UMWELT & ENERGIE | WIRTSCHAFT | WOHNRAUM | INNOVATION



InnoFinTech

Funding Guidelines for Young Innovative Companies and Start-ups in the FinTech Sector

Valid from 22 March 2022

Last change: 30. Oktober 2026

Disclaimer: *This English version of the funding guideline is translated from the original German version. It should only be used for information purposes. For application and all administrative procedures, only the text of the German version of the funding guideline applies*.

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1. Funding Objectives and Purpose of the Grant

The InnoFinTech funding programme aims to facilitate the implementation of innovative projects for innovative start-ups and young innovative companies (less than three years old) to help them grow and establish themselves in the market.

The focus is on FinTechs and InsurTechs, as well as startups in related segments with a clear connection to financial services.

Innovation is defined - throughout the entire process from the idea to its exploitation - as the entrepreneurial development and realisation (in terms of implementation or exploitation) of novel applications, products and services, methods or processes. A key focus of the funding programme is on innovative start-ups that also consider the sustainability goals of the United Nations (e.g. climate and resource protection and inclusion).

The programme is an important measure for the implementation of the Hamburg Financial Sector Masterplan.

The funding programme pursues the following objectives:

- Strengthening Hamburg as a financial centre by promoting innovative ideas and the emergence/development of innovative companies in the FinTech and InsurTech sectors and related segments with a clear connection to financial services
- Improving the founding climate, in particular for FinTech and InsurTech companies in Hamburg
- Supporting Hamburg's contribution to achieving the sustainability goals of the United Nations
- Increasing value added and creating new competitive and sustainable jobs and training positions in Hamburg
- Increasing the competitiveness, attractiveness and innovative strength of Hamburg as a business location
- Increasing the performance and competitiveness of young innovative companies from the FinTech and InsurTech sectors and related segments with a clear connection to financial services

How and who awards the funding?

The funds are approved by Hamburgische Investitions- und Förderbank (IFB Hamburg) based on a recommendation from the InnoFinTech programme's awarding committee. The awarding committee is composed of one representative each from the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce, Finanzplatz Hamburg e. V. and the Ministry of Finance, as well as up to four external persons with relevant expertise in the funding area. IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH supports the awarding committee's recommendation decision with a preliminary assessment of the applications received.

There is no legal entitlement to funding on the part of the applicant company. Rather, the approving authority decides at its own discretion within the scope of the available budgetary funds

2. Object of the Funding

The funding is provided for innovative projects that are part of a company foundation or a company development. In principle, the funding is provided without restrictions on economic sectors[1], provided that the start-ups are from the FinTech and InsurTech sectors and related segments with a clear connection to financial services, and can relate to innovative projects that involve technologies, products, services or processes.

Eligible expenses are:

- Preparation of market studies/implementation of feasibility studies
- Strategy development/business plan, market development and growth strategy
- Search for partners/founding teams/employees/personnel recruiting
- Product development and testing/implementation including production facilities
- Securing rights/patent developments/patenting
- Marketing activities including the development of sales structures

3. Eligible applicants

Eligible applicants are companies that have been in existence for less than three years, employ fewer than 50 people and whose annual turnover or annual balance sheet total does not exceed €10 million.

4. Grant Prerequisites

4.1. General Prerequisites

In order for funding to be considered,

- it must be a project that has not yet commenced prior to the issue of the grant approval notice,
- the project must be carried out mainly in Hamburg and the company headquarters must be in Hamburg,
- the implementation of the project must be jeopardised or impossible without the funding and the company's own financial resources are insufficient,
- the overall financing of the project, including the requested financial aid, must be convincingly demonstrated.

The funding is subordinate to funding from federal, EU and/or other sources and can only be granted if comparable funding from other sources is not available or can only be expected with considerable delay.

[1] Companies pursuant to Art. 1 of Commission Regulation (EU) No. 2023/2831 of 13.12.2023 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid (OJ L, 2023/2831, 15.12.2023), as amended, are excluded from funding.

4.2. Substantive Requirements

In addition to the general prerequisites, at least one of the following three prerequisites must be met for a project to be eligible for funding:

- The innovative technological products, processes or technologies underlying the project have been developed by the applicant company and are patentable or have been developed in cooperation with universities or research institutions, which is documented by recognised scientific publications.
- The technological products or innovative services to be developed are new or the innovative business idea stands out from the competition.
- There is a technological development risk. In particular, it is possible that significant development goals of the innovative project will not be achieved.

In addition, the following mandatory requirements exist:

- The project is characterised by a high level of innovation and has a recognisable market potential that should exceed the funding volume.
- The project is expected to make a foreseeable contribution to the creation of jobs, to increasing the economic performance in the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and, if applicable, to achieving the sustainability goals of the United Nations.
- The project has positive effects for the location (indirect creation of jobs/settlement of further companies and, if applicable, impact on sustainability goals, network effects, knowledge/technology transfer, cooperation effects, etc.).

5. Type, Scope and Amount of the Grant

5.1. Type of Grant

The grant is awarded as a non-repayable subsidy earmarked for a specific purpose

5.2. Type of Financing

The subsidy is granted in the form of co-financing with a funding rate of max. 90 % of the eligible expenses.

5.3. Amount of the Grant

A maximum of € 200,000.00 can be funded per project. If the recipient is entitled to deduct input tax, net amounts are decisive, otherwise gross amounts.

5.4. Eligible Expenses

The eligible expenses of a project include those funds that are necessary for the implementation of the innovative project with economical and prudent conduct. These include the following types of costs:

1. Personnel expenses according to standard unit costs or lump-sum salary components
2. Overhead expense allowance

3. Expenses for external services
4. Material, equipment and other costs

Description of the types of costs

1. Personnel expenses

- For founders with 100% work input in the funded project, a standard unit cost rate of €2,800 per month is set. If the work input in the project is lower, the rate is reduced accordingly.
- Personnel expenses for employees in the funded project are recognised on the basis of the employee's gross salary paid in the project context plus a flat rate covering the employer's contribution to social security[2].

2. Overhead expense allowance

An overhead expense allowance of 15% is recognised for personnel expenses. The allowance covers all the usual overhead expenses of the business, e.g. costs for rent, personnel-related infrastructure (e.g. office equipment including standard IT and telephone), insurance, further training and usual travel expenses.

3. Expenses for external services

- External services include services provided by third parties commissioned by the funding recipient in connection with the implementation of the project, e.g. legal fees and programming services.
- When awarding contracts, the provisions of the ANBest-P on the awarding of contracts (see section 8.1 of the funding guidelines) must be observed.

4. Material, equipment and other costs

- In addition, material, equipment and other costs necessary for the project (e.g. costs incurred in the area of marketing and patent applications that cannot be allocated to external services or travel expenses not covered by the overhead expense allowance) can be recognised.
- In accordance with tax regulations, low-value assets (GWG) can be fully applied. In the case of assets subject to capitalisation, only the depreciation (AfA) attributable to the project term is recognised as eligible expenses.
- When procuring, the provisions of the ANBest-P on the awarding of contracts (see section 8.1) must be observed.

5.5. Non-eligible Types of Costs

The following types of costs are not eligible for funding (negative list):

- Hospitality expenses
- Food expenses (exception: daily allowances for business trips)
- Acquisition of land or buildings, even if it is in connection with the project
- Contributed land, buildings, facilities or technical equipment

[2] Please refer to the project calculation documents provided with your application for the current flat rate amount.

- Purchase or leasing of cars and sales vehicles
- Rents, ground lease payments, real estate transfer tax

6. Progress Monitoring and Other Grant Provisions

In addition to the proof of appropriation audit, the success of the funding is monitored in up to three stages in accordance with an individual timetable with corresponding milestones set out in the grant approval notice. The number of stages depends on the requested funding volume (one stage if the funding volume is a maximum of €75,000; two stages if the funding volume is between €75,000 and €150,000; three stages if the funding volume is greater than €150,000).

The review of the respective milestones is based on a corresponding report on the project progress to IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH. The reports must contain the progress and the main results with regard to the respective milestones of the project. IFB Hamburg decides on the continuation or termination of the funding, at its own discretion, taking into account the recommendation of IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH.

Additional reports, e.g. regarding the status of product development, market launch, partners/contracts, etc., may be requested by IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH and/or IFB Hamburg.

In the event of termination of the funding during the funding period, the grant approval notice may be (partially) revoked. As a rule, funding already approved and paid out up to that point will not be revoked for this reason and will not be reclaimed in this case.

7. Procedure

7.1. Application Procedure

Application forms are available from IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH. In the application forms, the project must be presented in text form based on the following points:

- Description of the company (including product/service, innovation, market, marketing, risks)
- Description of the entrepreneurial team/the founders
- Description of the project to be funded, including schedule and milestones
- Description of the financial and personnel plan
- Description of the financing plan

Only application forms issued by IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH will be accepted.

Applications for funding must be submitted in signed form to

Hamburgische Investitions- und Förderbank

Department of Innovation and Business Development

Besenbinderhof 31

20097 Hamburg

If required, the application process can be supported by IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH (Tel. 040/657 98 05-90, www.innovationsstarter.com).

The following supplementary documents must be submitted with the funding application:

- Concept/business plan/company description
  - Description of the company with proximity to implementation and technology used
  - Proof of market and innovation potential
  - Financial plan including financing plan
- Curriculum vitae of the entrepreneurial team/founders
- In the case of legal entities, proof of the shareholder structure (e.g. extract from the commercial register or articles of association)

Overall, the application documents must prove that the general and specific requirements/prerequisites according to nos. 4.1. and 4.2. are met.

IFB Hamburg and IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH may request further documents for examination.

7.2. Approval Procedure

7.2.1. Preliminary selection

IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH examines the incoming funding applications and, if necessary, obtains further statements from experts, whereby the legitimate interests of the applicant company to protect business secrets are taken into account in the selection of external experts.

For all applications, IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH prepares a decision template regarding the eligibility for funding of the applications. From the incoming funding applications, IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH selects suitable applications in accordance with the requirements specified in No. 4. The applicant companies then receive the opportunity to present their project to the funding programme's awarding committee.

7.2.2. Approval

Within the framework of the awarding committee meeting, the eligibility for funding of the proposed projects and the amount of funding to be granted are discussed and a recommendation for approval or rejection is made.

The basis for the approval recommendation is the funding application, the preliminary statement of IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH and, if applicable, the presentation of the applicants to the awarding committee.

Taking into account the recommendation of the awarding committee, IFB Hamburg decides at its own discretion.

In the event of a positive funding decision, IFB Hamburg issues a grant approval notice. Among other things, the milestones including the intended results for the purpose of assessing progress are defined or confirmed in this notice.

The approval may be subject to conditions, which must be specified in the grant approval notice.

7.3. Disbursement Procedure

As soon as the grant approval notice becomes legally binding, incurred eligible expenses can be claimed from the innovation agency of IFB Hamburg depending on the progress made. Deductions are permissible. However, the grant may only be requested in advance to the extent that the funds are required within two months of payment for due payments to fulfil the purpose of the grant.

Documents to be submitted for examination and release of the requested payment are:

- Copies of invoices (original documents remain with the applicant company)
- List of documents in the system of the approved financial plan

Payment is made after positive examination and in the amount of the recognised amount by IFB Hamburg.

7.4. Proof of Appropriation Procedure

After completion of the funding, a proof of appropriation must be submitted to IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH within six months.

The proof of appropriation consists of a factual report and a numerical proof:

Factual report:

- Use of the funds
- Progress of the project
- Results achieved (including target/actual deviation)
- Contribution to the funding objectives in accordance with No. 4 of the guidelines

Numerical proof:

- List of income/expenses in chronological order and separated from each other, in accordance with the structure of the financial plan
- List of documents

Further proof and information obligations arise from the grant approval notice.

In order to ensure efficient and proper control and evaluation of the funded project, the funding authority, IFB Innovationsstarter GmbH, IFB Hamburg and third parties commissioned by them are entitled to inspect original documents, accounting records and other business documents, to carry out on-site surveys and to request all necessary information. These rights also apply to the State Audit Office of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg or parties commissioned by them. In addition, the funding recipient is obliged, in the event that a scientific consulting institute is commissioned by the European Communities, the Federal Republic of Germany or the Ministry of Finance of Hamburg for the purpose of scientific support and evaluation of the funding programme, to provide all necessary information for this purpose.

The rights of the State Audit Office of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg arise from § 84 or § 81 paragraph 1 of the State Budget Code (LHO) for the commissioned audit offices.

As part of the evaluation of the funding programme, the funding recipient must report annually to IFB Hamburg on a selection of key figures on the further use of the project results and the impact of the funded project over a period of six full financial years after the end of the project.

7.5. Repayment of the Funding

IFB Hamburg may demand repayment of the funding if the funding recipient violates essential provisions of these guidelines or other conditions attached to the granting of the funds during the implementation of the project.

This applies in particular

- if the funded company relocates its headquarters from Hamburg during the funding period.
- if the company leaves Hamburg within six years after the end of the funded project.
- if the use of the results of the funded project undergoes significant changes within six full financial years after completion of the project, which conflict with the purpose of the funding and the provisions of the grant approval notice.

The funding may also be reclaimed in the event of

- a liquidation of the company,
- a sale of more than 50% of the company shares of the funding recipient ("share deal"),
- a sale of all or significant parts (more than 50% according to the fair value of the assets of the funding recipient) ("asset deal") or
- measures in accordance with the Transformation Act, including restructurings by means of share exchange, contribution or merger, as a result of which the shareholders of the funding recipient hold less than 50% of an acquiring company or a legal successor of the company.

8. Legal Basis and Regulations to be Observed

8.1. Grant Law Basis

IFB Hamburg grants subsidies in accordance with these funding guidelines and in accordance with the corresponding application of § 46 of the State Budget Code (LHO). There is no legal entitlement to the granting of funding.

The regulations on grants in the budget code of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg apply, in particular the General Supplementary Provisions for Project Funding (ANBestP), unless deviations have been permitted in the funding guidelines or grant approval notice.

8.2. State Aid Law Basis

The granting of the funds is subject to the conditions of the de minimis regulation (EU) 2023/2831 of the Commission of 13 December 2023 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid (OJ L, 2023/2831, 15 December 2023), as amended - hereinafter: de minimis regulation and is subject to the restrictions of state aid law.

Further information can be found in the "Information sheet on de minimis aid", available at www.ifbhh.de.

8.3. Implementation of the Funding

In this funding programme, no administrative fee is charged for the approval and official acts within the scope of the administration of the funding in accordance with the Hamburgische

Investitions- und Förderbank Fee Schedule (No. 1 of the Annex to the Fee Schedule). All other fees in the Schedule of Fees are charged.

The Ministry of Finance of Hamburg is the guideline issuer.

9. Entry into Force

These funding guidelines came into force on 22 March 2022. The last change to these guidelines was on 30 October 2026.

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