Guide for Applicants – SPARK-BIH
Track 1

This guide addresses **Track 1 only**. Please be aware of the separate "Guide for Applicants Track 2".

1. Mission and Aim of Funding

The Berlin Institute of Health at Charité (BIH) is pleased to announce the **eleventh call for proposals** of the **SPARK-BIH program**.

SPARK-BIH is part of Charité BIH Innovation (CBI) – the joint technology transfer of BIH and Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin. CBI supports researchers and clinicians in the development and transfer of technologies and products to patients and market. In addition to consultations and support in the areas of Intellectual Property (IP), patenting, licensing and law, Charité BIH Innovation offers two funding instruments, one of which is the SPARK-BIH program.

The **SPARK-BIH program** supports academic inventors with high-impact projects that address unmet medical needs (e.g. definition by VFA). Projects from **all medical disciplines** that develop pharmaceuticals/therapeutics (including small molecules, drug repurposing, ATMPs, vaccines, biologicals), medical devices, diagnostics and preventives will be considered.

We provide milestone-based funding, coaching, mentoring, project management, and targeted education on translation and entrepreneurship. Beyond funding, a key strength of the program lies in its tailored and individualized project support, provided by an experienced project management team that serves as a central point of contact for guidance and advice. Additionally, SPARK offers access to a broad, interdisciplinary network of experts who help teams bridge knowledge gaps and accelerate the innovation process. Our goal is to accelerate the translational process from academic invention to marketable product that benefits patients and society. Advanced development steps are expected to be realized via licensing IP to industrial partners or dedicated start-ups with equity held by home institutions, BIH or third parties designated by them.

2. Eligibility criteria

Only researchers or clinicians from BIH and Charité are eligible for funding, including principal investigators, postdoctoral researchers, and graduate students. Each application must be signed or co-signed by a principal investigator (Arbeitsgruppenleiter*in/ Kostenstelleninhaber*in) who needs to be an employee of BIH or Charité.

In order to ensure the successful completion of each project, the principal investigator needs to confirm that the duration of their employment contract at BIH/Charité covers at least the duration of the proposed project and that currently no alternative funding for the proposed work exists.

BIH seeks to increase the diversity of its funding programs. Women, individuals from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, as well as individuals with disabilities are especially encouraged to apply for BIH programs.

3. Project Requirements

The program offers grants for the development of pharmaceuticals/therapeutics (including small molecules, drug repurposing, ATMPs, vaccines, biologicals), medical devices, diagnostics and preventive treatments for unmet medical needs. Any clinical indication will be considered.

All projects (Track 1 AND Track 2) must aim at strengthening proof of principle or **validation** of research findings with the goal of translating these into therapies, products or services. **Basic research will not be funded**.

The following are the **project requirements** for projects in **Track 1 AND Track 2**:

- Projects must be translational; basic research projects are NOT eligible.
- Projects must address an unmet medical need.
- The described solutions must be innovative and novel (no "me too" solutions).
- Projects must be based on solid data, which demonstrate proof-of-principle (depending on the projects this can be *in vitro*, *in vivo*, proof-of-technology etc.) and justify the described next steps.
- The described solutions must exhibit a strong competitive advantage over the current gold standard.
- Projects must be developed within the academic setting. SPARK-BIH does not support start-ups/spin-offs.

Please note: A **data package**, describing the previous findings of the project, is a requirement for the application. In addition to providing basic information about the applicants, following information is requested in the application form and includes but is not limited to a brief description of:

- Applicant credentials
- Problem and unmet medical need
- Solution/invention, how it is unique and how it addresses the unmet medical need
- Current stage of the project including previous data
- Suggested development plan including milestones, Go/No-Go criteria, and budget
- Information about the intellectual property situation
- Commercial potential and competitors

Some examples of past projects include unmet medical needs in pediatric, neglected or orphan diseases, cardiovascular, oncology, inflammatory, respiratory, neurological, autoimmune indications and infectious disease. We will consider small molecules, biologics, ATMP, medical devices and diagnostics applications in all medical areas and other indications of serious unmet medical need. Information on alumni and currently supported projects can be found here.

A positive assessment of an invention disclosure (*positiv bewertete Erfindungsmeldung*) by the technology transfer office (TTO) is required for Track 2, but **not** for Track 1.

In order to ensure project alignment with the requirements of the call, all applicants who are not sure for which track (Track 1 or Track 2) to apply are encouraged to contact Dr. Tanja Rosenmund before submitting their proposal.

4. Submission Process and Deadline:

Applications must be submitted in English by **July 7th, 2025 before** the call **deadline at 14:00 CET** via the BIH application portal. **Applications will only be considered if submitted via the BIH application portal** and if it contains all required information, **including the signature page** that can be **downloaded** from the SPARK website (If the applicant is not the PI, then the PI/Kostenstelleninhaber*in is required to co-sign the application).

Please note, all questions that will be asked via the online application portal are listed in the document '*Application questions Track 1 – for preparation only!*' Please be aware that this document is only a guidance tool for your preparation and cannot be used as an application form.

We strongly suggest using Google Chrome as a browser for your online application. Using other browsers is NOT recommended. For questions concerning the BIH application portal, please contact: portal@bih-charite.de

5. Key dates

Submission deadline: **July 7th, 2025 14:00 (CET)**
Invitation for the presentation of selected projects: **September 5th, 2025**
Project presentations (Pitch Session): **September 22nd and 23rd, 2025**
Preparation of Milestone Agreements: **Fall 2025**
Project start: **January 2026**

More detailed information will be communicated in due time.

6. Selection criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Scope of unmet medical need
- Novelty of approach / level of innovation
- Appropriateness of proposed solution to unmet medical need
- Quality, validity and robustness of data presented

- Marketability/probability of commercialization/path to patient
- Feasibility of development within funding period (budget and time)
- Expertise of the team

Selected applicants of Track 1 projects will be invited to personally pitch their proposals to an external expert panel (jury) on **September 22nd or 23rd, 2025**.

7. Budget, Duration and Milestone-based Funding

Track 1 projects are funded with **up to 50,000 EUR for a duration of max. one year.** We therefore urge you to carefully evaluate your project and to include only work packages and expenses in your proposal, which are critically important for the successful validation and completion of your project.

Please describe the specific steps needed to commercialize your product or alternative paths towards market and/or patient. These steps may vary widely depending on the area of the product or solution you are working on and its current developmental stage.

At the end of the funding period, the products and solutions should achieve one of the following:

- Positive review of the invention disclosure by the technology transfer office (TTO)
- Submitted patent application
- Secured additional funding for further development steps in the academic setting (e.g. GO-Bio *initial*, BMBF e.g. for a clinical study, SPARK Track 2)

Please describe all steps (including budget) that you consider vital in order to achieve one of these outcomes. It is important to **propose critical milestones and Go/No-Go criteria** that allow the assessment for continuation of the project within the funding period.

Please note that, if your project is selected for funding, before a final funding decision can be made, the entire project plan as well as milestones and budget will be jointly evaluated by you and external experts and may be adjusted.

Funding support is aimed at research consumables or contract services (high-throughput screening, regulatory services, animal studies, consulting, etc.). Track 1 funding cannot be used for personnel costs.

Please note that project funding is **strictly milestone-based**. The budget will be released consecutively in a milestone-dependent manner and project progress will be monitored regularly by SPARK-BIH Project Managers. If it is determined at any point that the project goals cannot be met anymore, the project and funding will be discontinued. Only costs directly related to the funded project will be covered, agreed on in a **Milestone Funding Agreement,** and will be detailed in the corresponding budget table. Any future changes to work packages and/or milestones must be discussed and agreed on with the SPARK-BIH management team.

8. Mentoring and Expert Advice

In addition to financial support, one of the main benefits for supported projects is guidance and mentorship from a wide range of internal and external experts. Eligible projects will become part of the **SPARK-BIH program** (see 'SPARK Website') and are expected to participate in SPARK activities (e.g. regular project meetings, workshops and lectures). Topics that are presented in these workshops and lectures include – but are not limited to- intellectual property and patent right, regulatory requirements for medical devices, diagnostics or pharma development, clinical trial design, pitching, fundraising and Good Laboratory practices (GLP). The workshops are tailored to the needs of the supported SPARK projects to ensure education on key aspects of the translational process.

To ensure the project's steady progress, teams are expected to present their progress according to the agreed project plan and milestones in SPARK-BIH Project meetings at least every 6 months. It is a safe format for Teams to share confidential and not-patented data and to receive input and advice from experts both external but also other SPARK Teams. In addition, Milestone/Progress meetings are scheduled on a regular basis with SPARK-BIH project managers (and advisors if required) to review and, if necessary, adjust milestones and the release of the milestone-based budget if applicable.

9. Obligations

Please note that applicants and/or Kostenstelleninhaber*in have to **report to SPARK-BIH management team if deviations** from the information given in the application occur during the application process and (for funded projects) during the entire funding period. This applies to but it is not limited to changes concerning the team (e.g. contracts), changes regarding the IP situation or resources for the project (e.g. funding).

After project completion, and/or after discontinuation of the SPARK-BIH support, a final report (*Verwendungsnachweis*) in a format determined by the SPARK-BIH management must be prepared and delivered by the funding recipients.

10. Questions

For questions please contact:

Dr. Tanja Rosenmund – Director SPARK-BIH Program
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