

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

ETH Zurich Postdoctoral Fellowship programme

January 2024

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General information about the Fellowship

How many ETH Fellowships are available?

Approximately 26 ETH Fellows can be selected each year, i.e., about 13 in each round. About twice as many candidates are invited for the interview.

How much is an ETH Fellowship worth?

The ETH Fellowship covers the salary of fellows (i.e., first and second year postdoc standard rate at ETH), including social security contributions. The salary corresponds to the year the fellowship is awarded and is published on the [website](#). In addition, the fellowship includes CHF 16,000 for research costs and CHF 4,000 for travel costs, i.e., CHF 20,000 in total for the two years. The budget allocated for research and travel costs may not be used to cover salary costs, and vice versa.

Adjustments of the salary may be made in adherence to the general ETH domain remuneration policy as defined by the ETH Board. Any extra costs associated with salary scale increases effected during the funding period must be borne by the host professorship. This also applies to seniority-related salary increases (e.g., in cases where the postdoc was already employed at ETH before the start of the ETH Fellowship).

How do I apply?

You should apply jointly with your prospective ETH host professor using the ETH Zurich grant application system (eResearch). Candidates have to contact the potential host professor early enough prior to the submission of the application to ask if they are willing to support their application. Please read the guidelines and the information on "[How to submit](#)" on the website carefully.

Which subjects are covered by the ETH Fellowships?

The ETH Fellowships are available for researchers in all disciplines represented at ETH Zurich.

Where can I spend the ETH Fellowship?

The ETH Fellowships can only be spent at ETH Zurich. You need to agree on a research project with your prospective host professor.

Can I apply if I am already working at ETH Zurich?

The fellowship is aimed at incoming postdocs. Applicants who earned their doctorate from ETH Zurich or the University of Zurich will not be considered.

Applicants may not have carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) at either ETH Zurich, EPF Lausanne, a research institute of the ETH domain (PSI, WSL, Empa and Eawag) or the University of Zurich for more than six months in the three years immediately before the submission deadline. The employment status is not relevant for this rule; for example also the time spent at these institutions as academic guest is counted towards the six months.

Also, researchers may not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Switzerland for more than twelve months in the three years immediately before the submission deadline.

How long does an ETH Fellowship last? Can it be extended?

The duration of an ETH Fellowship is two years and cannot be extended. Employment after the two years must be financed from other sources.

Which criteria are used to assess applications?

Applications are assessed based on criteria addressing the candidate's aptitude as well as the quality of the proposed research and the synergy with the host lab. Successful applications must be compelling in all respects.

The criteria pertaining to the candidate's aptitude are based on the CV, the reference letters and the career outline and include research performance, track record relative to opportunities and career stage, competence for the proposed work and compatibility of the ETH Fellowship with the career goals of the applicant. The research itself is evaluated based on the scientific quality of the proposal, the suitability of the proposed procedures, expected difficulties, and chances of success, and the significance and innovativeness of the project. Please also have a look at the guidelines.

In line with DORA,^[1] achievements will be assessed on the base of qualitative evaluations of a diverse range of research outputs and activities.

What is the role of the ETH host professor?

The ETH host professor will act as your main research contact at ETH Zurich, providing research support and guidance, access to necessary facilities and infrastructure (desk, lab and bench space, consumables, equipment), and assistance with practical and research arrangements.

Please note that the fellowships are intended as early support towards academic independence. It is important that applicants come up with their own ideas and prove ownership of their proposals and projects.

^[1] The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, <https://sfidora.org/>

Who is entitled to be a host professor?

The host professor must hold a permanent or fixed-term contract (lasting at least for the duration of the ETH Fellowship) at ETH Zurich. An ETH Zurich Professor co-affiliated with an institution within the ETH domain (Eawag, WSL, Empa and PSI) can act as a mentor, as long as they have a “Leitzahl” (Responsibility Centre) at ETH Zurich. **Assistant professors must contact the Grants Office before submitting the proposal to ensure their eligibility to act as host.**

Can a professor support more than one candidate?

A professor may only submit with one candidate in each evaluation round. Members of the ETH Zurich Research Commission may only host one ETH Fellow at a time.

Which information is required from the ETH host professor?

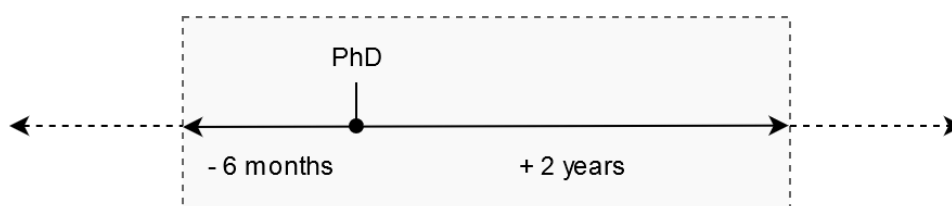
The ETH host professor is required to provide information on their research and to explain the reasons why they would like to collaborate with the candidate in an invitation letter.

Does the Grants Office help to find a suitable host professor at ETH Zurich?

Unfortunately, the Grants Office cannot support candidates in their search for a suitable host professor. The candidates have to identify and contact the preferred host professor on their own. Candidates are asked to check if they fulfill the eligibility requirements before contacting a potential ETH host professor.

Is there a biological age limit? Am I eligible to apply for funding for a second fellowship, if I have already completed/am currently involved in a postdoctoral fellowship?

There is no biological age limit, but an academic age limit. At the time of the submission deadline, applicants must hold a doctorate (PhD) or will complete their doctorate within the next six months. Applicants with the doctorate (PhD) must have obtained the same a maximum of two years prior to the submission deadline. The decisive date is the date of the examination or defense/viva voce. Exceptions can be made for researchers whose child was/children were born after the doctorate completion and who took parental leave. Please contact the Grants Office for more information.



Applicants who earned their doctorate from ETH Zurich or the University of Zurich will not be considered.

Applicants who have not yet completed their doctorate must submit a certification of the planned date of their defense signed by the advisor or department chair. The examination or defense/viva voce must have been completed by the time the fellowship is started (and no later than six months after the deadline).

Submitting your application

What is the exact deadline?

The submission deadlines are 1 March and 1 September each year at 17:00 Swiss local time. Candidates must contact the potential host professor early enough so that they have sufficient time to enter their CV and support letter in eResearch. No assistance is provided outside of office hours should problems occur with the electronic submission.

How do I submit my application?

The whole application must be submitted via the ETH Zurich grant application system (eResearch) provided under the link www.ethfellows.ethz.ch. The online tool guides you through all required information. In addition, you can upload a number of documents. **Please read the information on “[How to submit](#)” on the website carefully.**

Reference providers have to send their reference letters directly to the Grants Office at the latest 10 days before the submission deadline (the letter must include a letterhead and the signature of the reference provider, no password-protected files). This is for confidentiality reasons. Candidates have to ask the reference providers early enough so that they are able to meet this deadline.

Can the reference letters be submitted together with the application? Can I submit more than two reference letters?

No, for confidentiality reasons the reference letters must be sent electronically **directly** to the Grants Office, to the following address: ethfellows@sl.ethz.ch. The reference letters should arrive 10 days before the relevant submission deadline at the latest (Subject of the e-mail: last and first name of the applicant). Only two reference letters will be accepted. Additional reference letters will not be considered.

What are the structure and the formal requirements for the project description and the CV? Which additional information is needed?

For the project description, the templates available on the website must be used. These templates list all the relevant chapters of the project description:

- **Project description part 1: project details**
The **description of the project detail** part is restricted to **five pages**, not including the bibliography.
- **Project description part 2: accompanying information**
This part contains additional information, such as the available resources for the project at ETH and the significance for the host professor. Teaching duties are individual and depend on the agreement with the prospective host.

In addition, the **candidate's CV** must be uploaded. It can be written in any format and must include a list of publications; **start and end dates of education and employment terms must be clearly stated and all dates must include at least month and year.**

The prospective **host professor** has to upload an **invitation letter** and their short **CV** (max. 2p).

Letters from collaborators may be attached to the application, if necessary (for example in order to confirm access to research infrastructure or equipment). This can be done in the ETH Zurich grant application system (eResearch) via the upload option “Supporting Information”. These letters are not intended as additional support letters, though, but should only provide the necessary information on intended collaboration or support. The letters must not contain any evaluation of the candidate's performance or the merit of the project.

A cover letter is not required. All information should be included in the application.

All other information, e.g., regarding budget and ethical questions, have to be answered directly in the grant application tool.

Am I allowed to use generative AI and/or AI-assisted technologies when writing my proposal?

The use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies such as large language models, chatbots, and image creators in the preparation of an ETH Fellows proposal is permitted in principle, but at the applicant's own risk. It must be disclosed in the cover letter by providing detailed information about which generative AI tools were used, for what purpose, and to what extent, whether in writing the proposal, creating illustrations, or collecting and analyzing data.

Please note that the use of generative AI tools may raise concerns regarding intellectual property and scientific misconduct. Applicants are fully responsible for the content and accuracy of their research proposal. They must adhere to the principles of research integrity that apply at ETH Zurich. Since this extends to any and all parts of a proposal produced by an AI tool, applicants must ensure that all sources are cited appropriately and correctly, and that the documents do not contain factually incorrect, misleading, falsified, plagiarized, or fabricated information.

The Research Commission therefore advises applicants to exercise maximum caution when using generative AI or AI-assisted technologies in the development of their research proposals.

During the evaluation of your application

Can I choose the dates of the interview?

Due to a very tight interview schedule, it is unfortunately not possible to choose an interview date and preferences for a certain day cannot be considered.

Do I have to present my project at the interview?

No. Candidates will be asked questions about their proposed research project, the choice of the host lab, the particular strengths and skills they will bring to the host lab and how their ideas will thrive in collaboration with the ETH group, as well as about their future career plans.

Is it possible to update my application after the submission, e.g., if a paper has been accepted?

No, modifications will not be accepted after the submission deadline.

After the decision

When do you communicate the results?

Candidates are informed within two months after the submission deadline whether they are invited to an interview. Applicants who are interviewed will be informed approx. four months after the submission deadline whether they will be granted an ETH Zurich Postdoctoral Fellowship.

Is it possible to resubmit a grant?

No. Resubmissions, whether with the same or a new project proposal, are **not** possible.

Can I start the project as soon as I have fulfilled the requirements for the doctoral degree, or do I have to wait until the university has actually conferred the degree?

Candidates do not have to wait until the university has conferred the degree but must provide an official document confirming that they have successfully defended their thesis, such as a letter by the department chair or advisor or a provisional statement from their university. The official certificate is necessary to receive the working permit from the cantonal authorities.

Is it possible to start sooner/later than indicated in the application?

Yes, this is possible. In order to receive the funds awarded, you have to indicate the start date of your fellowship in the eResearch portal (our online application platform). The link to the portal and instructions on how to do this will be sent when the fellowship is awarded.

The fellowship can be started at the earliest after receipt of the decision letter and the organisation of the formal requirements for employment at ETH and must be started no later than eight months after the submission deadline. A later start must be requested from the Grants Office and can only be accepted in exceptional cases. The ETH fellowship always starts on the first day of a month.

How do I find accommodation in Zurich? Where can I find other practical information regarding life in Switzerland?

A [welcome center](#) operates at the ETH Hönggerberg campus and can help you with practical issues regarding life in Switzerland. For information on accommodation, please check the [Housing Office of the ETH Zurich](#).

Do I have to provide a final report?

Yes, the necessary form will be sent to you shortly before the end of your fellowship by e-mail. You are expected to submit the report six weeks after the end of your fellowship at the latest.