

Guidelines for the Pioneer Fellowship Program

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The Pioneer Fellowship

The Pioneer Fellowship is awarded to candidates who want to become entrepreneurs based on their own research carried out during their Master or Doctoral Thesis at ETH Zurich. The fellowship will be given to one or two individuals intending to perform applied research leading towards a highly innovative product or service and to evaluate the potential for the commercialization of such products or services. Pioneer Fellowships are not awarded for basic research. Given the limited number of fellowships available in a given year, the fellowships are selected in a competitive process to ensure that the best applications with the highest potential and the most outstanding applicants are chosen.

Eligibility

By the proposed starting date of the fellowship, candidates must have earned a Master or Doctoral degree from ETH Zurich. Candidates may submit their proposals until the submission deadline up to 6 months ahead of their graduation and not later than 6 months after obtaining the Master or Doctoral degree. In justified cases, candidates will be considered, who have completed a postdoctoral stay at ETH Zurich and whose application is based on work accomplished during this stay. All candidates must be supported by an ETH Professor (host Professor).

Conditions of employment

The duration of a Pioneer Fellowship is 12 months for a team of 2 persons or 18 months for one person. An evaluation of the progress will be carried out after 6 months based on agreed milestones. In case the progress is insufficient, a probation time of 3 more months will be applied. If after 9 months the re-evaluation is still not satisfactory, the Pioneer Fellowship may be terminated by the end of month 12. Employment after 18 months must be financed from other sources. The total fellowship cannot exceed CHF 150'000 for the duration of 18 months and may not be subsidized by other, third-party research funds. Salaries are calculated according to the ETH standard doctoral or postdoctoral salaries. Within the maximum of 150'000 CHF for 18 months, fellows can reduce salary costs to increase funds for consumables or travel or to hire additional personnel. Pioneer Fellowships may not be viewed as sideline projects; therefore, Pioneer Fellows are expected to work full time for the project.

The funds for the Pioneer Fellowship are managed through the accounts of the host Professor. As the Pioneer Fellow may principally dispose of those funds and his/her working time during the Pioneer Fellowship in order to realize the project, he/she should be given the role of a "Fonds inhaber". The Pioneer Fellow is not expected to support teaching or other research outside the scope of his/her project.

Pioneer Fellows are expected to start their project within six months after the fellowship is awarded (Letter of Decision by VPFW). If they cannot keep to this set date, an approval for a later start must be requested by ETH transfer.

Application

The application is to be made independently by the candidate and must be accompanied by a letter from the prospective host Professor, who must be an ETH Professor. The host Professor must have a guaranteed ETH position for the entire duration of the proposed fellowship and must provide the given infrastructure within the professorship. The application needs to include:

- a composition of the financial requirements (see: Do's and Don'ts with your Pioneer Fellowship)
- a detailed description of the idea based on research results from the Master or Doctoral Thesis at ETH Zurich. Particular emphasis must be put on the innovative aspects and customer benefits of a potential product or service. It may further include some evidence of market relevance, e.g., a

business model, a technical and market-specific feasibility study, patent applications and software (IP) that is made available for the Pioneer Fellowship as well as for licensing to a future spin-off, etc. The description must include a time plan with distinct milestones and an explanation of the costs. Expected results are to be clearly outlined (max 5p)

- a short project summary which should give an overview of the planned activities, the market situation and the innovation potential. This summary should not contain confidential information
- a complete CV of the candidate including a brief outline of the career goals of the candidate and a 2p CV of the host Professor, including lists of publications for both, candidate and host
- a letter of support by the host Professor, stating why and how he/she wants to support the candidate and how he/she evaluates the presented project idea incl. describing the infrastructure made accessible. With his/her signature the host Professor confirms that he/she has read the Guidelines for Pioneer Fellowship applications.

When and how to submit an application

There are two Pioneer Fellowship calls per year. The relevant submission deadlines are **March 1** and **September 1**. Applications should be submitted electronically using the Pioneer Fellowship web-based system. The link is provided on our dedicated web page: www.pioneerfellowships.ethz.ch.

Evaluation and decision procedures

The evaluation is a two-step procedure, in a first step the proposal is assessed by ETH transfer. If needed, projects can be sent to external experts for a review. Based on these recommendations the Vice President Research and Corporate Relations (VPFW) decides, which candidates are invited to an interview in front of a jury. The jury consists of the VPFW (chair) and three main Referees: a Professor in the field from ETH Zurich or a delegated expert, a member of ETH transfer and a representative from industry. The Head of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Lab (ieLab), a member of the Research Commission plus additional guests will join the jury as well. The final recommendation of the jury will be communicated by the VPFW, who is responsible for the final funding decisions.

The evaluation criteria are:

- Innovation potential and economic attractiveness and viability: entrepreneurial suitability, market potential, feasibility, sustainability, as well as criteria of sociopolitical and environmental relevance
- Scientific quality: relevance, originality and timeliness of the underlying scientific work
- Individual aptitude: scientific record and performance of the applicant, personal motivation and entrepreneurial spirit
- A gender sensitive approach in the composition of the team, in the design of the service or the product and in the consideration of the market approach.

When to expect a decision

Notification of decisions made by the Vice President Research and Corporate Relations will normally be sent to applicants within 2 to 3 months of the submission deadline. In case of a negative decision, it is not possible to resubmit a Pioneer Fellowship Application.

Intellectual Property Issues

Work done during a Pioneer Fellowship belongs to ETH Zurich as Pioneer Fellows are employed by ETH Zurich. If a spin-off company is incorporated during the Pioneer Fellowship that wants to commercialize the results, the company needs a license from ETH Zurich. The precise licensing agreements are always subject to negotiations and the terms depend highly on the individual case and the value of the object of license. The binding document on licensing are the Guidelines for the Financial Exploitation of Research at ETH Zurich ("Verwertungsrichtlinien"): <https://rechtssammlung.sp.ethz.ch/Dokumente/440.4.pdf> (RSETHZ 440.4).



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www.pioneerfellowships.ethz.ch

Coaching

The Head of the ieLab will arrange a meeting with the designated Pioneer Fellow and his/her mentor within the first month after the Pioneer Fellowship has been accepted. This meeting will take place before the start of the Pioneer Fellowship. Pioneer Fellows will be assigned a mentor during their fellowship. The Pioneer Fellows may be supported by one or more external coaches as suggested by the mentor on a case-by-case basis and selected and approved by the Head of ETH transfer and the Head of the ieLab.

Final report

Pioneer Fellows have to submit a final report within six weeks after the completion of their fellowship to ETH transfer (c/o Head of the ieLab). The form of the final report depends on the outcome of the Pioneer Fellowship and needs to be discussed in time with the Head of the ieLab and mentor.

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