

ZHAW digital Research Call 2027

Funding of Applied Research on Digital Transformation

1. Background

Digital transformation is fundamentally reshaping the economy, society, healthcare, the environment, science, education, and public institutions. It presents new opportunities but also introduces new challenges. These challenges include, for example, the question of how individuals, organizations, and society can influence the development and use of digital technologies in a self-determined and sovereign manner.

Furthermore, digital transformation is not solely about technology. It is largely influenced by societal needs, ethical requirements, economic goals, and regulatory frameworks. Therefore, what is important is not only what is technologically feasible, but also what is desirable from a societal perspective, economically significant, and provides tangible value to individuals and organizations.

Through this Research Call, ZHAW digital supports projects that contribute to shaping the digital transformation as described above. In doing so, the Call strengthens applied research at ZHAW and reinforces its role as a research partner in this field.

2. Objectives

The research call pursues four objectives:

1. Strengthen application-oriented research in the field of digital transformation.
2. Supporting new research ideas and approaches as well as the further development of existing research and research results.
3. Enable a differentiated discussion of digital transformation, its potentials, and challenges.
4. Strengthen the exchange and knowledge transfer between science, practice, and/or society.

3. Funding Framework and Eligibility

3.1 Funding Scope and Budget

The ZHAW digital Research Call supports the development of new research ideas and approaches, preliminary research activities, as well as the implementation of larger applied research projects for digital transformation. Two funding formats are available for this purpose: the Seed Grant for smaller projects and initial steps in the development of a research idea, and the Research Grant for larger, self-contained, applied research projects.

Funded projects must have a strong connection to digital transformation as well as applied research, and have the potential to create benefits for science, practice, and/or society. The total budget of the call amounts to CHF 1.4 million, of which CHF 200,000 is allocated for Seed Grants and CHF 1.2 million for Research Grants.

3.2 Eligibility and Project Responsibilities

Each application is submitted by one person acting as principal investigator (PI). This person must be employed at ZHAW for the entire duration of the project. Doctoral candidates as well as employees of all personnel categories and organizational units at ZHAW can apply, provided they meet this requirement. The PI is responsible for the project, coordinates it in the event of approval, and is accountable for meeting deadlines and adhering to the budget.

Additionally, the following applies for the Research Grant (see section 4.2 for information on the format): At least one practice partner must be involved in the project. Applicants and practice partners must be financially independent of each other. Practice partners do not receive financial support for their participation.

4. Funding Formats

The call includes two funding formats that cover different needs and stages of applied research.

4.1 Funding Format A: Seed Grant

Early research ideas, conceptual work, and initial development steps are supported. The funding makes it possible to concretize a research question, develop or test an approach, and create the foundation for further research projects. Individual

subprojects or work packages from already funded larger research projects are also supported. A total of CHF 200,000 is available for the Seed Grant. A practice partner is not required.

- Funding amount per project: max. CHF 10,000
- Use of funding: personnel and material costs. Material costs include all project-related costs that are not attributable to the working hours of project participants, such as software¹ and hardware, external services, publications, as well as participation in or organization of workshops and conferences. Material costs may not exceed 20% of the total project budget.
- Duration: max. 12 months
- Earliest project start: April 2027
- Latest project completion: November 2028

4.2 Funding Format B: Research Grant

Subject to funding are self-contained, applied research projects with relevance for science, practice, or society. The projects address a clearly defined research subject and aim at concrete results that can be further utilized scientifically, practically, or socially. This includes both the development and testing of new research approaches as well as the further development and verification of existing approaches. The involvement of at least one practice partner is mandatory. Interdepartmental and inter-institute cooperation is welcomed but not mandatory. A total of CHF 1.2 million is available for the Research Grant format.

- Funding amount per project: between CHF 70,000 and 150,000
- Use of funding: personnel and material costs. Material costs include all project-related costs that are not attributable to the working hours of project participants, such as software² and hardware, external services, publications, as well as participation in or organization of workshops and conferences. Material costs may not exceed 20% of the total project budget.
- Duration: max. 24 months
- Earliest project start: June 2027
- Latest project completion: August 2029

¹ For software and other IT resources, applicants must check before submitting their application whether a [usage assessment](#) (Cloud & App Due Diligence) is required. The proposal must indicate whether the usage assessment has been completed and whether a Due Diligence is necessary. If a Due Diligence is required, it will be carried out by the responsible internal ZHAW unit if the project is awarded funding

² See footnote 1.

5. Selection and Review Process

The submitted proposals are evaluated based on three or five criteria, depending on the specific funding format. For the Seed Grant, the focus is on the potential of the idea and its further development. For the Research Grant, the scientific quality, the appropriateness of the methodological approach, as well as the relevance and planned use of the results are additionally assessed.

5.1 Selection Criteria Seed Grant

1. Relevance of the Research Question

The project or activity addresses a comprehensible question with a strong connection to digital transformation. *Indicators: clarity of the question, significance of the problem being addressed, connection to digital transformation.*

2. Relevance to Applied Research

The project or activity shows a comprehensible connection to applied research. It can, for example, contribute to addressing research questions, discussing and further developing existing knowledge, or initiating new research approaches and collaborations. *Indicators: Understandable connection to a research question, a research field, or a research project, contribution to the discussion, dissemination, or further development of scientific knowledge.*

3. Potential Benefit

It becomes clear what potential benefit the project or activity has for science, practice, and/or society. The benefit may also lie in further developing an idea, making findings accessible, or creating the basis for further activities. *Indicators: Plausible potential benefit for research, practice, and/or society; potential to further develop ideas, make findings accessible, or create the basis for further activities.*

5.2 Selection Criteria Research Grant

1. Relevance of the Research Question

The project addresses a clearly formulated research question with a strong connection to digital transformation. It becomes clear why the research question is relevant and which problem or challenge the project tackles. *Indicators: clarity of the research question, significance of the addressed problem, connection to digital transformation.*

2. Scientific Quality and Research Approach

The project builds on the existing state of research and demonstrates a comprehensible scientific question and a suitable methodological approach. It becomes clear which open question the project addresses, how it connects to existing research, and which additional insights it seeks to achieve. Relevant disciplinary competencies are adequately represented in the project.

Indicators: Positioning within the state of research and consideration of relevant existing findings, independence of the project and distinction from existing research work and approaches, scientific suitability and justification of

the chosen methods, plausibility of the intended gain in knowledge, appropriate consideration of relevant disciplinary competencies.

3. Feasibility and Project Planning

The planned work steps, timeline, and resource allocation are well coordinated and realistic within the proposed project duration. Significant risks are identified and adequately addressed. *Indicators: clarity and coherence of the proposed work plan, realistic timeline, appropriate allocation of resources, and adequate risk management.*

4. Expected Results and Potential Benefits

The proposal clearly illustrates the expected results, their anticipated benefits for science, practice, and/or society, and how they can be utilized or further developed. Potential follow-up activities are also outlined in a comprehensible manner. *Indicators: clarity of the expected results, anticipated benefits for science, practice, and/or society, concrete opportunities for utilization, potential for further development, and plausible follow-up activities.*

5. Practice Partner and Collaboration

At least one practice partner is involved in the project. The collaboration addresses a specific practical challenge, and the role and contribution of the practice partner are clearly described. *Indicators: relevance of the practical challenge, role and contribution of the practice partner, quality of the collaboration, and integration of the practice partner into the project work.*

5.3 Review Process

The submitted proposals are evaluated against the criteria defined for the respective funding format.

The ZHAW digital Office first checks the applications for formal compliance. If necessary, it may request clarification or corrections to a proposal or exclude it from the evaluation process. This applies to formal inconsistencies, applications exceeding

the maximum funding amount, and other circumstances that may compromise the proper conduct of the funding procedure. These examples are not exhaustive.

5.3.1 Seed Grant:

The submitted applications are evaluated by ZHAW digital in a single-stage process based on the three evaluation criteria. Applications that meet all three criteria are eligible for funding. If the total funding requested by these applications exceeds the available budget, the applications to be funded are selected by lottery. Applicants are informed of the funding decision, individual justifications are not provided.

5.3.2 Research Grant:

For the Research Grant, scientific evaluation follows a multi-stage process. The proposals are reviewed by external and ZHAW-internal experts and assessed by the ZHAW digital Research Call Selection Committee, which comprises representatives from various ZHAW departments. The evaluation consists of the following steps:

- **Round 1: Expert Reviews**
Each application is reviewed in writing by two experts based on the five evaluation criteria. At least one reviewer is external to ZHAW.
- **Round 2: Review Evaluation and Funding Recommendation**
The proposals are assigned to the members of the selection committee according to their expertise and are read during the joint session. Afterwards, the committee checks whether the written evaluations from the first round are understandable and consistent. Any discrepancies are discussed internally. On this basis, the selection committee advises on the worthiness of the projects for funding and issues a funding recommendation. The funding recommendation is made within the available budget and is submitted to the university authorities for approval.
- **Round 3: Final Approval of Funding Decision**
The funding recommendation is submitted to the university authorities for approval. Funding for the selected projects is confirmed once the recommendation has been endorsed.

To promote transparency, all applicants receive the full written reviews from the experts along with the notification of the funding decision.

6. Application Process and Timeline

- Proposals can be submitted from October 28, 2026, until January 13, 2027, at 12:00 PM on zhawdigital.grantplatform.com (Internet Explorer is not supported).

- Grantplatform accounts must be created using the ZHAW email address and the full name.
- All information entered is automatically saved as soon as the first tab of the application has been completed.
- After submission (submit), no changes are possible
- Proposals can be submitted in German or English.
- Applicants can submit a proposal for both the Seed Grant and the Research Grant.
- Funding decisions for the Seed Grant will be communicated in early March 2027, and funding decisions for the Research Grant in mid-May 2027.

7. Contact

Questions regarding the content and the administrative process of the Research Call and the submission platform can be directed to digital@zhaw.ch.

8. Application Template

- Seed Grant link to follow
- Research Grant link to follow