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Press release

SPRIND CHALLENGE "COMPOSITE LEARNING": JURY SELECTS SEVEN TEAMS TO PARTICIPATE IN INNOVATION COMPETITION

Each team gets up to EUR 530,000 for the next 12 months to develop a robust, scalable framework that can handle AI training across diverse, decentralized systems

Leipzig, 5 February 2025

AI models transform our society and the economy – they can drive medical breakthroughs, enable self-learning industrial robots, or optimize complex traffic systems. However, high-performance AI training remains dependent on expensive, centralized data centers. Only few players have the resources to train these large models. Access for SMEs and startups is limited, particularly in Germany and Europe, where advanced computing resources still fall behind.

To address this challenge, SPRIND has invited 17 teams from across Europe to Leipzig to pitch their ideas for a robust and scalable framework for Composite Learning, enabling AI training across diverse and decentralized systems. The participating teams have proposed innovative solutions aimed at delivering benefits such as reduced cost and environmental impact of AI training, accelerated time-to-market for new models and efficient data privacy.

Seven teams convinced jury with technical expertise and team track record

The expert jury - comprised of AI industry experts, VC funders and academics - has now selected a total of seven teams from more than 50 applications. The teams come from universities and start-ups from across Germany, France, and the UK.

These teams have showcased disruptive approaches that push the boundaries of AI model training beyond the current state of the art. They demonstrated a strong track record of collaboration on similar challenges and many have taken significant steps toward commercialization, such as launching spin-offs or forming partnerships with industrial leaders in sectors like medical technology and industrial automation.

Stage 1 of SPRIND competition until January 2026

During the Stage 1 of the Challenge, each team will receive up to EUR 530,000 for the next twelve months. Beyond financial backing, SPRIND provides comprehensive support to the cohort through individual mentoring, fostering connections between teams to leverage their collective strengths, and facilitating access to industry leaders.

In January 2026, the teams will present their solutions to the jury again. The jury will review interim results, evaluating which teams display the strongest potential for transformative innovation and advance to Stage 2, with funding of up to EUR 520,000 (plus VAT) per team for the next nine months. For those moving into Stage 3 in October 2026, SPRIND will provide up to EUR 600,000 (plus VAT) to support further development.

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The teams are working at the technological frontier shaping the future of decentralized AI training. The aim of the challenge is to develop a comprehensive framework demonstrating the potential of composite learning in distributed and heterogeneous environments. The solutions are intended to show how AI models can be trained efficiently and safely in different locations, with different hardware and data. Ideally, participants will develop innovative approaches for overcoming existing barriers, such as a lack of compatibility between chips, communication bottlenecks, and dependence on central update servers

The innovation competition builds on the work of the BMWK's IPCEI-CIS to promote digital sovereignty in Germany and Europe. The overarching funding objective is to develop advanced technologies for the "multi-provider cloud-edge continuum," which will enable the exchange and processing of large volumes of data with extremely low latency.

For more information on the participating teams, please visit
https://www.sprind.org/en/composite-learning

About SPRIND Challenges

SPRIND Challenges are innovation competitions in which the participating teams receive quick and unbureaucratic financial support to develop solutions for the major social and technological challenges of our time. In SPRIND Challenges, the teams take part in a multi-stage competition. At the end of each stage, the teams' work is evaluated and only the best teams remain in the competition and receive further financial support to continue developing their idea.

About SPRIND

The Federal Agency for Breakthrough Innovation SPRIND was founded in 2019 and is based in Leipzig. The sole shareholder is the Federal Republic of Germany, represented by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK). SPRIND closes a gap in the German innovation landscape: It finds new, groundbreaking technologies for the major challenges of our time and at the same time ensures that the added value of the resulting companies and industries remains in Germany and Europe. SPRIND is financed by funds from the federal budget. It is headed SPRIND by Rafael Laguna de la Vera and Berit Dannenberg.

About IPCEI-CIS

The IPCEI-CIS is the central digital initiative for Europe, with more than 100 companies and research institutions from 12 EU Member States making advances to build the world's first multi-provider cloud-edge continuum. The main goal is to create a completely new decentralized software infrastructure for the advanced use of data processing resources from the cloud to the edge. This new type of open ecosystem, which is operated by several providers, will reduce both technological dependencies and lock-in effects. It will also enable new and innovative data-driven business models, e.g., in connection with artificial intelligence and IIoT (Industrial-Internet-of-Things), for a wide range of applications in industries such as manufacturing, mobility, energy, and tourism.

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