Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Economic Affairs,
Education and Research EAER
State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO

ETH for Development (ETH4D)

ETH Zurich
Clausiusstrasse 37
8092 Zurich, Switzerland

www.eth4d.ethz.ch

Call for Proposals 2026

Guidelines

ETH Zurich Urban Research Grants

ETH Zurich Urban Pilot Grants

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1. Overview

Urbanization is transforming the world, with city populations expected to reach 70% by 2050. As engines of growth, cities generate most GDP and jobs, offering vast development potential. As urban populations continue to expand, cities face growing pressure to provide reliable infrastructure, sustainable energy, efficient transport, and high-quality public services. At the same time, they play a critical role in addressing climate change and building resilience to future challenges.

The Innovate Cities and Infrastructure programme supports interdisciplinary, practice-oriented research that helps cities respond to these complex challenges. By bringing together researchers, policymakers and urban practitioners, the programme develops innovative, evidence-based solutions for sustainable urban development, resilient infrastructure and effective local governance. It aims to strengthen cities as engines of economic growth, improve quality of life, and support a more sustainable urban future.

To that end, ETH Zurich and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO offer the following two research grants:

- **ETH Zurich Urban Research Grants** support collaborative project-based research between researchers at institutions of the ETH-Domain and practice partners from eligible countries to develop effective solutions to urban development and infrastructure challenges.
- **ETH Zurich Urban Pilot Grants** provide a smaller amount of funding to explore, prepare or design new collaborations and pilot a new applied research project with practice partners from eligible countries.

Applications for grants are expected to develop research-practice partner consortium that consists of, at minimum an ETH domain professor/research group leader (lead applicant) and a local non-academic practice partner from an eligible country and may include more than one partner.

Grant type and overview	Purpose	Amount (CHF)	Duration (Months)	Matching Funds	Application deadline
(a) Urban Research Grant	to develop effective solutions to urban development and infrastructure challenges.	• Up to 350,000	max. 24	50% of the requested funding[1]	**15 November 2026**
(b) Urban Pilot Grant	to explore, prepare or design new collaborations and pilot a new applied research project with practice partners	• Up to 30,000	max. 12	-	**15 November 2026**

2. Definitions

The Innovative Cities and Infrastructure programme supports sustainable urban development and infrastructure in SECO partner countries, including Ukraine, and selected EU member countries. Projects

[1] Consortia applying for Urban Research Grants in Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia must provide matching funds corresponding to at least 30% of the requested sum.

shall to the extent possible relate to the Swiss Cooperation Programmes[2] of the relevant countries to ensure the potential use of synergies with other SECO-funded projects. For information on eligible countries and topics, please refer to the programme website.

2.1 Urban Research Grants

The Urban Research Grants support collaborative project-based research between researchers at institutions of the ETH-Domain and practice partners from eligible countries. The objective is the development, testing or evaluation of an innovative result, tool, policy, service or prototype that responds to a specific challenge related to urban development and infrastructure.

Applications need to have a **clearly defined research question** that has the objective of creating positive impact on cities and urban infrastructure in the country of focus. The research question must be related to (a) the research interests of a research group of the ETH domain and (b) relevant demands/needs of the practice partner. Only research proposals **with high scientific quality and clearly defined potential real-world impact** will be funded.

2.2 Urban Pilot Grants

Urban Pilot Grants support feasibility and pilot studies that might lead to a proposal for a larger project-based research collaboration between researchers at institutions of the ETH-Domain and practice partners from eligible countries. The objective is to explore, prepare or design new collaborations and pilot a new applied research project. It can and should also be used to ensure demand orientation of the research proposal and to develop the partnership and research collaboration with the practice partner.

Applicants should submit a **well-defined piloting plan** with **clear objectives**. Funding will be awarded to proposals that convincingly **show the pilot is essential for pursuing a larger effort**.

3. Eligibility

For both grants, the team must consist of at least one ETH Zurich professor or a professor/research group leader from another ETH Domain institution (EPFL, Eawag, Empa, PSI, or WSL), and at least **one non-academic practice partner** from an eligible country.

Practice partners: Eligible practice partners include public institutions, private sector companies, and civil society organizations from eligible countries. Local academic institutions may also participate in the consortium but cannot replace the required non-academic practice partner.

4. Duration

The duration of the Urban Research Grants is max. **24 months**, this includes potential iterations of prototyping and user testing, as well as informing key stakeholders of the findings. For the Urban Pilot Grants, the duration is max. **12 months.**

[2] SECO partner countries: Economic cooperation worldwide; Selected EU Member Countries: Second Swiss Contribution

5. Budget and Funding

5.1 Budget

The Urban Research Grant sum ranges between **30kCHF and 350kCHF** and the Urban Pilot Grant sum is up to 30k CHF. A budget template is provided as part of the applications materials.

Both grants can be used for any travel and research-specific material costs, and for salaries of postdocs, doctoral candidates, or research assistants in the ETH domain.[3] Funding may not be spent on the construction/implementation of buildings or infrastructure, the concrete planning and engineering for its construction (e.g. a classical feasibility study) or goods and services related to military purposes.

For an Urban Research Grant, subcontracting by service agreement (see section 10.1 under Terms of collaboration between parties of granted projects) is permitted up to a maximum CHF 100’000, or 28% of the SECO-funded research grant, whichever limit is reached first.

5.2 Matching Funds

For the Urban Research Grant, consortia must provide matching funds corresponding to at least 50% of the requested grant sum. Consortia applying for Urban Research Grants in Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia must provide matching funds corresponding to at least 30% of the requested sum.

Matching funds can be travel, material costs, as well as salaries of postdocs, research assistants or doctoral candidates in the ETH domain that are not funded by the grant. Salaries of ETH professors or senior scientists cannot be counted as matching funds. Salaries above the standard ETH postdoc rate cannot be counted matching funds.

No matching funds are required for Urban Pilot Grants.

6. Regulations on consecutive applications

Consecutive applications are strongly encouraged. The same principal investigator (PI) can apply for up to three consecutive calls for the Urban Research Grant to renew a concluded Urban Research Grant project. In this case the PI needs to clearly state in the proposal that it is a prolongation of a concluded previous project and justify in the proposal why additional research is needed.

If a research group plans to apply for multiple consecutive grants from the outset, they should indicate this in the proposal for the first grant, with a brief outline of the research for the subsequent grant applications.

[3] The maximum salary covered is the ETH standard postdoc year-three rate: https://ethz.ch/en/the-eth-zurich/working-teaching-and-research/welcome-center/employment-contract-and-salary/salary.html

Furthermore, PIs that have an ongoing Urban Research Grant project are also welcome to submit a new project proposal on the condition that the submitted project is unrelated to the ongoing project. This should also be clearly stated in the proposal.

The proposal for an Urban Research Grant can – but is not required to – build on the results of an Urban Pilot Grant.

7. Regulations on complementary projects

Complementary projects, e.g. from different research groups working on the same larger research question are possible under the following conditions:

- Each project must be designed as an independent research project that operates independently and produces clearly delineated separate results.
- Joint work on the same results (e.g. the same software) or results ownership across different projects is not permitted.
- Local practice partners can be involved in more than one research project
- Each application will be evaluated individually and administered as a separate project.

8. Submission Procedure and Requirements

The call for applications for both grants is launched once yearly. All application documents must be written in English and must be submitted electronically through the online application form on the call webpage.

8.1. Required Application Documents

The application must include the following documents**:**

- Completed electronic application form
- Application documents, to be uploaded as one pdf in the following order:
    - Project narrative (using the project narrative template provided on the application website)
    - Bibliography
    - Timeline and work packages in the form of a Gantt Chart
    - Letter(s) of support from the practice partner(s), clearly stating the interest in the project and the partnership, its relevance to the organisation and the contributions the partner is willing to make to the project
    - CVs of all involved partners (2 pages max. per partner)
- Budget (using the budget template provided on the application website) as a separate file.

8.2. Proposal Requirements

8.2.1. Diversity and Inclusion

ETH Zurich strives to promote diversity and inclusion in scientific research. Factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, disabilities, must be consistently considered from the start of the proposal development to the research and dissemination phase.

8.2.2. Ethics and Research Integrity

Projects that involve humans as research subjects (e.g., end-users, patients, or survey respondents) must consider gender roles in experimental design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the outcomes. If the gender dimension is not being considered, a short justification of why it is not being addressed must be included.

If applicable, relevant ethical, legal, and social considerations should be included in the proposal. The prospective research must comply with the existing ethics regulations and adhere to the principles of research integrity valid at ETH Zurich or other institutions of the ETH-Domain.

Recipients of the Urban Research Grant or Urban Pilot Grant whose research includes human subjects must receive approval from the ETH Ethics Commission or other ethics commission as applicable at the other institutions of the ETH-Domain and submit the ethical clearance to ETH4D as soon as they receive approval and before starting field work.

8.2.3. Relation to Larger Research Projects

In case the submitted proposal is part of a bigger research project (for instance a doctoral project), the applicant must explain the history of the proposed project and the links to the bigger ongoing project.

9. Evaluation and Selection

9.1. Selection Process

All research proposals will be evaluated and selected for funding through the following procedure:

1. **Administrative verification**: The ETH4D program management performs a formal check.
2. **Expert review**: Each proposal is reviewed and rated by at least three reviewers against the criteria set out below. Reviewers can be members of the evaluation panel (see point 3 – Assessment and ranking), other professors from the ETH Zurich Domain, or external experts.
3. **Assessment and ranking:** An evaluation panel consisting of one representative of SECO, three professors from the ETH Zurich Domain from different disciplines, and the Executive Director of ETH4D assesses and ranks the proposals based on the reviewer reports.
4. **Funding decision**: The programme's steering committee makes the funding decision based on the assessment of the evaluation panel.

Notification of the decision will usually be given within two months of the submission deadline. Projects may start at the latest within five months after the reception of the notification letter.

9.2. Evaluation Criteria

- **Quality and innovation** of the research proposal: The proposal must include specific information on the scientific methodology and field study and must have the potential to develop an innovative scientific contribution. Interdisciplinary projects are encouraged.
- **Feasibility** of the research proposal: The research plan must be feasible within the given budget, timeframe and risks.

- **Relevance** of the challenge and potential for impact: The project has the potential to address a pressing challenge in the realm of urban development and infrastructure in the research country and aligns to the extent possible with the Swiss development cooperation programme[4]. The project tackles important – but understudied – problems that affect many people in research country and develops solutions with potential for impact at scale. Projects should provide clear arguments for why the research project differs from and/or improves upon existing or similar efforts in the research country.
- **Applicability for partners**: The research will be conducted in collaboration with the local practice partner to ensure knowledge transfer and the use of the results by the practice partner. Having a realistic long-term implementation plan and measurable goals is important. We ask applicants to be explicit about the collaboration modality and how their practice partner (and, potentially, other organisations) will use the results of their research.
- **Team qualifications and diversity, team composition and organization, including practice partner** (including gender, race, ethnicity, disabilities): The proposal selection process may include an interview/presentation with/by the local practice partner of the shortlisted proposals.
- **Clarity of the budget and matching contributions (cash and in-kind)**

10. Deliverables

1. Recipients of both grants will participate in an onboarding call with both ETH4D and the project partners before the start of the project, if possible, including the Swiss Embassies/Swiss Cooperation Offices.
2. Recipients of both grants are required to present at a Cities and Infrastructure Research Seminar, which typically takes place each semester.
3. Grant recipients must submit a 4-5-page scientific report no later than three months after the completion of the project. The report outlines research and other activities conducted with the grant, the results of the research project (including knowledge transfer to and use of the results by the practice partner) and the planned next steps.
4. Grant recipients shall also submit a financial report, which includes the relevant excerpts from ETHIS or relevant financial reporting software no later than three months after completing the project.
5. In addition, recipients can choose **one** of the following deliverables, which must be submitted to the ETH4D Executive Office no later than three months after the grant period has ended:
    - A short video that explains the project to a non-scientific audience
    - An article in the ETH Ambassadors Blog (or other ETH outlet)
    - A policy brief that presents the findings to a non-scientific audience
    - An outreach event organized together with the practice partner

[4] SECO Partner Countries: Economic cooperation worldwide; Selected EU Countries: Second Swiss Contribution

One year after the project completion, Urban Research Grantees and their partners will have follow-up calls with ETH4D to discuss the project impact. Grantees will also complete a short follow up survey on project impact.

The submitted material will be made public on the ETH4D website and may be used by ETH4D and SECO for reporting and other outreach activities, including with the local practice partner. Consent of any identifiable individuals e.g. in videos and photos, and sufficient intellectual property rights or a sufficient license, are to be secured by the recipients submitting the material.

11. Terms of collaboration between parties of granted projects

11.1. Legal Framework & Project Agreements

The lead institution ETH Zurich, or other institution of the ETH Domain, must enter into project agreements ("collaboration agreements") with the practice partner(s) and potentially further partners of a project.

The legal framework for such collaboration agreements is standardized in program specific General Terms and Conditions for collaborations (GTC):

- **Non-Negotiable Terms**: The GTC incorporate binding terms and requirements from the funding agreement between the funding agency (SECO) and ETH Zurich. To ensure the efficient launch of projects - especially in international multi-party settings - the GTC are essentially non-negotiable.
- **Two-Tier Agreement Structure**: Unter this funding mechanism, all disbursements - whether between project parties or to third parties (permitted up to CHF 100k) - must be processed exclusively through service agreements. Consequently, while the collaboration agreement covers the overall project scope, any entity receiving a payout must also enter into a separate service agreement.

11.2. Intellectual Property

The parties in the projects acknowledge that the projects are conducted in the context of publicly funded research and international cooperation and that a core objective in the public interest is the broad use, implementation, dissemination and scaling of project results by the parties, the stakeholders, and the funding agency.

Non-exclusive Rights: Accordingly, only non-exclusive rights in the project results can be granted, and the parties shall grant each other:

- encompassing non-exclusive, royalty-free licences for both solely and jointly owned project results,
- including the right for commercial- and non-commercial use, the right to modify the project results, and the right to grant sublicences without accounting to one another. Further specifics are defined in the GTC.

11.3. Data Protection and Confidentiality

Data exchanged within the Urban Research Grant or Urban Pilot Grant projects is generally **not** considered confidential. Non-disclosure agreements or terms on confidentiality in project agreements should be signed prior to the exchange of confidential information (if any).

If personally identifying information is used, exchanged, or collected in the framework of the research, the involved partners shall comply with applicable data protection laws and regulations, and shall establish appropriate data protection agreements or terms on data protection in project agreements in writing, including, where applicable, a data management plan, a data protection concept, or equivalent documentation).

11.4. Export Control and Ethics

Export Control: All parties must comply with any applicable export control requirements. Principal Investigators (PIs) are required to consult with their institution's export control specialists based on the project description prior to participating in the Call.

Ethical Standards:

- Projects must comply with the GRP Alliance principles.[5]
- Researchers must adhere to the Code of conduct for scientific cooperation of ETH Zurich (RSETHZ 416) or the equivalent regulations of their respective institution.

10.5 Private and public entities who participate in the Calls and projects accept by their participation the principles as set out in this Clause 10.

11.6 Where the PI for a project is from another institution of the ETH-Domain rather than ETH Zurich, the respective institution must accept a flow-down of the agreement with the funding agency, and the respective institution must setup the project agreement. This institution is free to use the GTC and other contract documents of ETH Zurich as templates but does this in its own responsibility and will of course need to adjust at least the name of the institution in the templates.

12. Financial Administration for both grants

12.1. Projects with PIs from ETH Zurich:

The financial structure for the Urban Research Grant or Pilot Grant will be implemented by the Finance Desk upon reception of the notification letter.

One psp-element will be opened for the Urban Research Grant or Pilot Grant within the Responsibility Center (Verantwortungsbereich) of the professorship. Expenditures of the running project can be booked on this grant from the beginning of the project (according to the approved budget).

[5] https://naturalsciences.ch/organisations/kfpe/11_principles_7_questions

Matching funds: A second psp-element will be opened by the finance desk for the committed matching funds. The matching funds will be transferred from the professorship on this psp-element. All matching funds must be booked through this PSP element.

If matching funds are provided by the practice partners, partners will submit a signed financial overview of all contributions, including invoices, receipts, and salary documentation where applicable, to ETH4D upon project completion.

Projects will submit a financial overview including documentation of salary payment, to ETH4D at the conclusion of the project.

12.2. Projects with PIs from EPFL, Eawag, Empa, or other units within the ETH Domain:
The financial administration for projects led at other ETH-Domain institutions, including the handling of matching funds, is currently being finalized with the ETH Zurich finance department. Successful applicants from these institutions will receive detailed instructions with their notification letter.