit. Further, the head of the host scientific unit should provide a letter of support and guarantee independent research including the possibility to publish research findings as corresponding author. In exceptional cases, applications can be sent directly to the Scientific Directors. After an internal evaluation of the career stage and perspective of the applicant, the Board of Directors will invite the candidate to discuss the perspective and align expectations. The decision on the suitability of the candidate for the Rising Stars Program and the intended support package will be taken by the Board of Directors in agreement with the Head of the Scientific Unit hosting the applicant during the career development plan. The Rising Star Program is funded by central INM budget and not by the budget of the scientific unit.

The career pathways in science can be very different, but to provide some orientation to potential applicants, one expected milestone of a Rising Stars application typically would be the writing and submission of a large grant proposal (ERC Starting Grant, Emmy Noether, or comparable).