

NEXT FRONTIER AI CHALLENGE

WEBINAR, 12 MAY 2026

SPRIN-D

A HOME FOR PEOPLE WITH
RADICAL NEW IDEAS



SINCE
DECEMBER
2019

150+
EMPLOYEES
WORKING IN LEIPZIG AND
REMOTELY

16
CHALLENGES & FUNKE
3000+
PROJECTS SUBMITTED



UNDER THE BANNER OF SPRIND CHALLENGES VISIONARY TEAMS
ARE SELECTED TO DEMONSTRATE RADICALLY NEW SOLUTIONS

THE GOAL:
FINDING THE BEST SOLUTIONS TO TACKLE
THE GRAND CHALLENGES OF OUR TIME

WHERE ARE WE RIGHT NOW?

16

800+

130+

9 CHALLENGES,
7 FUNKE
SINCE 2021

800+ SUBMISSIONS
HAVE BEEN RECEIVED

CHALLENGE TEAMS FUNDED,
40 ARE STILL IN THE RACE

NEXT FRONTIER AI CHALLENGE

WHO IS RUNNING THE CHALLENGE?



**Dr. Johannes
Otterbach**

Co-Initiator & Co-Lead



**Jano
Costard**

Head of Challenges



**Leonard
Schenk**

AI Analyst



**Moritz
Richter**

Operating Lead



**Marcia
Holst**

Challenge Officer

SciencesPo



**Carsten
Dirks**

Co-Lead



**Sebastian
Berns**

Challenge Officer



**David
Farago**

AI Analyst



**Alessandro
Audretsch**

Go-to-Market Lead



NextFrontierAI

The goal:
transform conceptual frontier
approaches into European AI Labs
with validated technologies
– within 24 months.

Stage 01

Stage 02

Stage 03

10 teams

7 months

~ 3M €

6 teams

8 months

~ 8M €

3 teams

9 months

~ 15.5M €

~ 1B €
per
team

Up to € 26,500,000 per team
for all three stages

STAGE 1

10 Teams

7 months

€3M per team

Key milestones for this stage:

- First technological proof points for the frontier hypothesis (e.g. technical report or paper preprint)
- Artefacts (model families, experimental codebases, open-source contributions) showing a potential scaling dimension or new emergent phenomena
- Updated roadmap for Stage 2, justified by technological and operational learnings
- Scalable R&D processes demonstrated
- New connections into academic and economic ecosystems
- Overview of resource utilisation and implemented FinOps controls

Disclaimer

The final conditions of participation are defined in the official call for applications and the contracts between SPRIND and participating teams. More details will be shown on the website (<https://www.sprind.org/en/actions/challenges/next-frontier-ai>).

STAGE 2

6 Teams

8 months

€8M per team

Key milestones for this stage:

- Scalable, production-ready engineering processes demonstrated
- Fast translation of experiments into production established
- Scaling dimensions and emergent phenomena validated or falsified
- First technical secrets identified, leading to 5–10x optimisation on relevant KPIs
- Proprietary datasets in scaling phase
- Partnerships for long-term compute procurement initiated
- Qualified conversations with commercial R&D departments

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STAGE 3

3 Teams

9 months

€15.5M per
team

Key milestones for this stage:

- Frontier system prototype implemented, demonstrating the lab's vision
- User applications in testing phase (GUI/API)
- Multiple technical secrets successfully identified and implemented
- Scaling laws clearly recognisable and understood
- First long-term industry partnerships established
- Long-term compute resources secured
- Investment-grade data room ready for large-scale investors

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WHAT WE ARE NOT LOOKING FOR

- ✗ Incremental transformer optimisation without fundamentally new capability horizons
- ✗ Reproduction or derivatives of established models (e.g. rebuilding OpenAI, Llama, Qwen)
- ✗ Incremental efficiency gains (better quantisation, leaner MoE routing)
- ✗ Conventional agent architectures without systemic innovation
- ✗ Domain-specific fine-tuning without foundational innovation
- ✗ Brute-force scaling as the primary innovation thesis

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HOW THE JURY EVALUATES YOU

1

Approach

Potential to become a disruptive innovation. Does your thesis target the next S-curve, not just optimise the current one?

2

Implementation

Effectiveness of the proposed work plan. Is the roadmap realistic? Are milestones concrete and measurable?

3

Team

Ability to execute. Does the team combine deep technical expertise with operational competence? Evidence of shipped systems?

4

Economic Viability

Cost effectiveness of proposed budget. Economic potential of approach. Potential to attract further funding.

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WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

- Pre-committed funding, available within days after selection
- Access to investors, corporates, public institutions and advocates
- Proven SPRIND processes with minimal administrative effort

FAQs

IP PROVISIONS (1)

The participant retains the ownership of all the rights on the results that it generates.

Because of State Aid Laws requirements...

- the Participation Agreement explicitly provides that SPRIND may utilize, further develop, or research the results and associated IP rights only for its own use.

[Read the IP provisions in the Participation agreement and the IP FAQ](#)

IP PROVISIONS (2)

In case that the Participant fails to commercially utilize the results,

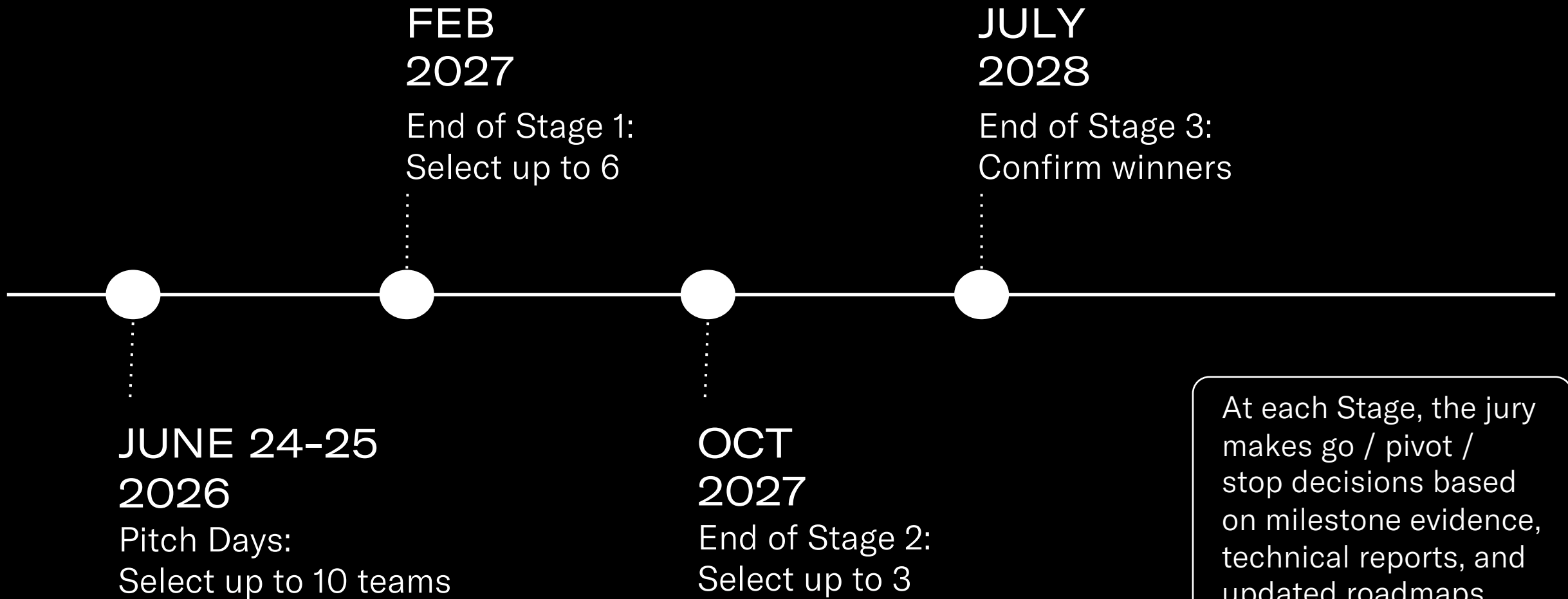
- SPRIND is entitled to require the Participant to grant non-exclusive and non-transferable licenses to third parties for the commercial or non-commercial utilization of the results on fair and reasonable terms.
- That right of SPRIND is limited to a period of three (3) years after the end of the Participation Agreement.
- Solely the Participant and these third parties are responsible for determining fair market conditions.

Read the IP provisions in the Participation agreement and the IP FAQ

LEGAL ENTITY

You'll need a European legal entity (UG, GmbH, SAS, Oy, S.r.l., etc.) by the time funding flows,

and the lab must be effectively headquartered in European Union, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Israel or the United Kingdom.



Application period runs until
June 1, 2026 (12:00 pm CEST)

Read Call for Submissions, Application
Form and Participation Agreement
ASAP

Your questions

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