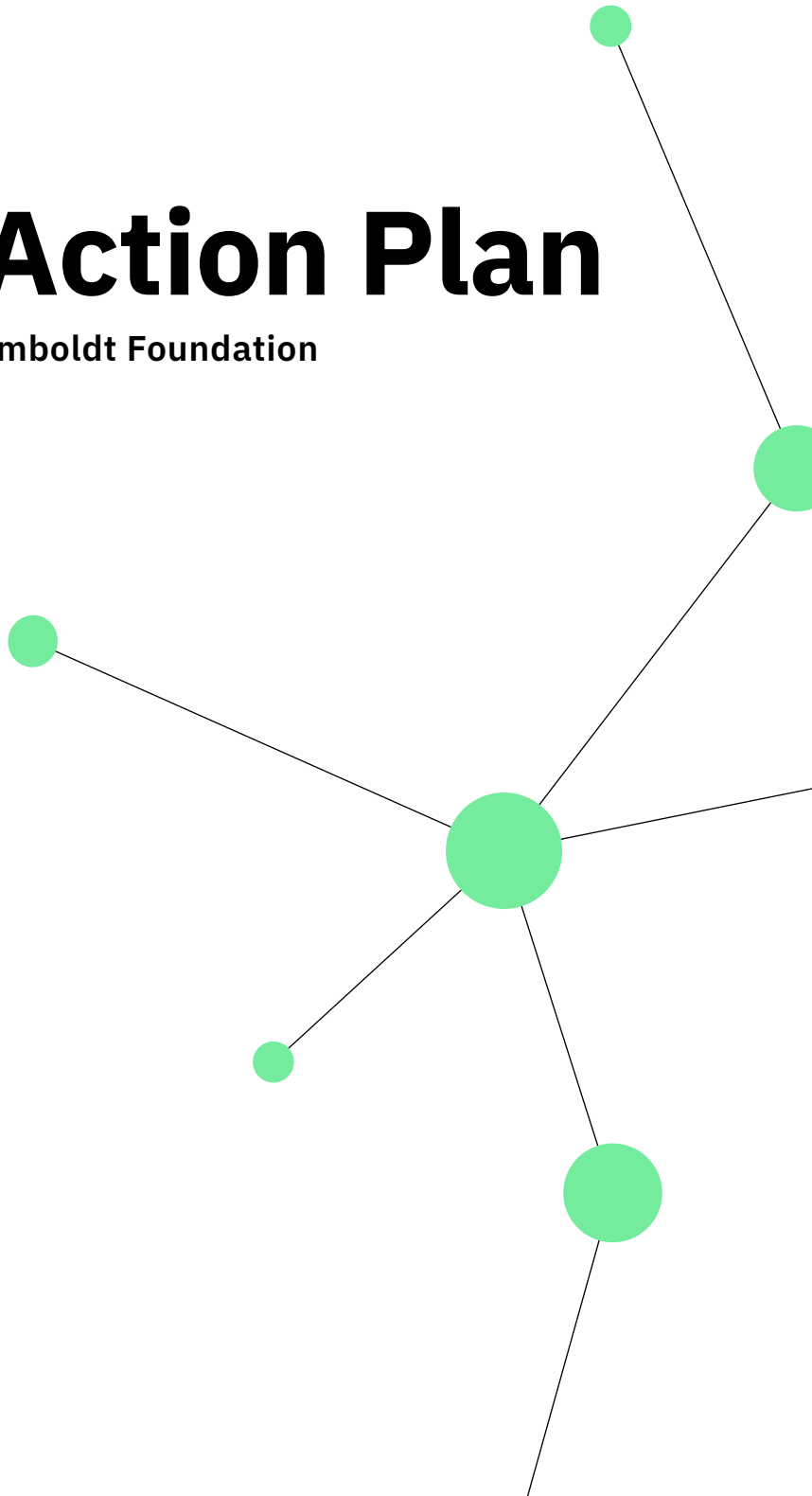




Alexander von
HUMBOLDT
STIFTUNG

CoARA Action Plan

by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation
As of March 2026



Foreword

More than ever before, Europe has become the area in which the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation is making an impact. Through our strategy, “Resilient science for a changing world,” we are strengthening academic freedom, excellence and transfer to society and the political arena – together with strong partners in Europe. That is why we joined CoARA in 2024: to promote a system of assessing research that highlights diversity, judges quality in a differentiated way and takes impact seriously.

This CoARA action plan is our roadmap. It pools 23 concrete measures for the period up to 2029 – pragmatic, measurable, adaptive. It has been developed in cross-departmental collaboration, approved by the management and closely interlinked with our strategy and monitoring processes. Thanks to all colleagues contributing to this team effort and, in particular, to the members of our CoARA working group.

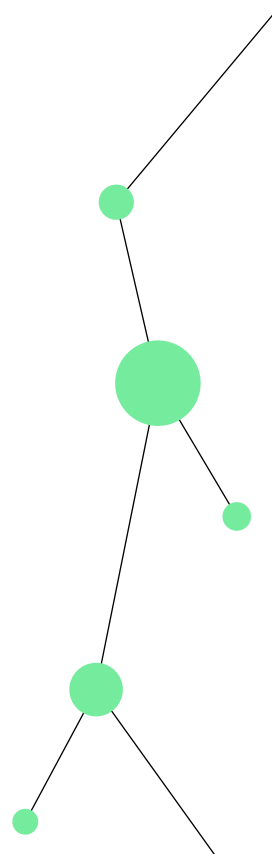
We contribute our experience of promoting researchers, participate in relevant working groups and are actively involved in the National Chapter Deutschland. Dialogue generates change: we are continuing to hone our concept of quality, make procedures fairer and more transparent, and reinforce international cooperation.

What we want most of all is to achieve better conditions for excellent, diverse, independent research – and a greater impact on society. Assessing research means accepting responsibility. We are determined to follow this path – together with our reviewers, fellows, alumni and partners. We are looking forward to it!



Dr Markus Zanner

Secretary General of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

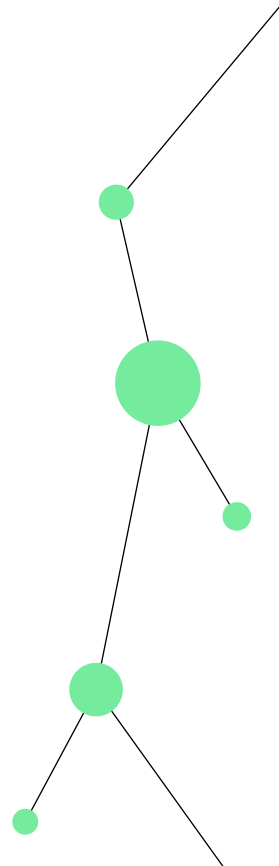


The Mission of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

For 70 years, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation has been promoting outstanding international researchers who come to Germany on the strength of a Humboldt Research Fellowship or Research Award. In tandem with researchers at German universities and research institutions they conduct a research project they have chosen themselves. The Foundation sponsors people, not projects, across both countries and disciplines. Its selection committees make their decisions solely based on academic quality and the applicants' recognisable ability and promise. In this mission, the Humboldt Foundation is unique on the international funding landscape. The Humboldt Network, which is nourished by promoting individuals, now embraces more than 30,000 individuals worldwide. Since 2016, the Humboldt Foundation has been setting a vigorous example for academic freedom: the Philipp Schwartz Initiative enables German universities and research institutions to host foreign researchers who are at risk so that they can continue their academic work unhindered. The Humboldt Foundation's activities are mainly financed by public funders, especially the Federal Foreign Office (AA) as the institutional funder as well as the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR), the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the European Union (EU).

Signing CoARA

As a research funding organisation that grants research fellowships and awards exclusively on the basis of quality, ability and promise, across countries and disciplines, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation sees itself as having a responsibility to actively participate in the discussion on assessing research quality and researchers' performance at European and international level, thus helping to shape the conditions for research evaluation. In December 2024, the Humboldt Foundation therefore signed the CoARA agreement (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment) to become a member of the coalition. Since then, the Foundation has participated in relevant



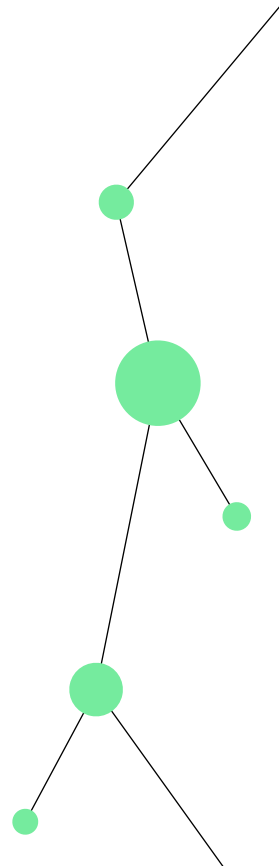
working groups, the meetings of the German National Chapter and been represented at the biannual General Assembly. We consider CoARA membership and the related activities as a contribution to implementing our current strategy “[Resilient science for a changing world](#)” (2024–2028). On this basis, the Foundation continues to develop its differentiated, inclusive and impactful concept of quality and reflects on the implications for selection, funding and the Humboldt Network.

Implementing CoARA

Upon joining the coalition, an internal, cross-departmental CoARA working group was established whose members are involved in various CoARA working groups (e.g., “Improving practices in the assessment of research proposals”). They also participate in the meetings of the German National Chapter which was initiated by the German Research Foundation (DFG) in 2024. Through exchanges with stakeholders in the national and international science systems, the Humboldt Foundation gains impetus for continuing the development of its assessment of research quality and promise. The working group was tasked with drawing up the Foundation’s CoARA action plan, documenting measures already carried out and initiated in line with the CoARA Commitments as well as committing to new initiatives to start and follow up over the coming five years. The CoARA action plan was presented to the Board of Trustees and approved. It will be published on [zenodo](#) shortly. The Foundation’s commitment to CoARA is part of our external communication with the scientific community and the public at large.

As a steering instrument, the action plan focuses on a five-year innovation cycle. The Humboldt Foundation is addressing all ten CoARA Commitments and will implement a total of 23 measures over the next four years. The following table sets out the Foundation’s measures to reform research assessment in line with the ten CoARA Commitments, indicates the status of implementation and defines a time frame.¹

1 Overlaps occur when measures contribute to implementing different Commitments concurrently.

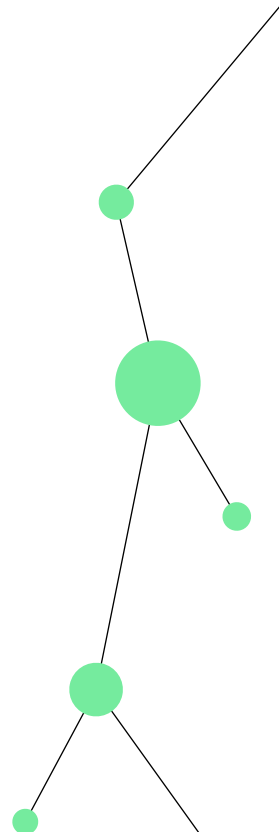


Commitment 1: *Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research.*

No.	Actions	Status
1.1	Dedicate space to diverse contributions in application materials, including space on forms and templates for all kinds of published contributions to the scientific community and professional experience outside of academic settings. Test narrative formats in selected programmes to allow scope for diverse contributions. Consequent assessment of contributions relevant to the area of research by expert reviewers and interdisciplinary selection committees which are asked to weigh criteria according to discipline-specific expectations.	✔ implemented
1.2	Raise expert reviewers' awareness of fair assessment of diverse contributions.	⚙️ ongoing
1.3	Continue exploring the intersection between research quality and promise, academic freedom and the impact generated with and through our network of fellows and alumni by learning from our transfer programmes and exchanging with partners.	🕒 planned, prospectively implemented by 12/2027

Commitment 2: *Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.*

No.	Actions	Status
2.1	Request for key publications to focus on research quality, complemented by a comprehensive list of all published contributions to the scientific community as an indicator of overall productivity.	✔ implemented
2.2	Use peer review for all applications, except in cases where multiple indicators clearly point to a negative funding decision and no countervailing information is presented.	✔ implemented
2.3	Brief reviewers and committee members on the responsible use of quantitative indicators.	✔ implemented

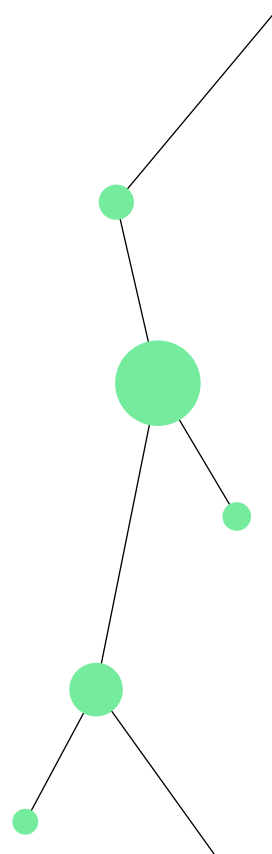


Commitment 3: *Abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index.*

No.	Actions	Status
3.1	Regularly alert new committee members from the beginning of their first term to inappropriate uses of journal- and publication-based metrics in research assessment.	✔ implemented
3.2	No request for metrics in application forms.	✔ implemented
3.3	Use a set of questions that encourage reviewers to focus on qualitative aspects rather than metrics, e.g., on originality and innovativeness for fellowships, and ground-breaking research and advancement of the field for awards.	✔ implemented
3.4	Actively discourage any kind of information on metrics in the complete list of publications.	🕒 planned, prospectively implemented by 12/2029
3.5	Implement a new collaborative peer review procedure (Peer Circle) which enables us to act as moderators and request reviewers to focus on qualitative criteria and disregard the inappropriate use of metrics.	⚙️ in implementation

Commitment 4: *Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment.*

No.	Actions	Status
4.1	At the beginning of the form for reviewers, request to take individual circumstances into account when assessing academic excellence. Also raise committees' awareness about recognising individual circumstances.	✔ implemented
4.2	Act as moderators during the Peer Circle assessment and interact with reviewers.	⚙️ in implementation



Commitment 5: Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to.

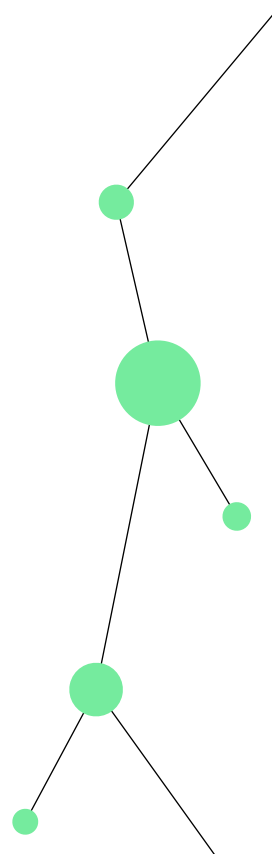
No.	Actions	Status
5.1	Follow an annual innovation cycle to discuss and implement changes suggested by members of the Humboldt Foundation and Humboldt Network.	✔ implemented
5.2	Become a member of CoARA, sign the CoARA Agreement and contribute to working groups as well as the National Chapter Germany.	✔ implemented

Commitment 6: Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes.

No.	Actions	Status
6.1	Introduce a new review procedure, called Peer Circle, which is both collaborative and interactive, and provides guidance for reviewers, thereby facilitating balanced assessment. Invite participating reviewers to give feedback to enable continued development of the procedure.	⚙️ in implementation
6.2	Establish and refine the ex-post evaluation procedure in the Henriette Herz Scouting Programme, in which fellows' academic achievements are not assessed prior to but after completing the fellowship.	⚙️ in implementation

Commitment 7: Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use.

No.	Actions	Status
7.1	Provide new committee and peer circle members with guidance on assessment criteria at the beginning of their term.	✔ implemented
7.2	Provide new peer reviewers with additional guidance on assessment criteria.	🕒 planned, prospectively implemented by 06/2028



Commitment 8: Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition.

No.	Actions	Status
8.1	Share Peer Circle Reviewing as a good practice example and engage in exchange with partners.	✔ implemented
8.2	Host and pilot exchange formats with partner organisations such as „Are we entering a post-bibliometric era? Assessing research quality in the context of recent reform initiatives“ in cooperation with the British Council.	✔ implemented

Commitment 9: Communicate progress made on adherence to the Principles and implementation of the Commitments.

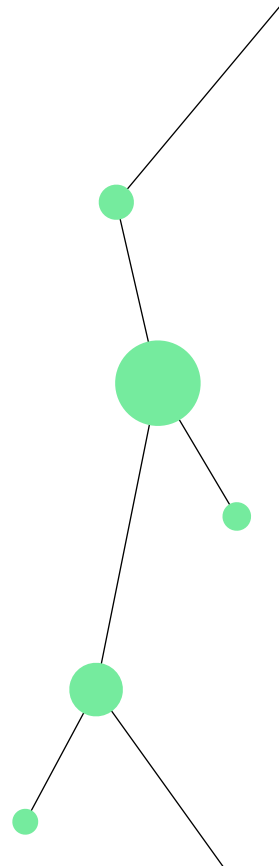
No.	Actions	Status
9.1	Share and discuss our action plan with partners, the Humboldt Network and critical friends, e.g., at the meeting of the National Chapter.	🕒 planned, prospectively implemented by 06/2027

Commitment 10: Evaluate practices, criteria and tools based on solid evidence and the state-of-the-art in research on research, and make data openly available for evidence gathering and research.

No.	Actions	Status
10.1	Evaluate our programmes and new review practices, and publish the results, e.g., the report on the Peer Circle pilot phase in German and English (2023).	✔ implemented

Monitoring CoARA

The Foundation continuously monitors progress on reaching its objectives through impact-oriented monitoring. It systematically evaluates its activities using indicators and targets and thus achieves accountability and comparability, commitment and transparency. It dovetails its CoARA monitoring with the strategic, impact-based



monitoring of all the Foundation's activities: Using cross-programme monitoring, management steers the Foundation's work and acquires information on the impact of its activities. Programme-specific monitoring allows it to plan, steer and continue developing its sponsorship programmes in an impact-based fashion.

We thus ensure that our strategic action plans and CoARA actions interlock effectively. Throughout the five-year implementation cycle, we will regularly report on our progress to the Foundation's Board of Trustees and will systematically assess the impact of CoARA membership. We conceive of the CoARA action plan as a living document that responds, where needed, to relevant ongoing exchanges and developments within the Foundation and the scientific community. In summer 2027 and at the end of 2029, we will conduct a mid-term and a final evaluation respectively. CoARA will continue to inform the Humboldt Foundation's next strategy cycle beginning in 2027. Open measures will be integrated into the new strategy; we will take inspiration from our interaction with the CoARA community for our strategic conversations within the Foundation.

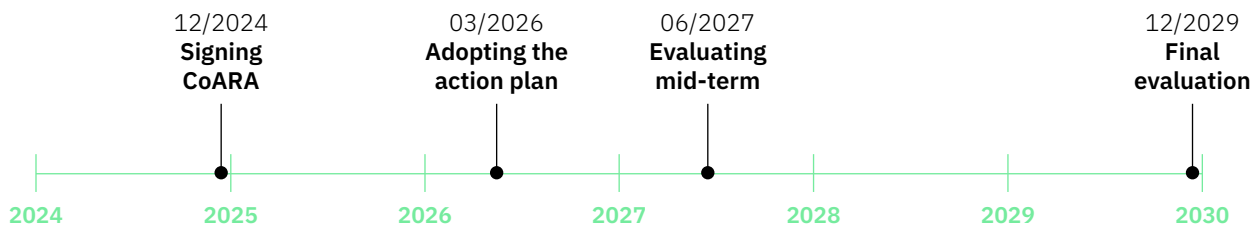
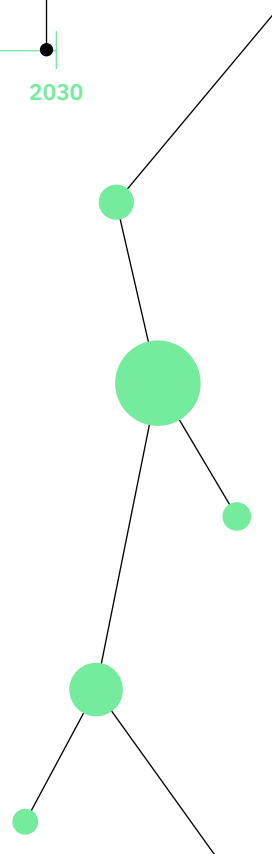


Fig. 1 The process of implementing the CoARA Commitments





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