

3rd LIFT_C RESEARCH CALL DIGITAL SOCIETY

The **Linz Institute for Transformative Change** (LIFT_C) invites researchers to apply for our latest call for proposals, focusing on the evolving dynamics of **digital society**. Digital and physical worlds are increasingly merging and how society makes use of these technologies affects individuals, institutions, and broader societal structures. The concept of the "metaverse" captures this blend of digital and physical realities, symbolizing a space that transcends various boundaries.

Our goal is to support inter- and transdisciplinary projects that contribute to a more equitable, democratic and humanistic digital society. Interdisciplinarity is about the added value of bringing several disciplines together to jointly address a topic (e.g., a unified research question and methods). Transdisciplinarity refers to the active involvement of external stakeholders throughout the research process (e.g. ranging from learning partnerships with private, public or civil sector organizations to citizen science approaches). We are particularly interested in projects that address how we can make people ready for a digital society, how we can mitigate harms of current practices of using digital technologies and how we can leverage digital technologies to create better futures. Applying researchers may address one of the following themes:

1. Empowering a Digital Society

In the transition to a digital society, ensuring equitable access and opportunity is essential for social and economic well-being. An important issue is bridging the digital divide, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of socioeconomic background or age, have access to crucial online services. Digital technologies can foster inclusion and social participation for marginalized groups, including disabled people based on age, cognitive, or physical reasons, and how these technologies can be leveraged to foster inclusion and social participation. Concerning age, we also invite research on current debates about the need to offer key services "offline". Empowering a digital society also warrants a focus on education. Projects could explore how both formal education systems and informal channels such as civil society initiatives can equip individuals with the necessary skills to navigate and critically engage with a digital society. This includes media literacy, a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind digital economies (e.g. surveillance capitalism), or equipping students with interdisciplinary knowledge (e.g. how to bring disciplines together such as medicine and AI).

2. Coping with the Consequences of Digital Society

The rise of digital platforms and technologies, including social media, artificial intelligence, and cryptocurrencies, has created complex challenges that often transcend national borders and escape traditional forms of regulation. Tech giants have amassed considerable power that rivals or exceeds that of nation-states. Against this backdrop, projects may explore the consequences of digital capitalism, including the spread of misinformation, the polarization of public discourse, online mobbing, social media induced mental health challenges, online (sexual) harassment, or the emergence of toxic online cultures. Furthermore, proposals could address or seek to reduce the environmental and social costs of digital innovation, including the energy and water consumption of AI and data centers, or the often precarious working conditions of digital laborers

such as delivery riders, fulfillment workers, or (digital) gig workers. Another aspect is bias in AI data, which may lead to unjust decisions or applications and thereby further exacerbate inequalities (e.g. bias in medical data). Effectively coping with these challenges will require combined efforts from all societal sectors (public, private, civil society).

3. Shaping the Digital Society

This theme invites forward-looking projects that explore how digital technologies can be used to shape a more equitable, democratic and humanistic digital society. Digital transformation is dominated by the Silicon Valley and the Chinese-Model. There is a space for projects, theories, concepts embracing European values and ideas. We invite research to think about new infrastructures to reclaim digital sovereignty. We are interested in projects seeking to improve public institutions to strengthen the rule of law (e.g., court processes) and foster access to justice. For instance, how can courts or regulatory bodies harness digital tools to improve processes or how can governments engage citizens more effectively.

Digital technologies, in particular AI, bear great promise for healthcare institutions. Research may investigate how responsible artificial intelligence might improve healthcare services, for example, leading to more accurate diagnoses and better treatments.

We also welcome fundamental inquiries, for instance, how to improve democratic law-making, control and governance, how to innovate public broadcasters and (private) media to improve public debates, or exploring the tensions around the fundamental question of privacy, secrecy, openness and transparency in an increasingly connected world.

In sum, the LIFT_C call prioritizes projects that not only explore digital technologies but also consider their broader societal implications, hence the emphasis on inter and trans-disciplinary approaches. We seek proposals that offer a transformative vision for the future of digital society, ensuring that technological advancements contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable world. Projects that focus solely on technological development without considering these wider impacts are encouraged to seek other funding opportunities.

We look forward to receiving your innovative and visionary proposals, aimed at addressing the complex challenges and opportunities of transformative change in a digital society.

FUNDING

Funding of up to € 250,000 per project application is available.

RESEARCHERS

Researchers (those already holding a Ph.D./ Dr. scient.med) are invited to submit a project proposal to receive funding under the JKU LIFT_C program. An interdisciplinary research approach is mandatory in order to follow the LIFT_C funding scheme.

The JKU LIFT_C Call is open to all researchers (from the JKU as well as from other institutions) however, if **selected for funding, an PI from another institution will have to move to Linz and accept employment at the JKU for the duration of the project. Collaborating universities are encouraged to participate in the project, but cannot directly receive funding.** In addition, permanent JKU employees (Stammpersonal) may take part in the JKU LIFT_C call but their efforts must be in-kind (requesting no salary beyond full-time employment) as part of the correct financial administrative procedure.

LOCATION

The project must identify a hosting JKU institute/department and a point of contact (the institute or department head). The host is required to provide office space and any other infrastructure. We recommend adding a Letter of Confirmation issued by the hosting institute/department to the proposal.

COOPERATIONS

Since LIFT_C promotes transdisciplinary research, cooperation is essential to fulfill the goals of LIFT_C. The JKU LIFT_C encourages the participation of societal stakeholders (corporations, civil society organizations, public administrations) and encourages partners to assist in co-funding the project. However, the JKU LIFT_C does not permit stakeholders to be funded by LIFT_C.

SUBMISSION PROCESS

Applicants are required to submit a written proposal that follows a template (in English, max. 7 pages of content, CV and bibliography not included). The project proposal should include a funding plan that covers salaries (please include an approximate annual salary increase of 7%) and reasonable allowances for consumables; travel (max. € 3.000,-), and small equipment to be funded in exceptional cases only.

The proposal deadline is February 28th, 2025. Each project proposal must be submitted in English and include a standard cover sheet, the principal investigator (that individual will also be a JKU LIFT_C project leader), the project's duration, the requested amount of funding for the project, the contact information of the JKU institute/department hosting the project, the contact information of the industrial company assisting in the project (if applicable), the project's primary objectives, any major equipment expected/needed, and a short abstract. The provided template (Proposal_template.docx) is mandatory.

To provide support to applicants, there is a checklist available and information sessions regarding the nature of the call and the topic will be offered.

EVALUATION

The project proposals will be pre-evaluated by an external panel of internationally renowned researchers (=jury) and then assessed in a joint jury session in June 2025. The JKU Rectorate will render a final decision in early fall 2025.

The criteria used to evaluate whether or not a project is eligible for funding will, in addition to the usual criteria (a convincing and relevant research question, appropriate methodology, feasibility in terms of time and budget), primarily focus on the extent to which the proposals demonstrate excellence in interdisciplinarity (particularly the added value of cross-disciplinary collaboration), transdisciplinarity, and potential impact.

The evaluation will follow the below weighting:

Topic Fit: 20%

Does the proposal fit the above specified thematic field of digital society?

Scientific Quality: 25%

Is the proposal plausible and up-to-date with regard to the research question/research gap/relevant problem, theoretical approach and research methodology?

Interdisciplinarity: 25%

Does the proposal stand out due to its interdisciplinary approach? Does the collaboration between the different disciplines add value and is it innovative?

Transdisciplinarity: 15%

Is the proposal convincing with its transdisciplinary approach, i.e. the involvement of social stakeholders? Does the collaboration with these stakeholders add value and is the approach pursued innovative?

Impact: 15%

How do you rate the chances of this proposal providing a tangible impetus for the area of digital society? How do you assess the potential impact? (e.g. is it an impulse that can also be taken up by other actors)

Please see: jku.at/lift-c for detailed information about funding guidelines.

Send your application to: liftc_call@jku.at by February 28th, 2025.