

ESA BIC Challenge 2026

“Join the New Space Economy”

Submit your idea
from **15 January**
to **25 March 2026**

The Challenge

The space economy has evolved from a niche commercial sector into a vital backbone of our society and economy. Today, leveraging space assets is not just about opportunity; it is about ensuring **technological sovereignty and resilience**. Space infrastructure and secure data are essential for protecting **critical systems on Earth** – including energy grids, communication networks, and global supply chains.


To meet these growing demands, we need **next-generation upstream and downstream technologies** that are robust, secure, and sustainable. The ESA Business Incubation Centres (ESA BICs) provide comprehensive support to ambitious entrepreneurs who want to develop these future-proof solutions and drive value across all sectors.

The ESA BICs in Germany are looking for teams with innovative business ideas that strengthen the space ecosystem or utilize space data for **secure and scalable cross-sector applications**. The teams will receive support to turn their ideas into a viable company.

Potential innovation areas and use cases are:


- **Resilient Infrastructure:** Solutions for renewable energy grids, supply-chain security, and autonomous mobility that rely on uninterrupted space data.


Your Reward

 All 8 finalist teams receive assistance and coaching to transform the business concept into a viable business plan over a 6 week period (April–May)

The 3 winning teams are determined through an online pitch after the coaching phase and will receive:

 1st Place: 12,000 EUR, 2nd Place: 5,000 EUR, 3rd Place: 3,000 EUR

 Access to an Europe-wide network of experts who can provide both technological and business support

 Support in applying to one of the German ESA BICs. If accepted, the start-up will benefit from 60,000 EUR in funding

- **Industrialisation of Space:** Concepts for automated manufacturing, series production technologies, and rapid integration processes that enable scalable satellite constellations and responsive space access.
- **Trusted Data Ecosystems:** Cybersecurity, crisis response, and ensuring data integrity for critical decision-making.

- **Space Safety & Sustainability:** Emerging markets such as active debris removal, satellite servicing, and space traffic management to ensure long-term, safe access to orbit.
- **Sovereign Components:** Innovative space components, subsystems, or advanced sensor systems that ensure technological independence and reliability in harsh environments.
- **Any other ideas** for the space sector or use of space data.

What you need to bring to participate: Valid [space connection](#), existing business idea, founding team with complementary skills.

The Evaluation Criteria:

- There is a clear value proposition that promises relevant benefits for a clearly identified customer group through utilisation of an obvious [space connection](#) (spin-in or spin-off/application).
- The team brings relevant experience and complementary skills (technical and business competencies) to turn idea into reality.
- The exploitation potential and the chance for commercial success are high.
- The idea/solution is technically feasible.
- The degree of innovation is high (technical and/or business model).

The Partner

The European Space Agency (ESA) is dedicated to the peaceful exploration and use of space for the benefit of mankind. Established in 1975, ESA works with its 23 Member States to push the frontiers of science and technology and to promote economic growth in Europe.

ESA Business Incubation Centres (ESA BICs) are the largest network of incubators supporting space related start-ups in Europe. The objective is to support entrepreneurs with a space-based business idea and help them developing their product while getting their company off the ground. In the process, they create and grow clusters of space-related start-ups across Europe.

Each incubation centre is managed by local champions who connect their ESA BIC to local industry, universities, research organisations, government, and investor communities. There are five centres in Germany: ESA BIC Bavaria, ESA BIC Hessen, ESA BIC Baden-Württemberg, ESA BIC Northern-Germany and ESA BIC North Rhine-Westphalia. All the centres are embedded in local communities, but also have strong regional and national links.

The ESA BICs are financed by the German Space Agency at DLR with funds from the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) through Germany's contribution to the optional ESA commercialisation programme ACCESS and co-funding from the local federal-state of the respective ESA BIC.

[Learn more](#)

Eligibility & Submission information

To ensure that you or your team is eligible for the challenge and that your submission can be processed successfully, please adhere to the following prerequisites:

Eligible are early stage start-ups, research teams, students & individuals

- from the space and non-space sectors
- with a valid [space connection](#) and existing business idea
- who are registered in **Germany**
- who are planning to get registered in **Germany**

All proposals must be submitted via the INNOspace Masters submission platform:

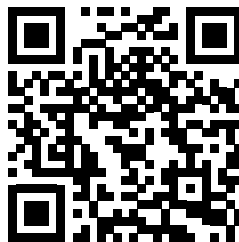
<https://innospace-masters.awardsplatform.com/>

When submitting your proposal, you have to choose which ESA BIC office to submit your idea to:

- ESA BIC Bavaria (Oberpfaffenhofen, Ottobrunn, Nuremberg, Neubiberg, Wuerzburg)
- ESA BIC Northern Germany (Bremen, Luebeck, Wismar)
- ESA BIC North Rhine-Westphalia (Aachen, Herten)
- ESA BIC Hessen (Darmstadt)
- ESA BIC Baden-Württemberg (Reutlingen, Friedrichshafen)

Apply now

15 January to 25 March 2026



innospace-masters.de

The timeline – Important dates for you!

