

KUKA



KUKA Innovation Award 2025
_Medical Robotics Challenge 2.0





KUKA Innovation Award 2025 – Call for Participation _Medical Robotics Challenge 2.0

Objectives of the Award

As a world-leader in robot-based automation, KUKA has maintained an intense collaboration with academia and R&D partners worldwide on various scientific and technical topics for many years. To take this collaboration to the next level the KUKA Innovation Award has been established in 2014. It comes with a substantial financial prize of €20,000. The competition leading to the award is intended to accelerate the pace of innovation in the field of robot-based automation at large and improve technology transfers from research to industry.

The KUKA Innovation Award 2025 primarily targets the interaction of robotic systems with humans in the medical environment and robots being part of future medical applications. This includes applications with direct interaction with a patient for diagnosis, rehabilitation, surgery and other forms of therapy. We would like to encourage participants to look to the future: Where and how can robots be used in the next medical applications and contribute to optimal patient care? Does AI play a role in this area? How can sensors and vision systems act in medical applications and improve outcomes?

The proposed solutions are expected to enable new robotic use cases for the future of healthcare. The solutions should address a valid clinical or medical problem that can be solved with an innovative robotic system. Market requirements should also be taken into account and potential business opportunities highlighted.

The clear focus of the KUKA Innovation Award Medical Robotics Challenge 2.0 lies on the introduction and demonstration of new, innovative and interactive methods for improving health and care. The system concept should be versatile, i.e. broadly applicable and definitely not limited to an engineering approach for solving a specific use case. Participants from academia, research and industry are encouraged to present system concepts that can lead to, or are already on the edge to, commercialization.

Participating in the KUKA Innovation Award

The competition is open to the robotics research community at large (including companies). This includes researchers and developers at a post-graduate level or higher as well as research teams. Individuals and teams must belong to a legal entity that enters into an agreement with KUKA for the purpose of the competition.

The first step in participating in the KUKA Innovation Award is the creation of a proposal. This proposal should include a motivation for the solution to be developed, details regarding its realization and ideally an already established proof of concept in a working system. Transferring experiments and results from legacy components to the hardware



provided by KUKA is particularly encouraged. A realistic implementation plan and a description of the team's experience should also be provided. The proposal for participating and getting access to the sponsored hardware must be submitted electronically by June 28, 2024. The proposals will be reviewed and rated based on the assessment criteria. Please find more details below. The 10 top-ranked teams will be invited to pitch their proposals to an international team of judges in an online interview. After that, the top 5 teams will be chosen as finalists for the KUKA Innovation Award 2025. KUKA will announce the selected finalists by July 15, 2024.

KUKA offers the 5 finalist teams a free of charge lightweight robot [LBR Med](#) optionally enhanced with a NDI tracking system for the duration of the competition. While using the LBR Med is mandatory for the finalists, using the provided tracking or vision system is optional. Proposed applications may include additional hardware, such as sensors or other mechatronic components to be developed and provided by the applicants. Newly introduced components should provide a clear vision how they can easily blend in with the hardware provided by KUKA.

Each finalist team will sign an agreement with KUKA to implement its ideas on the provided hardware. Teams will be invited to Augsburg to receive an initial training on the hardware and will be continuously technically supported and coached by KUKA experts to be more effective in the implementation phase. In January 2025, on-site visits to the finalist teams will be held to support the teams in the preparation of the final presentation at an international trade fair in the second half of 2025 (between June and November 2025).

Finally, the teams will be invited to the trade fair to present their applications and compete for the award in the final round. This will offer the participants the unique chance to present their work to the expert public, the judges and to KUKA management and senior developers and to generate valuable contacts for further studies or technology transfers. It is the 4th Medical Challenge and KUKA had already 15 great finalists in 2019, 2020 and 2022.

The Innovation Award judges will determine the winner at the fair based on the assessment criteria listed below with a particular focus on quality and robustness of the presented solutions. Presenting the solution on the fair is a mandatory activity for competing in the Innovation Award. The winner of the KUKA Innovation Award and the €20,000 financial prize will be selected and announced on the fair ground during the award ceremony.

All intellectual property generated in the competition belongs to the participants. The participants are encouraged to use the KUKA-sponsored exhibition at the fair to engage also with third parties to initiate technology transfers and new cooperation projects.



Outline and content of the proposals

The proposal should be aligned along the following structure:

- 1. Cover page**
 - a. Project full title and short title/acronym
 - b. Applicant contact data (name and institution of project leader)
 - c. Summary of project proposal
- 2. Team description**
 - a. Institution/ laboratory/ group description
 - b. Background in robot-based automation (especially experience with sensitive and collaborative robots, projects, knowledge and track record the project capitalizes on)
- 3. Motivation and objectives**
 - a. Description of the intended use-case, challenges and relevance to potential markets
 - b. Objectives of the proposed work with an outline of the advances focusing on the Medical Challenge
- 4. Approach and realization**
 - a. Technical details of the proposed solution including a description why the proposed solution is promising as well as a pictures and videos of the current stage of development (ideally, an already established proof of concept in a working system)
 - b. Work plan for the duration of the competition (from the announcement of the finalists in the end of January 2022 until the fair in November 2022). Please list suitable milestones and expected use of resources.
 - c. Initial concept for the system design and a list of to be used hardware and software (libraries, licenses)
- 5. Targeted results and measures of success**
 - a. Results regarding the topic of the award
 - b. Assessment of technology readiness level of the proposed solution including its scalability, the reusability of used and developed components and risk assessment
 - c. Outline of possible integration/ cooperation with KUKA regarding the proposed systems/ methods
- 6. Analysis of economic impact and competitive advantages**
 - a. Economic impact on potential markets
 - b. Summary of transferable/ licensable technology and time-to-market estimation
 - c. Competitive advantage with respect to existing solutions (research/ technology / applications)

Award applications must be written in English and are limited to 12 pages (including the cover page) addressing the items above in a balanced manner. Teams are encouraged to provide video material as part of their application. Other supportive material, e.g. publications, should be linked to the application.



Assessment criteria for the KUKA Innovation Award

The main assessment criteria will be the level of innovation¹ paired with the quality, the level of integration and technological readiness² of the proposed solutions. Further criteria for the selection will be the originality of the overall approach, the expected economic impact³ of the suggested application and its competitive advantage⁴. In addition, participants are encouraged to demonstrate scalability and reusability of their components and algorithms to different kinematics, sensors, and tasks.

Already existing components should be reused and not developed from scratch as far as possible. Last but not least, components and algorithms need to be validated and presented in a realistic work environment, not just in simulation or under special conditions. Ideally, end-user requirements must be fulfilled, which includes performing a risk assessment of the developed application and implementing safety functions according to the determined requirements⁵.

¹ The term *innovation* can be defined as something original and more effective and, as a consequence, new, that "breaks into" the market or society.

² *Technological readiness* measures the technological maturity and robustness of an evolving technology on a scale from 1 to 9. See https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2014_2015/annexes/h2020-wp1415-annex-g-trl_en.pdf

³ *Economic impact* measures the economic effect (growth) caused by proposed system or solution in a certain area.

⁴ *Competitive advantage* measures the uniqueness of a solution in economic terms compared to the approaches taken by competitors. See <https://www.thebalance.com/what-is-competitive-advantage-3-strategies-that-work-3305828>

⁵ A *guidance and explanation* of relevant rules and standards regarding safety in human-robot collaboration is provided by a VDMA Position Paper, see

https://robotik.vdma.org/documents/105999/16922915/1493970057035_VDMA_Position%20Paper_MRK_Safety_EN.pdf/edfe5e2d-9686-433b-93b6-30e835471546



KUKA Innovation Award judges

Evan Ackermann

Senior Editor, IEEE Spectrum

Patrick A. Meere, MD, CM

Clinical Professor of Orthopedic Surgery, NYU Langone Orthopedic Hospital

Josef de Pfeiffer

Founder of Surgical Robotics Technology

Prof. Dr. Oussama Khatib

Director of Robotics Lab, Stanford University

Henry Norton

MedTech Search @RW Search, Host of The SurgibotsPodcast

Volker Schmirgel

Head of Technology and Innovation Center, KUKA

Prof. Dr. Ir. Stefano Stramigioli

Director of the Robotics and Mechatronics Lab, University of Twente

Axel Weber

VP Global Industry Team Medical Robotics, KUKA

Schedule

June 28, 2024	Application deadline
July 10, 2024	Pitches of top 10 applications
July 15, 2024	Announcement of finalists
June-November 2025	Setup of applications with final presentation at an international trade fair

Contact and further information

For further questions and to submit the application: innovationaward@kuka.com

Find out more about the KUKA Innovation Award: www.kuka.com/InnovationAward2025



KUKA Innovation Award 2025 Medical Robotics Challenge 2.0

Open to invent the future

- Medical Innovations: Innovate with robotic systems as part of medical applications for the future, using advanced sensors and vision systems to improve patient outcomes.
- Medical Solutions: Create a solution in the field of medical robotics – from diagnostics to surgery, therapy and rehabilitation.
- Implement your solution on a KUKA LBR Med lightweight robot.
- All equipment, robot training and coaching will be provided free of charge for the duration of the competition.

Accept the challenge

- Create a versatile solution that goes beyond specific application engineering.
- Exhibit your work next to the other finalists at an international trade fair and draw the attention of thousands of experts.
- Win € 20,000!



KUKA Innovation Award 2025

Schedule

Call for participation

March 2024

Applicants

- Submit application as pdf via e-mail (up to 12 pages)
- Support application with papers / video / pictures of current results

Application deadline

28 June 2024

Evaluation by a panel of international judges

Pitches of Top 10

10 July 2024

Announcement of finalists

15 July 2024

Finalists

- Receive KUKA LBR Med lightweight robot
- Receive training and coaching
- Implement innovative solutions

Award finals at international trade fair

June-November 2025

Finalists set up their solutions at KUKA booth

Finalists present their solutions to the media, industry experts, investors and judging panel

Winner receives € 20,000



Queries and applications to: innovationaward@kuka.com
Find out more about the KUKA Innovation Award 2025 at:
kuka.com/InnovationAward2025



KUKA Innovation Award 2025



Terms and Conditions

Eligibility

You are eligible to enter the competition if you meet the following requirements at time of entry:

- You are affiliated to a legal entity (company, university or research institute etc.), which is signing an agreement with KUKA that is handling the lending of the provided hardware and all financial issues regarding your participation.
- You are not an employee or intern of KUKA AG or their affiliated companies.
- You are not involved in any part of the execution or administration of this competition.
- You are not an immediate family member (parent, sibling, spouse, and child) or household member of a KUKA employee or an employee of KUKA affiliated companies, or a person involved in any part of the administration and execution of this competition.

Confidentiality

KUKA, the judges and the experts assigned will treat the submitted project material confidential. Intellectual Property (IP) generated in the competition belongs to the participants. If KUKA and a participant are interested in a technology transfer or access to IP, a separate agreement between the participant concerned and KUKA will be established.

Innovation

To accelerate the pace of innovation in the field of robot-based automation and to improve technology transfers from research to industry for the finalist teams, KUKA will organize a special confidential session at the fair to bring together finalists with KUKA top management and senior developers. This is to offer finalist teams the opportunity to present technical details of their solution and to suggest to KUKA on how to possibly exploit their developments in further bilateral research and development cooperation.

Lending agreement

Granting of access to the KUKA LBR Med and the suggested vision sensor shall be conditional upon signing a lending agreement. Such lending agreement may not be signed by private individuals, but only by an authorized representative of a legal entity (company, university or research institute etc.). By signing the lending agreement, the lender agrees to do its utmost to fulfil the work plan described in the Award proposal. The costs for



fulfilling the work plan as described in the proposal including personnel and additionally required hardware and software must be borne by the finalists.

Prize

No transfer, substitution or cash equivalent for travel and accommodation grants, sponsored access to hardware and prizes is allowed, except at KUKA' sole discretion. The prize money can only be transferred to legal entities; transfers to individual persons cannot be made. KUKA reserves the right to substitute a prize, in whole or in part, of equal or greater monetary value if a prize cannot be awarded, in whole or in part, as described for any reason.

Copyright

Applications shall only include material that you own or where permission has been granted by the copyright/trademark owner. Applications and robot programs may not include copyrighted materials (such as source code, user interface, background music, images or video) unless you own or have permission to use the materials. The team must provide a list of non-proprietary tools, libraries and source codes used.

Reimbursement of travelling and exhibition expenses

Applicants bear their own costs with the exception of costs explicitly listed here. KUKA will cover all costs related to lending, servicing, and supporting the KUKA LBR Med in the context of the KUKA Innovation Award.

KUKA offers a travel and accommodation grant to reduce the financial burden of finalist teams in the context of the demonstrations at the fair covering the following items:

- Accommodation for up to three members per finalist team (arranged by KUKA)
- Incurred travel expenses up to 1200 € for German teams, 1900 € for European teams and up to 3300 € for non-European teams
- Transportation costs for equipment (arranged by KUKA)

This grant can be accessed by the finalist teams' legal entity via handing in a cost claim with all necessary receipts of the costs incurred by three members per finalist team after the fair.

On accepting the invitation for participating in the Award finals at the fair, the teams agree to set up and present their solutions to the expert public, the judges and KUKA top management and senior developers. The costs for presentations at the fair relating to exhibition space, designing a representative booth and supporting the setup and dismantling of booths and equipment will be borne by KUKA.

KUKA reserves the right to reclaim any surplus payment or money paid in error. Furthermore, KUKA may cancel the accommodation and travel grant and demand



payment repayment, if the financial support was obtained under false pretenses, if not used for the intended purpose, if any obligation regarding the final is not fulfilled, or for any other sound reason.

KUKA does not provide any kind of insurance. Finalists shall insure themselves and their own equipment against any possible costs and consequences caused by loss, theft, illness, accident, personal liability, etc.

FAQ

Where can I get more information on the provided hardware?

- [LBR Med](#)
- [NDI tracking system](#)
- [Roboception vision sensor](#)

Can other robots than the KUKA LBR Med be used in this competition?

Using and integrating the final demonstrator with the LBR Med is mandatory. However, other robots can be used as well, e.g. in the preparatory phase and in addition to the hardware provided by KUKA. Proposals may be submitted using other robots, but applicants should explain how they intend to transfer their technology developments to the hardware provided by KUKA.

Who can participate?

Teams and individuals from legal entities (companies, universities or research institutes etc.) may participate. Proposals can only be made in the name of the legal entity. Lending agreements and financial issues can only be handled with the participant's legal entity.

Why should I participate?

The competition leading to the KUKA Innovation Award may allow you

- to access KUKA's latest robot hardware free of charge,
- to receive an LBR Med training and advanced coaching for the duration of the award,
- to present your solutions to the expert public at one of the world's most important industrial trade shows,
- to present your solutions to KUKA top management and senior developers,



- to engage in a closer collaboration and technology transfer of your innovative technology to one of the world leaders in robot-based automation (subject to a separate license agreement),
- to travel a major fair in Germany for presenting your work at KUKA's expense,
- to use this opportunity to meet and engage with other parties interested in your work,
- to win €20,000!

What are the evaluation criteria for obtaining a sponsored hardware?

The main criteria for evaluation are outlined above. Furthermore, please address the following aspects in your proposal:

- Scalability and reusability of components and algorithms,
- validation of proposed solution in a realistic work environment,
- risk assessment of the developed application and implemented safety functions according to the determined requirements.

Data privacy

To process applications and to provide continuous support, KUKA collects and electronically stores the data submitted by applicants. These data include personal information (name, address, date of birth, nationality, phone numbers and e-mail addresses and organization of the applicants) as well as information on the project and the support granted.

KUKA may publish the names of the participating teams, their project titles, project videos and project abstracts on KUKA websites, via social media, in press releases and in printed publications.”