

1st Call for Proposals for The LOOP Zurich Incubator Projects



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1. The LOOP Zurich – overview

The LOOP Zurich is a translational research center focusing on precision medicine*. Our goal is to improve the fundamental understanding of diseases in order to develop individual treatment strategies and therapies – because every patient is different.

The LOOP Zurich brings together the expertise of ETH Zurich, University of Zurich, and the four university hospitals in Zurich – University Hospital Zurich, Balgrist University Hospital, University Children’s Hospital, University Hospital of Psychiatry Zurich – in the fields fundamental biomedical research, bioinformatics, biomedical engineering, and clinical research. Based on building extensive medical data and sample sets, modern analytical and bioinformatics methods are used to gain new insights into cause and progression of diseases, enabling highly specific treatments for the benefit of patients.

* *Under the term precision medicine, we understand the customization of healthcare measures to the individual patient, or more precisely, to the specific molecular and/or phenotypic make-up linked to a pathology.*

2. Summary of the 1st call for proposals for The LOOP Zurich *Incubator Projects*

The LOOP Zurich project grants for *Incubator Projects* will enable groups of researchers of at least two different academic institutions from Zurich, to explore new approaches in the field of precision medicine. They should bring together complementary skills, knowledge, and resources, to address an ambitious medical problem. *Incubator Projects* should fit into the Precision Medicine strategy pursuit at The LOOP Zurich, e.g., by considering genotypic and phenotypic aspects related to specific pathologic conditions. In contrast to LOOP Translational Projects, inclusion of a clinical research component, i.e. Proof-of-Concept in patients, or a biomedical informatics component is not mandatory for *Incubator Projects*.

The scope of LOOP *Incubator Projects* may involve:

- Elucidation of novel molecular pathways relevant for disease.
- Identification of novel cellular and molecular targets for diagnosis and therapy.
- Evaluation of novel biological concepts for diagnosis and therapy. This includes the development of novel MedTech-solutions for diagnosis and therapy.

LOOP Incubator projects will be supported by a maximum of 1 Mio CHF to be spent over a duration of 3 years. One to two projects may be funded depending on the recommendation of the evaluation body. The LOOP Zurich foresees calls for Incubator projects on a yearly basis.

The projects may benefit from existing IT, biobanking and clinical research infrastructures at the University of Zurich, the ETH Zurich, and the four university hospitals. At the same time, the projects are intended to advance the research ecosystem of Zurich.

An important aspect for The LOOP Zurich is career development for young talents. Hence, the projects must allow young scientists to take on a responsible role within the project that helps them advancing their careers.

The submission procedure involves two stages: outline proposals and full proposals.

Timeline:

- Submission deadline for outline proposals: **April 15th, 2024**
- Submission deadline for full proposals: **July 14th, 2024**
- Earliest project start: **November 1st, 2024**

3. Principles and requirements for The LOOP Zurich research projects

There is no specific thematic focus for the call apart from the requirement that projects must be *linked/ or must contribute to precision medicine*. Projects must cover the following scientific competences and disciplines:

Applications for LOOP Incubator Projects must fulfill the following criteria.

- *Precision Medicine*: Topic must fit into precision medicine strategy of The LOOP Zurich
- *Inter-institutional*: Projects must involve at least two of the LOOP partner institutions.
- *Bioinformatics*: Bioinformatics work packages are welcomed but not a necessary requirement.
- *Development of young talents*: At least one post-doctoral student should be given the opportunity to work as junior PI and take on responsibility within the project. Last authorship should be granted.

○ **Collaborations with outside groups:**

If a specific expertise required for the project is missing in the Zurich biomedical research area, collaborations with national and/or international partner labs are possible.

It is, however, required that the principal activity happens in Zurich; resources allocated to external collaborations should not exceed 20% of total funds.

○ **Eligibility**

Principal investigators (PIs) and Co-PIs are employed by one of the following partner institutions: ETH Zurich, University of Zurich, University Hospital Zurich, Balgrist University Hospital, University Children's Hospital Zurich and the University Hospital of Psychiatry Zurich. Biomedical researchers, engineers, bioinformaticians, or clinical researchers qualify as PIs.

PIs and Co-PIs must have guaranteed employment for the duration of the grant period and guaranteed access to the home institution's infrastructures and services needed for research project. Research groups from at least two of the partner institutions shall be involved in a project.

PIs of an ongoing The LOOP Zurich- project cannot apply as PI for any further The LOOP Zurich projects if the duration of the two projects overlap. However, they are eligible as Co-PIs. Co-PIs, on the other hand, can participate in different projects without restrictions.

○ **Gender Equality**

The LOOP Zurich is in line with the efforts of its partner institutions in the field of gender equality and diversity. Prospective LOOP-research consortia should apply and implement the correspondent gender equality action plans of their home institutions.

4. Time, financial scope, and project management

- The total duration of a The LOOP Zurich research project is a maximum of 3 years and funding for up to a maximum of 1 Mio. CHF (allocated up to 333 kCHF / year)
- Direct project costs, which includes personnel salaries (PhD students, postdocs, technical personnel), consumables and travel will be provided by the grant scheme. Costs for salaries of PIs and Co-PIs, major equipment and/or infrastructure will NOT be provided (fees for services and for use of infrastructure necessary for data/sample collection/management and analyses can be charged).
- Project funding will start earliest on November 1st, 2024.
- Progress of The LOOP Zurich research projects will be regularly monitored, which includes the submission of annual intermediate reports (scientific and financial reports at month 12 and 24). At the end of the project a final report (scientific and financial) must be delivered.

- Projects that use human samples, patient data or animal models will require the necessary ethical and legal approvals by the responsible commissions as a prerequisite for the final allocation of funding. The LOOP Zurich adheres to the respective regulations of the partner institutions (e.g. Institutional governance processes and data strategies) and recommends early cooperation with the appropriate bodies.

5. Criteria for the evaluation of grant proposals

The LOOP Zurich research project proposals will be prioritized following these criteria, which have to be fulfilled:

- Medical relevance:** The proposal addresses a problem, that is highly relevant regarding diagnostic, prognostic, therapeutic, or preventive management of diseases and for which there is currently no solution at all or no satisfactory solution.
- Novelty:** The scientific concept is novel, i.e., it should not be a minor modification of already established approaches
- Feasibility and Quality:** The Project is feasible within the 3 years period of the project duration. Sufficient resources must be requested in the proposal to achieve the availability and/or to generate the data and sample required in high quality and accuracy.
- Benefit for Zurich:** PIs demonstrate how the Zurich (bio-)medical ecosystem would benefit from the research project. In particular, the authors should address, why Zurich is suited for this project, what expertise and prior art is available in Zurich, and how the project capitalizes on the inputs from the founder institutions.
- Competitive Position:** The PIs position the project in comparison to similar projects (if any) that are currently pursued at other comparable national and international institutions. In which domains can Zurich position itself in relation to these competitors?
- Contributions by PIs:** Proposals document (in-kind) contributions by the individual PIs and their teams. Each PI/Co-PI is expected to devote *20% of her/his time* to the project.
- Career development plan**

6. The two-stage submission procedure

Outline proposal: In the first stage, an outline proposal shall be submitted that describes the research idea, highlighting the scientific novelty, know-how already available in partner labs, technical feasibility,

interdisciplinarity, value for the biomedical research community Zurich, international competitive situation, and in-kind contribution from individual research group.

The proposal should comprise 4 pages at maximum and include a budget estimate (no detailed budget required at this stage). Moreover, the proposal should include biosketches of all PIs (max 2 pages per PI).

[See “7. Instructions for Application” for details.]

*Submission deadline of the Outline Proposal: **April 15th, 2024***

Outline proposals will be evaluated by the LOOP Office for compliance with the Call criteria (Point 3) only, but not for the scientific/strategic criteria outlined in Point 5.

Proposals that meet all formal criteria will be invited for full application by **May 2nd, 2024**.

Full proposal: Applicants, who are invited to submit a full-length proposal describes the project in more detail. These proposals must comprise:

- *A common research plan* describing the overall hypothesis, the role of the individual subprojects, the organization of the collaboration, and the expected impact of the overall proposal.
- Descriptions of the individual sub-projects with hypotheses, preliminary work by researchers in the field, schedules and milestones, relevance.
- Competitive situation
- Long-term perspective
- *Detailed budget*, which includes budget positions for diverse services (e.g., data management, IT, study conduct, sample and data collection/acquisition), as well as budget for a dedicated project manager.

[See “7. Instructions for Application” for details.]

*Submission deadline of the full proposal: **July 14th, 2024***

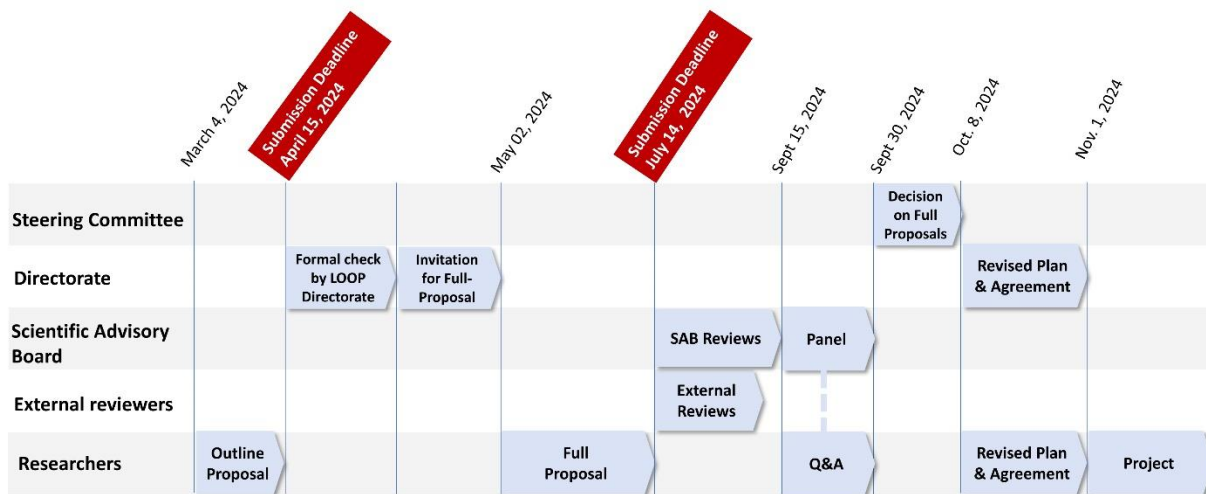
7. Instructions for applications

- **Templates**

Templates for outline proposal and full proposal can be found on the homepage of The LOOP Zurich (<https://www.theLOOPzurich.ch/en/project-submissions.html>)

○ **Submission procedure**

The submission procedure comprises two-stages: outline proposals and full proposals. The outline or full proposals must comply with the specifications given below and must be submitted in full and on time. Outline or full proposals that are incomplete, exceeding page limits, or not submitted on time will not be considered.



○ **Submission of Outline proposals**

The outline proposal comprises **4 different parts I.-IV.** (excl. title page and appendices), is written in English and structured as follows:

- I. General Information
 Research project title, information on the project management (lead) and the mainly involved institutions and faculties (title page)
- II. Description of Work (max. 4 pages)
 - a) Short description of the planned research program, including description of possible sub-projects (background information, objectives, prior work by applicants) (≈2.5 pages)
 - b) Demonstration of relevant clinical/medical expertise to ensure the medical significance of the projects and envisioned outcome (≈ 0.5 page)
 - c) Significance of the project: Expected added value and innovation potential, clinical relevance gained through interdisciplinary cooperation. (max. 1 pages)

III. References

IV. Annexes

- a. Budget estimate
- b. CV and publication list of the persons involved (2 pages per person, 1 page CV + 1 page with 5 most important publications of the last 10 years and a URL to a complete publication list (ORCID, Scholar, Scopus, ZORA, etc.)).
- c. Suggestions for at least five external reviewers (according to template)

The outline proposal must be prepared according to the official templates:

<https://www.theLOOPzurich.ch/en/project-submissions.html>

Submission deadline: The outline proposal (incl. appendices) must be submitted as one PDF document to The LOOP Zurich (jens.selige@theLOOPzurich.ch) by **April 15th, 2024**

Decision: The decision on the outline proposal will be communicated to the applicants **May 2nd, 2024**

○ **Submission of Full proposals**

A full proposal may be submitted on invitation following the successful evaluation of the outline proposal. The full proposal comprises **a maximum of 12 pages** (excl. title page and appendices), is written in English and structured as follows:

I. General Information

II. Description of work

- a) Research project title, information on the project management and the mainly involved institutions and faculties (title page)
- b) Summary of the planned research program (1 page)
- c) Scientific question and state of research (2 pages)
- d) Research plan for three years and perspective for the following years, incl. description of sub-projects (5 pages)
- e) Significance of the project: Expected added value and innovation potential gained through interdisciplinary cooperation compared to the sum of the individual projects (1 pages)
- f) Use of existing or research infrastructures within Zurich (1 page)
- g) Strategy for academic career development, gender equality and science communication (1 pages)
- h) Organization: Persons involved (management; sub-project leaders), tasks and responsibilities, organization chart (1 page)

III. References

IV. Budget including in-kind contributions by PI and Co-PIs and their teams (according to template)

V. CVs and publication lists of the persons involved (PIs, sub-project leaders, potential outside collaborators) (2 pages per person, 1 page CV + 1 page with 5 most important publications of the last 10 years and a URL to a complete publication list (ORCID, Scholar, Scopus, ZORA, etc.))

VI. Support letter(s) by relevant infrastructure units involved: e.g., clinical IT center ITC, Clinical Trial Center (CTC), etc.

VII. Support letter(s) by external collaborators: If external collaborations are essential for the project, the application must include a letter by the external project partner stating her/his commitment for the project.

VIII. Data Management Plan

IX. A statement confirming that all patient related data collected and used in the course of the project will be entered into the respective research data bases.

The full proposal must be prepared according to the official templates (templates will be sent directly after a positive check of the outline proposals).

Submission deadline: The full proposal (incl. appendices) must be submitted as a PDF document to The LOOP Zurich (jens.selige@theLOOPzurich.ch) by **July 14th, 2024**.

Evaluation:

- Written evaluation by the members of the SAB as well as external experts
- Based on results of written evaluation proposals will be shortlisted and applicant teams of shortlisted proposals invited to a panel meeting of the SAB for Q&A between **September 15th and September 30th, 2024**.

Decision: The decision on the full proposals will be communicated to the applicants by **October 8th, 2024**

8. Evaluation and decision bodies

- The LOOP Zurich Directorate (Outline Proposals only)
- The LOOP Zurich Scientific Advisory Board members (Full Proposals)
- Specific external reviewers (min. 2 per proposal) – ad hoc (Full Proposals)
- Final funding decision by the Steering Committee of The LOOP Zurich

9. Contact

The LOOP Zurich

Managing Office
Moussonstrasse 15
CH-8032 Zürich

Tel. : +41 44 63 40610
E-mail: jens.selige@theLOOPzurich.ch
www.theLOOPzurich.ch