

**Munich**

26 January 2021

# Sustainable startups on the upswing: Following an excellent first year, the RESPOND accelerator program enters its next round

- The BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt and UnternehmerTUM are once again looking for founders of sustainable startups to participate in the RESPOND accelerator program
- The program seeks startups that make a positive contribution to one of the following sustainability areas: "The Future of Work," "Sustainable Urbanization," "Responsible Economy"
- Applications can be submitted between January 18 and February 15; the accelerator starts in June 2021
- Already the first program brought forth several success stories: From among the participating startups of the first cohort, Hawa Dawa was named "Digital Startup of the Year 2020" by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy and Made of Air was named "Science Breakthrough of the Year" by the Falling Walls Foundation

**Munich.** The application phase for RESPOND has begun: Until February 15, 2021, the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt and UnternehmerTUM are once again looking for founders of sustainable startups to participate in the five-month accelerator program. RESPOND aims to inspire and empower entrepreneurs to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN 2030 Agenda. The focus of the 2021 program is on the following topics:

## 1. The Future of Work

Work worlds and the role of human labor are changing rapidly. RESPOND is looking for solutions that equip people with the right skills and tools for the future of work, enable equal access to employment, and use technology to improve precarious working conditions.

## 2. Sustainable Urbanization

Urban environments are facing complex social and ecological challenges. RESPOND is looking for solutions that promote intelligent and sustainable urban systems and foster citizen participation.

## 3. Responsible Economy

The effects of our economic systems overtax our planetary resources. RESPOND is looking for solutions that promote a responsible use of resources, sustainable production and consumption patterns, the creation of a circular economy, and the mitigation of environmental risks.

In the four sprint phases of the program, the founders will receive support, both on-site in Munich and digitally, in developing responsible leadership and scaling their enterprises with a particular focus on sustainability. In addition to numerous coaching and mentoring offerings, the participants will benefit from the mutual exchange and collaboration with each other as well as with the global networks of the BMW Foundation and UnternehmerTUM. Moreover, the entrepreneurs will have free access to coworking spaces at the new Munich Urban Colab during the five-month program period. At the RESPOND Demo Night, the startups will be able to present their work to an international group of investors, industry representatives, and journalists.

RESPOND is entering its second round in 2021. The first year was already a major success: we received more than 400 applications from 74 countries last year. 36 coaches supported the participating startups with more than 250 hours of training and development. Networking plays a particularly important role: In 2020, the startups had the opportunity to work with 27 VCs, 50 mentors, and 18 partners, including renowned big names of the startup scene such as HV Capital or Earlybird Venture Capital. The ten participants of the first round included the startups Hawa Dawa (air quality management), which was named “Digital Startup of the Year 2020,” and Kraftblock (storage-based renewable energy systems), which received an investment in the mid-single-digit million range.

Heba Aguib, Chief Executive RESPOND, BMW Foundation, summarized the program's achievements as follows: “In 2020, the support provided by RESPOND showed direct and impressive results in terms of scaling the startups: Despite the turbulent year, the participating enterprises were able to achieve major successes. Made of Air, for example, did not only win the Golden Pretzel award at the Bits & Pretzels conference but was also named ‘Science Breakthrough of the Year’ by the Falling Walls Foundation. We look forward to giving this kind of boost to another group of founders and startups this year so that they can unfold their potential for making the world a better place even more quickly.”

Miki Yokoyama, COO RESPOND, UnternehmerTUM, added: “The first year of the program clearly demonstrated the value of a good network for founders, especially in challenging times. We look forward to continuing to expand our network of relevant investors, enterprises, and mentors and thus offering real added value to all participating startups also this year.”

More information on how to apply to the accelerator program can be found at <https://respond-accelerator.com/apply>.

## **About RESPOND**

RESPOND is a BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt accelerator program operated by UnternehmerTUM. It is the first accelerator program that supports responsible leadership and thereby helps scale sustainable business models for a better future. The program supports founders who use entrepreneurial approaches to work towards a peaceful, just, and sustainable future in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda. As part of the program, founder teams have access to workshops and mentoring at the intersection of business, society, and ecology. In addition, the participants benefit from the opportunity to closely connect with the global BMW Foundation Responsible Leaders Network and the extended network

of both organizations. The Responsible Leaders Network currently comprises more than 1,800 leaders worldwide who work towards social change within and between societies.

### **About the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt**

The BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt is an independent corporate foundation whose activities contribute to the social responsibility and mission of the BMW Group. The BMW Foundation promotes responsible leadership and inspires leaders worldwide to work towards a peaceful, just, and sustainable future. Through its activities, the Foundation aims to advance the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. It inspires leaders, providing them with a platform for personal and professional development, and connects them across communities, cultures, and countries through its global Responsible Leaders Network. The third component of the Foundation's work is to invest in initiatives and organizations seeking to solve humanity's social, political, and environmental challenges.

### **About UnternehmerTUM – Europe's leading center for innovation and business creation**

UnternehmerTUM is a unique platform for the development of innovations. UnternehmerTUM actively identifies innovative technologies and initiates new business by systematically connecting talents, technologies, capital, and customers. UnternehmerTUM offers founders and startups a complete service from the initial idea to IPO. A team of 250 experienced entrepreneurs, scientists, and investors supports startups in terms of business creation, market entry, and financing – also by providing venture capital. For established companies, UnternehmerTUM is a central platform where they can collaborate with startups and expand their internal innovative strength and culture. Founded in 2002 by the entrepreneur Susanne Klatten, UnternehmerTUM is the leading center for innovation and business creation in Europe supporting more than 50 high-growth technology startups every year – including Celonis, Konux, and Lilium.

### **Press Contact**

Anna Schäffer, BFHQ Communications  
Telephone: +49 30 33962913  
E-Mail: [Anna.Schaeffer@bmw-foundation.org](mailto:Anna.Schaeffer@bmw-foundation.org)

Milena Pighi, BMW Group Corporate and Governmental Affairs,  
Spokesperson CSR  
Telephone +49-89-382-66563  
Email: [Milena.PA.Pighi@bmw.de](mailto:Milena.PA.Pighi@bmw.de)