DIZH Innovation Program 5th Project Call

With the Project Calls, the Digitalization Initiative of the Zurich Higher Education Institutions (DIZH) Innovation Program supports projects that address specific questions across DIZH institutions and across disciplines. Project Calls are fundamentally geared toward forward-looking solutions for relevant practical issues and societal challenges. This explicitly includes the possibility of working on novel, risky issues for which the path to implementation or the measurement of the impact is associated with some uncertainty.

The aim of the Project Call is to promote projects that focus on different forms of cooperation between the participating universities and practice partners. Project funds of up to 2,2 million CHF are available. For projects with a duration from 1 to 3 years, between 100,000 CHF and 300,000 CHF in funds can be claimed from the DIZH special credit. The projects must start as soon as possible, but at the latest within three months of being approved.

Conditions for the current DIZH Project Call

Project proposal – Content and Structure: A proposal consists of a maximum of 5 pages and must address the following points (a Word template for the submission will be available on the DIZH website):

Key content points: The funded projects focus on forward-looking and beneficial solutions to relevant questions and problems from social, cultural, and economic practice in the context of digital transformation. Accordingly, applicants state:

- *which practice-relevant questions and problems are addressed in the context of digital transformation,*
- *what the relevance of the issues and problems addressed is,*
- *how the project fits into the current state of knowledge or the previous work of the applicants,*
- *and which explicit innovation goals are being pursued.*

Collaboration across disciplines and DIZH institutions: In this call of the DIZH Innovation Program, the focus is on addressing specific questions and problems through projects across disciplines and DIZH institutions. Accordingly, the project proposal must specifically indicate how different partner institutions, actors, disciplines, and expertises are to be integrated. The inclusion of applicants from more than one DIZH institution (UZH, ZHAW, ZHdK, PHZH) is a criterion for approval, although exceptions are possible in justifiable cases (to be addressed in the proposal). The focus should be on the interdisciplinary character of the collaboration (see 4th evaluation criterion below). The proposal should also show how practice partners will be involved in the project, which can be done in two ways: (1) If practice partners are part of the project team, the practice partners attest to their interest and involvement in a "Letter of Intent" (LoI), outlining the form, content, and responsibilities. If, in justified cases, no practice partners are involved when the application is submitted, it can be shown in the application text how the project is to achieve an impact in practice by outlining a suitable strategy.

Impact: The projects funded by the DIZH Innovation Program are intended to generate resonance and create value in the social, cultural, and economic region of Zurich. The target dimensions of the intended impact can be of a scientific, political, social, economic, or cultural nature (see Paper «Innovationsverständnis und Evaluationskriterien»).

Applicants shall demonstrate accordingly:
- *how* their project will generate innovation and impact in practice,
- *where* they can potentially generate an impact with their project,

- what *accompanying measures* to the interested public they intend to support this impact. It is expected that part of the budget will be used for activities to ensure that the transfer into practice can take place, e.g., workshops, or exhibitions. These must be described in the application.

Budget and Financing: Funds from the DIZH Special Credit of CHF 100,000 to CHF 300,000 can be requested (without the matching funds contribution of the involved DIZH institutions, which must be at least the same amount; see below). DIZH funds may be used for personnel and material costs or the procurement of equipment and facilities if these are below the threshold value[1]. DIZH funds may *not* be used for expenses incurred by practice partners. Subcontracting individual tasks to third parties using DIZH funds is possible if it is indispensable for the project[2].

The applicants must show valid contributions of at least the same amount as the requested funds (matching funds). Valid contributions include the reallocation of existing institutional revenues (e.g., in the form of preliminary work from projects related to the submitted project, dating back no longer than 12 months from the application date), the dissolutions of reserves, and third-party funds directly related to the project. Cash contributions from practice partners must flow as third-party funds to one of the DIZH institutions. In-kind contributions by practice partners cannot be credited but have a positive effect on the evaluation. For the crediting of overhead costs, the regulations for the Innovation Program must also be observed. If practice partners provide cash contributions, corresponding letters (signed by authorized persons) must be enclosed. Within the scope of their contributions, the partner institutions may charge overhead costs on the total costs (consisting of special credit and contributions of involved DIZH institutions including overhead surcharge) in the amount of 20 percent (see DIZH Innovation Program Rules 2020-2029, §17)[3]. In the budget calculation table (available on the DIZH website), applicants must indicate the specific form in which their matching contribution will be made. Funds from other DIZH programs may not be used as their matching funds. If there are any questions regarding matching funds, the use of funds, or other aspects of the project budget, the applicants may contact the responsible person at their institution and/or the DIZH Program Office at any time. The contact details can be found on the website.
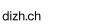
Timetable and Milestones: Projects in this call should not exceed a duration of 3 years. The application should show how the project objectives are to be achieved in terms of content, methodology and time, and what effort will be required for the individual project phases and milestones.

Evaluation Criteria: In selecting the projects to be funded, the Innovation Program is guided by the following criteria and associated indicators taken from the "Reglement für das Innovationsprogramm DIZH 2020-2029":

1. Impact: The innovation is based on research and/or technology-based findings, can be implemented sustainably in society or the economy and is accompanied by social, artistic, cultural, ecological, economic and/or political value creation. *Key indicators: feasibility, scope, sustainability,*

---

[1] Procurement of equipment, facilities and infrastructure that are indispensable for the project and have a useful
life of at least one year. All DIZH universities (UZH, PHZH, ZHAW, ZHdK) have a threshold value of 50 kCHF per purchase. Purchases that exceed these thresholds are categorized as "investments" and must be procured within the
university. These cannot be financed with DIZH funds. However, purchases of equipment and systems below this threshold may be declared for the DIZH loan. *For example: laboratory equipment, machines, instruments, tools, hardware (incl. operating software), printers, vehicles, furniture, software, licenses, patents, etc.*
[2] A maximum of 20% of the total costs or a maximum of 100 TCHF may be used for subcontracting.
[3] The overhead surcharge applies at the level of the individual project (i.e., it is a fixed imputed surcharge per project). In total, 25% overhead on primary funds and 20% of total costs (including overhead) are incurred and this is independent of the funding split. For the innovation program, 50/50 funding applies.

scalability and transferability, differentiation from existing approaches, topicality and time-critical nature of the issue, immediacy of impact.

2. <u>Scientific and professional quality:</u> The project is based on the latest findings and meets the high standards of the disciplines involved. *Key indicators: relation to "state of the art" and adequacy of methodology, stringency of the argumentation.*

3. <u>Inventiveness and risk-taking:</u> The project and the innovation it aims to achieve are forward-looking in nature. Original approaches are being pursued that clearly stand out from existing solutions and procedures. *Key indicators: Novelty of the application, opportunities, risks.*

4. <u>Cooperation and disciplinary dialogue:</u> Due to its interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary character, the project contributes to the networking and realization of synergies between the partner universities. The different disciplinary perspectives required for a differentiated approach to the project are represented in the project team. *Key indicators: suitability of the interdisciplinary approach to the problem, synergy effects between universities and departments.*

5. <u>Practical orientation:</u> The project's practical orientation should already be expressed in the application phase via cooperation with one or more practical partners. As an alternative, a strategy can be presented, as to how practice-orientation networks will be built up during the project. *Key indicators: plausibility of the strategy for generating practical impact, existence of stakeholder groups (or addressing missing stakeholder groups), targeted involvement of practical partners, reference to a significant practical issue, LoIs from practical partners.*

With regard to the interpretation of the evaluation criteria, reference is made to the Paper «Innovationsverständnis und Evaluationskriterien». As additional knowledge resource, the database of previously funded projects may be accessed via the DIZH website.

Eligible applicants: All members of the four DIZH institutions with employment are eligible to apply for this call. By submitting the proposal, applicants confirm that they are authorized to submit and carry out project applications within the scope of the budget entered, in accordance with the guidelines of their institution. For each project, the main applicant is named who is responsible for the submission of the application and is considered the contact person. This person usually takes over the coordination in case of approval of the application and is responsible for the compliance (monitoring) of deadlines as well as the DIZH regulations and requirements, such as reporting and representing the project. In addition, when the application is submitted, it is indicated which DIZH institution is the Leading House. The main applicant and coordinating person should be a member of the Leading House. However, the financial and personnel responsibility lies with the individual institutions. Students of DIZH universities can be team members but are not eligible to apply for this call. In addition, the research and practice partners must be financially and personally independent[4].

Intellectual property (IP): When submitting an application, it is ensured that possible third-party rights have been clarified and that the necessary rights of use are available. The rights are regulated in a case-specific agreement with the practice partners before the start of the project (a template can be downloaded on the website). The right of the partner universities involved in the project to use the results

---

[4] Independence is guaranteed if the natural persons involved in the project on the part of a DIZH institution:
- do not work for a practice partner at the same time;
- have no economic interests in the business activities of a practice partner and do not financially support a practice partner for other reasons.

Legal entities working together as DIZH institution members and practice partners are considered independent if none of the parties holds 20% or more of the participation rights of the other partner.

free of charge for research, development and teaching in all areas of application must be ensured. In the event of approval, the IP issues will be regulated in accordance with the provisions of the Regulations DIZH Program Office DIZH 2020-2029 (§7). The contact persons of the transfer offices of the respective DIZH universities can be contacted for further information. The existence of a case-specific agreement on the use of the results is a prerequisite for the release of the awarded funding within the project opening process.

The contact persons of the transfer offices at the universities are:

– UZH: Unitectra   loch@unitectra.ch
– ZHAW: Legal services   rechtsdienst@zhaw.ch
– ZHdK: Legal services   info.rechtsdienst@zhdk.ch
– PHZH: Office R&D   marcel.behn@phzh.ch

Submission and duration: The prescribed template has to be used for the submission of proposals; the prescribed table has to be used for the calculation of the budget. Both these documents can be downloaded at https://dizh.ch/en/innovationprogram. Further information on how to submit a proposal can be found at the same Internet address.
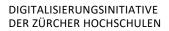
Applications for the 5th Project Call will be handled according to the following timeline:

– Opening submission portal: **July 2025**
– Deadline for application submission: **1st of October 2025, 12pm (noon)**
– Evaluation of the applications submitted: **October 2025 – January 2026**
– Communication funding decision: **February 2026**
– Project start:
  a. Earliest formal start of the projects: expected from **March 2026, as soon as the written agreement is available**
  b. Latest start of the projects: **1st of June 2026**

Background

Digitalization Initiative of the Zurich Higher Education Institutions (DIZH)

Digitalization places great demands on the economic, technological and social innovative strength of the Canton of Zurich. Society is undergoing a fundamental transformation as a result of digitalization. This process offers great opportunities in all areas of society, but also requires new skills and poses new challenges for society, culture, business and science. It is a joint task of all these players to meet the opportunities and challenges and to generate innovations.

DIZH wants to strengthen the Canton of Zurich's competitiveness as a hub for research and development. The initiative aims to help industry and society take advantage of the opportunities offered by digitalization and use them to benefit the greater Zurich area. The mission of Digitalization Initiative of the Zurich Higher Education Institutions (DIZH) is to promote cooperation on digitalization issues between higher education institutions in Zurich. The University of Zurich (UZH), Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) and Zurich University of Teacher Education (PHZH) are part of the DIZH network, which aims to advance research, innovation and education on digitalization by using interdisciplinary approaches.

Innovation program

DIZH's innovation program is one of the initiative's core components. Our partner universities are running various types of innovative digitalization projects with the private and public sector. This is intended to bring research findings closer in line with practical real world applications and also allows researchers to consider the needs and experiences of their partners in industry and government. Here the following characteristics of innovation play an important role: being open to taking risks, incorporating a variety of disciplines, creating value and working together.

Funding from the innovation program will be distributed in a transparent and competitive process. The focus is on funding projects that generate innovations that enable the new possibilities of digital transformation in the first place or expand these possibilities. To this end, different calls are launched each year.

For detailed information regarding the different call types and the funding conditions please refer to dizh.ch/innovationprogram.