Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
ETH Zurich Career Seed Awards

January 2024

Before you apply

What subjects are covered by a Career Seed Award?

The awards are available for researchers in all disciplines that are covered at ETH Zurich and for which infrastructure to carry out the project is available.

Where can I carry out the project?

An ETH Career Seed Award can only be awarded for the time of your employment at ETH Zurich. However, research stays abroad such as field work can be supported.

Can I apply in the first year of my postdoctoral stay?

You can apply for the award as soon as you have been employed as a postdoc at ETH Zurich for six months. The date of the submission deadline is the decisive date. Please keep in mind that you are expected to have a record of research output obtained at ETH Zurich from the start of your employment as a postdoctoral researcher until the submission of your application for a Career Seed Award. Please do not submit a proposal as long as you do not have scientific achievements as a postdoc at ETH Zurich. You can wait for the next deadline which is only six months later.

Can I apply if I have completed my doctorate at ETH Zurich?

Yes, but you also must have been employed as postdoctoral researcher at ETH Zurich for at least six months at the submission deadline. It is important to note that your achievements during the doctorate will not be part of the evaluation. Please assess yourself whether you have relevant achievements as a postdoc at ETH Zurich to present in the application.

Can I apply for funding of my own salary?

No, you cannot fund your own salary with the award. Funding is strictly limited to covering your project expenses.

Can I submit a project of shorter duration than 12 months?

The maximum project duration is 12 months. A project can be shorter than 12 months if it makes scientifically sense and the feasibility of the overall project is given. Shortening a project just because the applicant's eligibility is not given for 12 months is not recommended.

Can I apply for hiring personnel to help me carry out the proposed work?

Yes, you may hire any personnel that is needed for you to complete the work, e.g., field assistants, lab technicians etc. Permanent staff in your host group should not be supported through a Career Seed Award.

Can I support / supplement my ongoing postdoc project with a Career Seed Award?

No, you cannot subsidize ongoing work with a Career Seed Award. The project should stand on its own and be your own independent work.

Can I apply for more than one Career Seed Award at a time?

No. You also cannot apply for subsequent deadlines as long as you still have an active award.

Can I submit a joint application with another postdoc?

Yes, this is possible. The maximum budget for a joint project is the same (CHF 30,000 for up to one year). A maximum of two applicants can submit a proposal together; one of them must act as corresponding applicant. Both applicants must meet the eligibility criteria. The relevant information and documents (achievements at ETH Zurich as postdoctoral researcher, CV, etc.) must be submitted by each co-applicant. The support letter has to refer to both applicants and, if the applicants are in two different groups, have to be signed by both host professors and uploaded by the host of the corresponding applicant. The two applicants are seen as equally involved in the project, but the budget awarded is managed by the corresponding applicant in the responsibility area of their host professor.

What criteria are used to assess applications?

Applications are assessed based on the applicant's aptitude and past performance as well as the quality of the proposed research.

Particular attention is paid to how independent the proposed work is, how it advances the applicant's academic independence, and how it fits with their career goals. Successful applications must be compelling in all these respects.

The applicant's aptitude is judged based on the CV and the letter of support. The current research performance as a postdoctoral researcher at ETH Zurich and competence for the proposed work are considered. In line with [DORA](#), achievements will be assessed on the base of qualitative evaluations of a diverse range of research outputs including publications in journals but not exclusively. Also, for instance, produced and/or published data sets, registered codes, presentations at conferences, accomplished field campaigns and experiments, outreach activities or similar achievements can be taken into consideration as research output.

As regards the research proposal, the scientific quality of the planned research, the suitability of the proposed procedures, difficulties to be expected, as well as the significance and innovativeness of the project will be considered.

Who is entitled to be a host professor?

The host professor must hold a permanent or fixed-term contract (lasting for the duration of the Career Seed Award) at ETH Zurich. Professors belonging to an institution within the ETH Domain (PSI, WSL, Empa and Eawag) other than ETH Zurich cannot act as a host professor.

What is the role of the host professor?

Your host must grant you enough time to carry out the work and access to the necessary facilities and infrastructure. They should also provide assistance with practical and research arrangements, scientific guidance, and advice regarding your career plans. If another professor grants access to necessary infrastructure, they must also submit a letter of support.

Submitting your application

How do I apply?

You will find the proposal template at http://www.seedprojects.ethz.ch. Fill in the proposal and submit it via the online submission portal that is likewise linked from the webpage. The letter of support must be requested by the applicant via the online submission portal from the host professor, who must register/log into the submission portal and upload the letter himself/herself. Please contact your host professor well in advance. Submissions via other channels will not be accepted.

What is the exact deadline?

There are two deadlines per year, 1 March and 1 September at 17:00 Swiss local time. Please note that there is no administrative/technical support outside office hours.

What information is required from the host professor?

The ETH host professor is required to formally approve the proposal and to grant enough protected research time during the prospective award period as well as the necessary research infrastructure. They should also comment on your past research and achievements as a postdoctoral researcher at ETH Zurich so far as well as on the merits of the planned research. If the project duration exceeds your formal time of employment and/or would require a promotion based on ETH's HR regulations, they must also confirm that your contract will be renewed.

What are the structure and the formal requirements for the project description and the CV?

You will find the structure of the proposal on the template. The format for the CV is free, but the duration of education and employment history must include month and year. Please also include a picture of yourself.

How do I submit my request for funding?

Funding is provided as a lump sum of CHF 30,000. Each successful applicant receives the same amount. However, the proposal template includes a budget section in which you need to justify all project costs. Salaries should be calculated including the social security overhead.

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

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

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

Will I be invited to present my work in front of the ETH Zurich Research Commission or to discuss it with the corresponding referee?

No, the evaluation of your application will be exclusively based on the proposal and the letter of support from the host professor.

After the decision

When do you communicate the results?

Applicants are notified about both approvals and rejections within about 4 months after the submission deadline.

Is it possible to resubmit a proposal?

Resubmissions of a given proposal will not be accepted. However, the applicant is free to submit a new proposal at a subsequent deadline.

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

Career Seed Awards can start immediately after formal approval, but no later than two months after the reception of the decision letter. If you cannot start within two months, please inform the Grants Office at seedprojects@sl.ethz.ch about the reasons for the delay.

Do I have to provide a final report?

Yes. The template provided on the webpage must be used for this. You are expected to hand in the report at the latest six weeks after the completion of your project.

What if I didn't use up my budget?

Once the PSP account associated with your Career Seed Award is closed, any remaining budget will expire. Funding from this programme is intended for use by postdocs on their way to academic independence, so even if you do not fully use up the budget, your group or your group leader must not use the rest based on their own needs.

Can my project be extended?

Yes, under the condition that any incurred delays are not at your own fault. Please write a short email to the Grants Office at seedprojects@sl.ethz.ch giving the project code, the reasons why the project has been delayed, until which you wish it to be extended and a confirmation that you are employed at ETH Zurich for the duration of the extension.