Booklet

exist-Women

Empowering Female Founders



2025

KIT makeIT KIT GRÜNDER SCHMIEDE exist



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Dr. Sarah Manthey
exist-Women Coach



Schadi Neumann
exist-Women Coach



Welcome Message

Women, ideas, and impact – this is the heart of exist-Women and the spirit behind this exist-Women Booklet. With these pages, we want to highlight the strength and momentum of the female founders' community in Karlsruhe and beyond – and to explore how we can continue this journey together.

Over the past months, we have had the privilege of meeting inspiring women: bold thinkers with perseverance and the courage to challenge the status quo. We have witnessed the strong sense of community that arises when female founders come together, share experiences, and empower one another. And we have felt that many women have been waiting for this moment – a moment when the community is no longer just an idea, but a living network. This is the moment we want to create together.

Karlsruhe and its surrounding ecosystem hold enormous potential. What it needs is a vibrant community of female founders – a platform for visibility, resonance, and shared growth. This booklet is our anchor: while it presents exist-Women, above all, it seeks to strengthen the Female Founders Community. We aim to make stories visible, celebrate achievements, and address challenges – because every female founder deserves to be heard.

This booklet is also a statement: we believe in you and in your ideas. We are here to support you, connect you, and grow with you – and to celebrate the change you bring into the world.

Together, we can create lasting impact – and the following pages offer a glimpse into where we stand today, and how far we can go.

Sarah & Schadi

Table of **Content**

Background

04 Female Founders

05 exist-Women

People

exist-Women participants 2025 08

Mentors 21



exist-Women participants from different universities at a local event.



Networking and connecting at the 2-days long exist-Women Retreat.

Community

20 Outlook: exist-Women

26 Female Founders Support

28 Get in Touch

“This community made it feel natural to connect, to learn, and to believe in myself on a deeper level.”



Fatemeh Masoudian

18.8%

Female founders in the German startup sector in 2025

source: Startup-Verband

Female Founders in Germany

In Germany, the share of female founders in the startup sector currently stands at around 18.8% – marking a slight decline compared to previous years (Startup-Verband, 2025). Although women remain underrepresented, their impact is substantial: female founders are often the driving force behind social innovation, sustainability-oriented businesses, and transformative ideas. They frequently channel entrepreneurial energy into sectors such as health, education, social innovation, and sustainability: areas with strong societal impact (EY, 2024).

When it comes to financing, female founders face significant challenges. The larger the funding round, the lower the share of all-female founding teams: in rounds above €50 million, their share drops to just 1.8% (EY, 2024). Despite this, female founders who do secure capital often outperform expectations, as recent startup barometers highlight.

Beyond the startup scence, women are more strongly represented in traditional business registrations. In 2024, about 38.3% of new business registrations in Germany were by women, often as sole proprietors or in part-time self-employment (Innovative Frauen im Fokus, 2024). While this figure is higher than in the startup sector, it reflects structural differences in visibility, access to growth capital, and scaling opportunities.

Why does this matter?

Diversity and gender balance are crucial for Germany's competitiveness as a startup hub. Female founders bring new perspectives, address markets and user groups that are often overlooked, and serve as role models for the next generation. Numerous studies show that mixed-gender founding teams tend to be more innovative, resilient, and financially successful. They are more likely to enter new markets, integrate sustainability into their business models, and build inclusive company cultures – all of which are key drivers of long-term growth. Yet, women-led startups still receive only around 5% of total venture capital in Europe, and their access to networks, mentorship, and growth capital remains limited. Addressing these barriers is not only about equality – it is about unlocking untapped potential and securing Germany's future as a leading innovation economy. Strengthening female founders means strengthening the overall competitiveness and resilience of the German innovation ecosystem.

exist-Women closes the gap

exist-Women is a dedicated funding line within the German government's exist program. It addresses the exact challenges outlined above: lack of visibility, network barriers, unequal access to resources, and persistent stereotypes in entrepreneurship.

The program is aimed at students, researchers, university staff and alumnae (up to five years after graduation) who are curious about entrepreneurship. A fully developed startup idea is not required – the program is designed to provide coaching, mentoring, training, networking opportunities and financial support in the very early stages of the entrepreneurial journey (exist, 2025).

exist-Women empowers women from all disciplines to turn their ideas into innovations – from deep-tech solutions to social impact projects.

A key element of the German Federal Government's startup strategy is promoting female founders and strengthening diversity in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. With the continuation of exist-Women, the government underlines its commitment to these goals. The program offers events, mentoring, consulting, and financial support for aspiring female founders. The Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) and over 100 other universities have qualified to participate.

Eligible applicants include graduates, researchers, students who have completed at least half of their studies, and women with a vocational qualification linked to KIT. A specific startup idea is not required; selection is based on motivation, creativity, and innovative potential. The program welcomes all types of ideas and disciplines – from deep-tech startups to social innovations – provided no company has been founded or business activity started beforehand.

Over 12 months, participants gain essential entrepreneurial skills in areas like personal development, idea generation, prototyping, validation, market analysis, business modeling, and networking. Events take place in Karlsruhe or at partner universities, with a mix of optional and mandatory sessions.
Financial support ranges from €1,000 to €3,000 per month, depending on individual circumstances. All participants also receive a one-time grant of €2,000 for material expenses such as travel, coaching, or event participation. The optional scholarship cannot be combined with other living-expense funding or employment.

Participants benefit from personalized mentoring, expert knowledge, and a strong community where women can share experiences and support each other on their entrepreneurial journeys.

Community Events

A highlight of the program is the exist-Women Retreat. Over the course of two days, participants and invited female founders from the region come together in a relaxed and inspiring setting. Away from everyday routines, the retreat offers space for reflection, idea development, and meaningful networking. It has proven to be a catalyst for trust, new alliances, and long-term connections.

Another central element are our Female Founders Brunches, such as the edition with Dr. Gerda Frank. These gatherings create informal yet powerful spaces to meet female role models, exchange experiences, and build networks across disciplines and backgrounds. They are a cornerstone of the visibility and community-building we want to foster.

We also host an internal Closing Event for our exist-Women participants. It provides a stage for them to present their journeys, share insights, and celebrate their achievements. While this marks the formal end of their cohort, it does not mark the end of their involvement: all participants remain part of our network and continue to be supported within our ecosystem.

The Female Founders Forum opens up to a wider community. This forum serves as an important bridge: it connects exist-Women participants with the broader ecosystem, highlights role models, and strengthens the visibility of female founders in Karlsruhe and beyond.









The Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) successfully piloted exist-Women in 2025. Since then, it has become a permanent part of our startup ecosystem. With its strong research background, its dynamic entrepreneurial scene, and the collaborative power of the DeepTechHub, KIT provides fertile ground for women interested in founding their own ventures.

At KIT, exist-Women is more than a funding program – it is a shared journey and a supportive community. We combine individual mentoring and coaching with formats that enable exchange, peer learning, and visibility.

“Often, there are opportunities out there – we just don’t know they exist or the path to reach them.”



Mery Sheryll Hernandez Maya

Embedded in the DeepTechHub

Our exist-Women program is deeply integrated into the DeepTechHub, an alliance of universities and research institutions across Karlsruhe, Heidelberg, Mannheim, Pforzheim and Heilbronn. Cooperation within this hub is at the core of our activities: workshops and training sessions are often co-organized and opened across institutions, which fosters exchange and cross-pollination between founders.

This collaboration ensures that our participants not only benefit from KIT’s resources, but also gain access to a broader network of knowledge, mentors, and opportunities across the region. It reflects our belief that female founders thrive best in strong communities.



“exist-Women continues to serve as a reassuring foundation – a place I can return to for guidance, clarity, and growth ”



Simran Chopra

exist-Women participants 2025 at KIT

AI & Digital Solutions

Dr.-Ing. Nicole Merkle 10
Dr. Maryam Moradpour 11
Dr. Divya Varadharajan 12

Sustainability & Green Innovation

Maëva Courcelle 13
Mery Sheryll Hernandez Maya 14
Sarah Deskovski 15
Fatemeh Masoudian 16
Simran Chopra 17

Social Impact & Knowledge

Dr.-Ing. Marlene Kopf 18
Tonia Windbichler 19



Dr.-Ing Name Nachname

Projekt Platzhalter Projekt

Tagline: Coding Empathy into Women's Health – this could be even even longer

Dr. Anna Schneider holds a PhD in Environmental Sciences and has several years of experience as a research scientist at leading research institutions, contributing to national and international projects. Most recently, she worked as a postdoctoral researcher and scientific coordinator, focusing on interdisciplinary research and innovation. Her current work combines scientific expertise with entrepreneurial thinking to develop innovative solutions for complex environmental challenges.Lore impsum für maximale Länge.



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Dr. Maryam **Moradpour**

“exist-Women provides a platform to turn research into solutions that truly matter – empowering women to innovate for cleaner air, sustainable energy, and a healthier planet. It inspires me to bridge science and entrepreneurship to create real environmental impact.”



AI-Driven Solutions for Clean Air and Energy Efficiency

Maryam Moradpour is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Institute of Meteorology and Climate Research (IMK-TRO), Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). She holds a PhD in Mechanical Engineering and has extensive experience in Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD), Thermo-fluid system optimization, and AI-driven environmental modeling.

Her project aims to develop an AI-powered system that integrates Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) simulations with AI solutions to reduce air pollution and enhance energy efficiency across industrial systems. By enabling real-time optimization of fuel usage and emission control, the technology promotes cleaner operations and accelerates the transition toward low-carbon and sustainable energy solutions.

This innovation has the potential to significantly decrease greenhouse gas and pollutant emissions, contributing to cleaner air, improved energy performance, and a more environmentally responsible future.



Dr. Divya Varadharajan

“The exist-Women scholarship provided me with great mentorship and financial support, empowering me to confidently take my first steps as a female founder. Thanks to the program, I was able to validate my business idea, build a strong network through the program, and get access to valuable courses and events for my startup.”

Scivalon – a chemistry-expert AI agent for researchers

Divya Varadharajan is a chemist and innovation scientist who spent a considerable number of years in academia and industry learning and working with chemistry data, innovation, and product development. She has experienced the shift to extensive automation in chemistry and the use of AI in research throughout her career. This led her to identify a problem in accessibility of knowledge in chemistry for researchers in various levels and in interdisciplinary fields ultimately leading to her startup idea.

Using Scivalon’s chemistry-expert agent, Vivian, researchers in chemistry and materials science with any level of expertise can get >95% accurate answers to their research questions instantly. Integrating Vivian into everyday research, one can transform months of background research into minutes increasing efficiency by 95%.

Maëva
Courcelle

“The exist-Women program offers a valuable opportunity to bridge the gap between theoretical research and practical application to create meaningful real-world impact. I discovered a respectful and supportive women environment that generates ideas, unlocks new opportunities, and inspires personal growth – a space where encouragement and boldness are at the heart of every exchange.“



Real-Time Load Sensitivity Estimation for Unlocking Demand-Side Flexibility

Maëva Courcelle is a PhD student in the Real Time Systems for Energy Technologies (RTSET) group at KIT. Her research focuses on demand-side management and developing methods to better understand how electrical loads react to voltage changes in real time. Her project aims to create a tool that estimates the sensitivity of electrical loads in the low-voltage grid. By improving visibility of how distributed loads behave, this approach helps unlock new forms of demand-side flexibility – an important resource for integrating renewable energy.

She works in a unique laboratory environment that enables proof-of-concept experiments with real hardware. By simulating a testing electrical grid and connecting test houses, she can supply them with power shaped by the laboratory rather than the German electricity provider.
As the laboratory tests proved promising, the idea of turning load sensitivity identification into a commercial product began to grow. To explore this path, she joined the exist-Women program, a chance to learn how prototypes can evolve into real-world solutions and to learn from people who have gone through this journey.

The exist-Women program has been an inspiring experience, where she met other women facing similar challenges in entrepreneurship. This exchange strengthened her motivation to move forward. Her next step: turning her research prototype into a product that can make an impact in our evolving world.



Mery Sheryll **Hernandez Maya**

“The exist-Women program offers a supportive space for women to enter and grow in the entrepreneurial environment. It challenges the underestimation often faced by female founders, providing access to a network of like-minded peers, inspiring success stories, and mentorship from experienced female entrepreneurs. Often, there are opportunities out there – we just don’t know they exist or the path to reach them.”

A new way of providing chemicals – starting with hydrogen peroxide at low carbon footprint for disinfection across numerous industries

Mery Hernandez is a PhD student at the Institute of Microprocess Engineering (IMVT) at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). Her research focuses on developing plasma technologies to enable the electrification and decarbonisation of the chemical industry. She has made significant progress in developing a modular plasma reactor platform for sustainable and flexible chemical synthesis.

The PlaXma project introduces a new concept in chemical supply: on-site, on-demand production of hydrogen peroxide using only water and plasma energy. This innovation replaces the need for conventional centralised production reliant on fossil feedstock and the transport and storage of hazardous chemicals with a solution that is safe, has a low carbon footprint, and is connected to renewable energy.

Looking ahead, PlaXma plans to extend its production platform to include other essential chemicals, with the aim of contributing to a decentralised, fossil-free and flexible chemical industry of the future.

Sarah
Deskovski



“One highlight of the exist-Women-program for me was the exist-Women Retreat. It was truly special to connect with the other participants and share experiences, hopes, and also fears. The safe space we have created in just two days was incredibly meaningful, and I hope to see even more women in the exist-Women-program in the future, so we can continue learning from and empowering each other.”

Smart Industrial Synergies, Circular Use of Material and Energy Flows

Sarah Deskovski is a master’s student in Chemical Engineering at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). She is currently writing her master’s thesis at the Institute for Micro Process Engineering (IMVT), where she works on the decentralized production of 100 % drop-in synthetic jet fuels via the Power-to-Liquid route.

Sarah has a strong interest in environmental protection and sustainability and wants to contribute to a more climate-friendly industry through innovative and practical solutions. Her project idea focuses on making industrial areas more sustainable by finding ways to use material and energy streams that are currently wasted. The goal is to connect existing infrastructures with renewable technologies, so that less energy and resources are lost and circular systems can be created more easily.

At the moment, she is focusing on building a strong knowledge base and learning more about technologies that could support her idea. In the future, she aims to develop concrete strategies that help companies use their resources more efficiently and move one step closer to carbon-neutral production.



Fatemeh
Masoudian

“As an international participant, finding such a strong and open network in Germany meant a lot to me. This community made it feel natural to connect, to learn, and to believe in myself on a deeper level. For me, exist-Women was a real door opener to new opportunities and inspiring people.”

Improving the efficiency and user experience of hospitals

Fatemeh Masoudian is a PhD researcher at Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). Her work focuses on improving the efficiency and user experience of hospitals; and ultimately other public buildings such as schools, museums, and cinemas, through Facility Management and data-driven optimization concepts. Her goal is to make the built environment more effective, sustainable, and enjoyable for everyone who uses it.

The exist-Women program gave her the chance to develop her ideas while growing personally, it became a space where confidence grows naturally. It was not only about building a startup, but also about building confidence, surrounded by inspiring and supportive women who truly empower each other.

Simran
Chopra

“exist-Women was a breath of fresh air during a difficult time, offering a community of inspiring individuals. It reaffirmed my belief that failure is a stepping stone and gave me the confidence to pursue new ideas. It continues to serve as a reassuring foundation – a place I can return to for guidance, clarity, and growth.”



Weather, Forecasting, and Humanity: A Vision Beyond the Lab

Simran Chopra is a PhD researcher in the working group Aerosol and Reactive Tracer Modelling at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). Her research focuses on improving the representation of volcanic aerosols in the ICON-ART numerical weather prediction model, which is used by the Deutscher Wetterdienst (DWD) for operational forecasting. She aims to understand the processes linking micro-scale aerosol properties to their global impacts. This is crucial for volcanic plume forecasting, furthermore, for aviation safety and renewable energy sector.

Looking ahead, Simran is committed to bridging the gap between academic research and real-world applications. She envisions leveraging weather and climate modelling and data to benefit sectors such as energy, disaster risk management, and air quality. Her broader goal is to contribute to improving lives through science-informed solutions. She also advocates for stronger international collaboration between developed and developing countries to address the unequal impacts of the climate crisis across societies.



Dr.-Ing. Marlene **Kopf**

“A program like exist-Women was truly missing in the startup scene. As a woman interested in entrepreneurship, it was the first time I felt genuinely seen and addressed in a male-dominated environment. I really recommend it to any woman who wants to make a difference. The network, the wonderfully empowering atmosphere among the fellows, the support from experienced coaches, and the practical workshops helped me take the leap and decide to start my own venture.”

Kaonaut — Support for volunteer disaster helpers

Marlene Kopf holds a doctorate in mechanical engineering and, following a formative experience during a design thinking project in the wake of the devastating earthquake in Turkey in 2023, developed an idea that has stayed with her ever since. After working for a major automotive supplier in Germany and a biotechnology startup in Paris, she seized the opportunity offered by exist-Women and decided to create Kaonaut.

Kaonaut is a platform for volunteers helping in disaster areas. After events such as natural disasters, there is often a great desire among the population to help, but despite their great importance to society, self-organized helpers in disaster situations often have no official contact persons. Their efforts are poorly coordinated, they receive too little appreciation, and the volunteers put themselves under pressure. After a short time, a feeling of ineffectiveness and overload sets in, the volunteers' motivation declines, and they often give up in discouragement, even though they are urgently needed. To enable volunteers in disaster situations to better manage their energy and provide sustainable help, the Kaonaut platform is tailored to their needs: networking and exchange, coordination, and mental health support. This enables them to provide long-term and effective support where help is needed in the aftermath of a disaster, without losing sight of themselves.

Tonia **Windbichler**

“exist-Women offers solid and tangible support for entrepreneurs. It encourages personal growth and gives specific ideas offering steps to take on our founding journey.”



Interactive city adventures

Tonia Windbichler is an adventurer and storyteller. With her interactive city and nature tours she aims to spark curiosity, encourage discovery and bring joy to the world.

Eager to tell the stories of places and their inhabitants her lovingly written characters invite the readers to follow the footsteps of the past. What lies behind old stones and walls - behind trees and paths - behind stories old and new?

Outlook exist-Women

You can be part of the next cohort

We plan to offer 10 spots for a yearly cohort and welcome applications from aspiring female founders who have not yet founded a company. Eligible are students, researchers, staff members, and alumnae of KIT. And we also welcome all interested women who want to become part of a KIT startup team. Whether you are just beginning to explore your entrepreneurial potential or already working on a first idea, we will support your individual journey toward founding your own company.

Our program is deeply embedded in the DeepTechHub network, a collaboration of universities and research institutions across Karlsruhe, Heidelberg, Mannheim, Pforzheim, and Heilbronn. Cooperation is at the heart of this initiative: workshops, bootcamps, matchmaking events, and technical seminars are regularly organized jointly and opened across the partner institutions. This fosters cross-institutional exchange, strengthens communication between the hubs, and gives our participants access to a vibrant regional innovation ecosystem.

For questions regarding the application, please reach out directly to femalefounders@irm.kit.edu.

Please note:
We start with the application process before the final funding commitment. We are therefore unable to make a guaranteed funding commitment at this time.

Networks

Coaching

Mentoring

Workshops

Funding

Our Mentors

“I hope we keep supporting each other, sharing opportunities and advice so that we all move forward together.”

Dr. Iris Schwenk



Our mentor network is at the heart of the exist-Women experience. It connects participants with experienced founders, industry experts, and role models who share their knowledge, provide guidance, and open doors to new opportunities. The mentors accompany the participants throughout their entrepreneurial journey – from the first spark of an idea to the development of a viable business model.

Each mentor relationship is unique. Some focus on strategic questions like market entry or financing, others on personal growth, leadership, and confidence. What unites them all is their commitment to empower women to take the next step – even when the path seems uncertain. Through regular exchange and honest feedback, the mentors help participants sharpen their ideas, overcome challenges, and stay motivated.

Beyond one-on-one mentoring, the network creates a strong sense of community. Participants become part of a growing ecosystem of women supporting women – founders, scientists, and professionals who believe in the power of collaboration. Many of our mentors once stood at the same point as today’s participants. Their stories show that successful entrepreneurship begins with courage, curiosity, and a supportive network.

Thank you for your support, curiosity and advice as mentors,
Andrea Böhler, Anna Hofgärtner, Dr. Gerda Frank, Dr. Iris Schwenk, Janna Kraft, Marie Reger, Marlin Dürrschnabel, Paula Winterstein, Vera Meinert and Yelda Nur Demirdöğen.

Dr. Iris **Schwenk**

Co-Founder and COO of HQS Quantum Simulations

What have you learnt from your experience as a female founder?

Being a founder is very challenging in any case and female founders may face some additional issues. But it can also be an asset. Especially in the deep-tech space where a female co-founder can increase visibility.

Why did you become an exist-Women mentor?

Mentors have played an essential role for HQS, and I continue to benefit from exchanges with other founders to this day. To give something back, I want to share my general experiences as a founder. At the same time, I understand the unique challenges that female founders may face and I want to support them navigate these situations.

“Startup stories don't succeed if they never get started. The exist-women program helps women to jump over the initial hurdle or to even consider founding a company as a path for the future.”



What are your wishes for the future of the female founders community?

I want to see more women founders - especially in the deep-tech space. I wish for us to be visible in every industry. Most importantly, I hope we keep supporting each other, sharing opportunities and advice so that we all move forward together.

Janna **Kraft**

Co-Founder of femfeel

What have you learnt from your experience as a female founder?

That you can trust your gut feeling more than you think you can. That self doubt is a killer of motivation and speed. How cool it is to have great female Co-Founders.

Why did you become an exist-Women mentor?

The exist scholarship enabled me and my Co-Founder to start our startup right after our studies. During my studies I would have loved to get the chance to learn from the experiences of other founders.



“Connect all the great KIT female founders.”

What was the most important thing you learnt from your mentorship?

How important it is to go out with your idea, be loud about it and dare to tell it to anyone you meet. My wishes for the future of the female founders community? That it becomes bigger and bigger!

Marlin
Dürrschnabel

Knowledge Transfer Manager at
Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

Why did you become an exist-Women mentor?

I believe that diverse perspectives and strong networks are key to shaping meaningful innovation. Supporting female founders in building confidence, refining ideas, and turning visions into reality is deeply rewarding and crucial for a strong innovation ecosystem.

What was the most important thing you learnt from your mentorship?

I've learned that mentorship is always mutual – while I support founders in developing ideas and confidence, I also learn from their creativity and resilience. It's a powerful reminder of how much innovation thrives through collaboration and shared perspectives.

"To me, exist-Women is about unlocking potential – creating opportunities for women to explore their ideas, grow their confidence, and transform their visions into real impact. It's a powerful step towards a more diverse and innovative entrepreneurial landscape.



What are your wishes for the future of the female founders community?

I wish for the female founders community to grow into an even stronger and more visible network that empowers women to confidently pursue their ideas, collaborate across sectors, and create innovative solutions that shape a sustainable future.

Yelda Nur **Demirdögen**

Corporate Strategist

Why did you become an exist-Women mentor?

Supporting exist-Women combines two of my strongest motivations: empowering underrepresented talent and accelerating the translation of groundbreaking science into real-world impact. It's deeply rewarding to help others build confidence, navigate funding and turn technologies into companies that matter.

What are your wishes for the future of the female founders community?

I wish for a female founders community that's truly empowered – one where women support each other not just with encouragement, but with capital, access and opportunities. I'd love to see more women leading in deeptech and shaping industries traditionally dominated by men. My hope is that the community becomes a self-sustaining ecosystem.



"exist-Women is more than a program - it's a launchpad for female scientists ready to build boldly. It empowers women to move from research to real-world impact and to claim their space in deeptech entrepreneurship."

Female Founders Support

exist-women is not the only support you can get as a female founder. There are many more local, national and international formats you can profit from. Find an overview to start here.

KIT

With our many years of experience in entrepreneurship, research transfer, and startup support, KIT and especially KIT-Gründerschmiede accompany female founders from the initial idea to the successful launch of their business. We offer a unique environment for women who want to start a business or develop their ideas further. With our many years of experience in entrepreneurship, research transfer, and startup support, we accompany female founders from the initial idea to the successful launch of their company.

CyberLab Karlsruhe

As part of the Karlsruhe startup ecosystem, CyberLab supports female founders who want to apply for exist-Women with individual consulting, workshops, and direct networking with KIT. In addition, CyberLab offers special formats such as the Empowering Female Founders event and the HerImpact event series. These events focus on topics such as visibility, self-management, resilience, and mindfulness, and bring female founders together in a targeted manner. In addition, CyberLab offers mentoring programs with experienced founders and entrepreneurs – on request, also specifically from woman to woman.

EnTechnon

At EnTechnon (the chair for Entrepreneurship and Technology Management at KIT), aspiring entrepreneurs get support in turning innovative ideas into sustainable business models – through hands-on teaching and research-based insights. Their mission is to enable entrepreneurial thinking and action, technological innovation, and social responsibility. They value diverse perspectives, encourage collaboration across disciplines, connect academic research with real-world challenges and impact and support the exist-Women program at KIT with expertise and network.

DeepTechHub

The DeepTechHub actively supports female founders by fostering strong connections across its partner institutions in Karlsruhe, Heidelberg, Mannheim, Pforzheim, and Heilbronn. Through the exist-Women program, all partners maintain an open and collaborative spirit. Events such as workshops and networking sessions are accessible to participants from every hub. This active exchange enables female founders to benefit from diverse expertise, expand their networks beyond institutional and regional boundaries.

NXTGN

Stay up to date with the NXTGN Female Founders Newsletter – curated and exclusive news on everything that matters to female founders in THE LÄND. Be the first to hear about formats such as the Expert Roundtables for Female Founders (by NXTGN & encourageventures), an inspiring event format for exchange and networking in small groups, and much more.

Campus Founders

Campus Founders empowers women to become entrepreneurs by fostering a strong, supportive community of female founders. Through networking, knowledge sharing, and collaboration, members connect and grow together in a trusted environment. In partnership with encourageventures, Campus Founders offers mentoring, access to an extensive investor network, and joint networking events to strengthen female entrepreneurship. Female founders are also invited to the quarterly Founder's Exchange Events in Heilbronn.

GIG7

The Competence Center for FeMale Business in Mannheim empowers women to start and grow their businesses through tailored consulting, training, and a vibrant community. With the Female Founders Map Baden-Württemberg, GIG7 increases visibility for women-led businesses across the state, showcasing their impact and inspiring more women to pursue entrepreneurship.

Start-up BW

Entrepreneurial independence opens up attractive career opportunities for women. THE Start-up LÄND works with all stakeholders involved in promoting start-ups and entrepreneurship to encourage more women to take the step into self-employment and realize their business ideas. To this end, the state campaign Start-up BW, together with regional women's business development agencies, offers numerous services for women interested in starting a business, female founders, and female entrepreneurs.

Female Accelerator

The Female Accelerator, initiated and organized by TRACES, the Transfer Center of the University of Stuttgart, supports female entrepreneurship in Baden-Württemberg by increasing visibility, inspiring women, and providing targeted support. Through the Female Founders Accelerating Agency, success stories are promoted, access to funding is improved, and regional actors are connected. The initiative also includes Train-the-Trainer workshops and a statewide Female Founders Community, creating networks that empower women-led startups and strengthen the local ecosystem.

Get in Touch

Questions, ideas or anything else?
Contact femalefounders@irm.kit.edu



Dr. Sarah Manthey

Dr. Sarah I. Manthey is Project Lead of the Helmholtz Academy for Intrapreneurship (HAFIS) and the exist-Women program at KIT. As an Innovation Coach, she empowers aspiring founders to develop sustainable business models and entrepreneurial skills. With a PhD on technology entrepreneurship and management, she combines academic expertise with a hands-on “let’s do it” mentality to drive innovation and impact.



Schadi Neumann

Schadi Neumann is Project Lead of the Helmholtz Transfer Academy InnoSuper and the exist-Women program at KIT, where she supports women on their path from research to entrepreneurship. As an innovation coach, she equips emerging founders with entrepreneurial mindset, strategic clarity, and the ability to build sustainable ventures. With a multilingual and diverse background across law, mediation, sociology, and coaching, she blends analytical insight with an action-driven approach. Guided by empathy and curiosity, she transforms complex ideas into tangible opportunities – enabling women to articulate their vision with confidence and create lasting impact.

KIT GRÜNDER SCHMIEDE makeIT exist

LEGAL NOTICE

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Invitation to engage

We invite you to join us in our path supporting female founders. Direct communication is very important to us. If you have any questions, suggestions or comments, please contact femalefounders@irm.kit.edu

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