

Guidelines for the ETH Zurich Postdoctoral Fellowship programme

November 2024

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Overview

The ETH Zurich Postdoctoral Fellowship programme supports incoming postdoctoral researchers at ETH Zurich. The programme is intended to foster young researchers who have already demonstrated scientific excellence in the early stages of their careers.

Applications have to be made jointly by the candidate and the potential host, who must be an ETH Zurich professor and willing to act as the mentor of the fellow. A professor may only submit with one candidate in each evaluation round. There must be convincing synergies between the host (group) and the ETH Fellow. The fellowships are intended as early support towards academic independence, hence priority will be given to applicants who propose their own projects. Thus, it is important that applicants come up with their own ideas and draft the application themselves, and that the applicant and mentor have not closely collaborated prior to the fellowship.

The duration of an ETH Fellowship is two years and cannot be prolonged. The fellowship is competitive with only a limited number of fellowships available each year.

Submission

Eligibility criteria

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.

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).

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

Applicants 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.

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.

Applicants need to have at least one scientific publication in a peer-reviewed journal or have been awarded a prize for their doctoral thesis.

Members of the ETH Zurich Research Commission may only host one ETH Fellow at a time.

A professor may only submit with one candidate in each evaluation round. The host professor (mentor) must have a guaranteed ETH position for the entire duration of the proposed fellowship. Assistant professors must contact the Grants Office before submitting the proposal to ensure their eligibility to act as host.

Applications not complying with the eligibility criteria will be rejected on formal grounds.

Application

Applications are to be made jointly by the candidate and their prospective mentor, who must be an ETH professor. All parts of the application, including the reference letters, have to be written in English.

The application must include the following:

- a description of the research project and the specific role and input of the candidate, as well as the way in which the ETH Fellow's project relates to other research directions in the host group
- a complete CV of the candidate, including 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
- a brief outline of the career goals of the candidate (1 page max.)
- if applicable, a certification of the planned date of the defense signed by the advisor or department chair if the doctorate is not yet completed
- an invitation letter by the host professor, stating how the candidate is deemed to be excellent
- a short CV of the host professor (2 pages max.)
- two external reference letters for the candidate, to be e-mailed directly to the Grants Office by the referee (10 days prior to the submission deadline); the letters must include a letterhead and the signature of the reference provider

Deadlines

There are two ETH Fellowship calls per year. Submission deadlines are 1 March and 1 September, 17:00 Swiss local time. Applications should be submitted electronically using the ETH Zurich grant application system (eResearch). The reference letters must be sent directly to ethfellows@sl.ethz.ch at the latest 10 days before the deadline.

Evaluation

Evaluation procedure

The evaluation consists of two steps. First, the written applications will be evaluated by the ETH Zurich Research Commission, the results of which will be communicated to the applicants within two months after the submission deadline. Candidates whose applications pass the first step will be invited to an interview with one of the subcommissions of the [ETH Zurich Research Commission](#).

The recommendations of the subcommissions will be forwarded to the entire Research Commission for consideration. Their recommendation will be communicated to the Vice President of Research, who takes the final funding decision. Applicants will be informed about the decision approximately four months after the submission deadline.

Resubmissions, whether with the same or a new project proposal, are not possible.

Interview

The interviews last about 15 minutes and are mandatory. They are conducted about 10 weeks after the submission deadline. The interview dates are announced on the [ETH Fellow website](#).

During the interview, applicants will be asked questions about their proposed research projects, the choice of the research lab, the particular strengths and skills they would bring to the host lab and how they would like the collaboration to develop, as well as about their future career prospects. Applicants are not requested to give a presentation.

Evaluation criteria

The funding decisions are based on a strict, quality-based evaluation process. Applications will be assessed against criteria addressing both 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 and potential
- track record relative to opportunities and career stage
- competence for the proposed work and synergy with the host professorship
- compatibility of the ETH Fellowship with the career goals of the applicant

The criteria referring to the **research proposal** include

- the scientific quality of the planned research
- significance and innovativeness of the project
- suitability of the proposed procedures
- difficulties to be expected and chances of success
- consideration of gender aspects where appropriate

The criteria referring to the **synergies with the host lab** include

- particular strengths and skills relevant to the host lab
- added value and integration into the host lab
- ambition to move beyond his or her and the hosts' previous research

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

Use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies:

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 application 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.

Gender aspects

ETH Zurich strives to promote gender equality in scientific research by integrating the gender dimension into the research content in all fields of research. Research in gender studies is also supported through the ETH Zurich Postdoctoral Fellowship programme.

If the proposed research involves human subjects (e.g., as patients, consumers, users or as citizens in surveys), gender must be consistently taken into account from the proposal to the research and dissemination phase as well as in the experimental design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of the outcomes. If gender aspects are not addressed a justification must be supplied.

Research not involving human subjects should adopt the principles of gender-sensitive research where appropriate (e.g., fundamental research on genomics, development of materials for use in the biomedical sector, product design).

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

Ethical issues

The research carried out in the framework of the project must comply with ETH Zurich's scientific integrity and research data management regulations. The applicant must state in the ETH Zurich grant application system (eResearch) if the intended research requires authorization or notification. By filling in the form the applicant confirms that they are aware of the legal regulations at the federal and cantonal levels that are relevant to the research project.

Furthermore, in the grant application system there are instructions on how to proceed if the intended research needs authorization or notification. This applies in particular to research on humans, research on human embryonic stem cells, research on animals, research on GMO or pathogens and research in developing countries.

Funding

The duration of an ETH Fellowship is two years and cannot be prolonged. Employment after the initially granted time must be financed from other sources. Salaries are paid according to the ETH standard (100%). ETH Fellows are also entitled to an individual travel/mobility allowance (1/5) and a contribution to the research costs (4/5), not exceeding CHF 10,000 annually for both categories. The budget allocated for travel and research costs may not be used to cover salary costs, and vice versa. During the entire fellowship, the ETH Fellows must be employed at ETH Zurich on the basis of a valid working contract.

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).

Post-grant processes

ETH Fellows are expected to start their fellowship at the latest eight months after the submission deadline.

Whenever possible, Open Access should be granted to publications resulting from an ETH Fellowship, as per ETH's Open Access Policy. Publication fees (APCs) are taken over by the ETH Library for the most important journals. Otherwise, the research cost budget of the fellowship may be used to cover them.

The IP rights belong to ETH Zurich. ETH Zurich must be indicated as institutional affiliation for all publications resulting from research conducted within the framework of the project. The fellowship programme must be mentioned in publications, e.g., in the form "This work was supported by an ETH Zurich Postdoctoral Fellowship".

To monitor and improve the programme, each ETH Fellow is requested to submit a final report within six weeks after completion of their fellowship to the ETH Zurich Grants Office. The relevant request and form will be sent to you in due course.

Other

All ETH Fellows can benefit from career-development workshops organised by ETH Zurich. Further, all ETH Fellows are invited to social events twice a year where they can meet the other fellows and alumni. ETH Fellows are also expected to be given the opportunity to take part in the teaching activities of their host group, to a certain extent. The proposed teaching duties and an estimate of the average load must be specified in the application.

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