

## Call for Joint Initiatives in the Strategic Areas Human Health, Responsible Digital Transformation and Advanced Materials and Key Technologies

### 1 Introduction

The ETH Domain aims to be internationally competitive and to serve Switzerland by addressing important challenges in the context of education, research, and innovation. To achieve this goal, the ETH Board has defined in its [Strategic Plan](#) for the period 2025-2028 five Strategic Areas to respond to the most pressing global challenges in which the ETH Domain is well positioned to have a strong impact: **Human Health; Energy, Climate and Environmental Sustainability; Responsible Digital Transformation; Advanced Materials and Key Technologies; Engagement and Dialogue with Society.**<sup>1</sup>

The ETH Board expects institutional activities as well as close cooperation and collaboration within the ETH Domain among its institutions on the five topics (see Fig. 1).

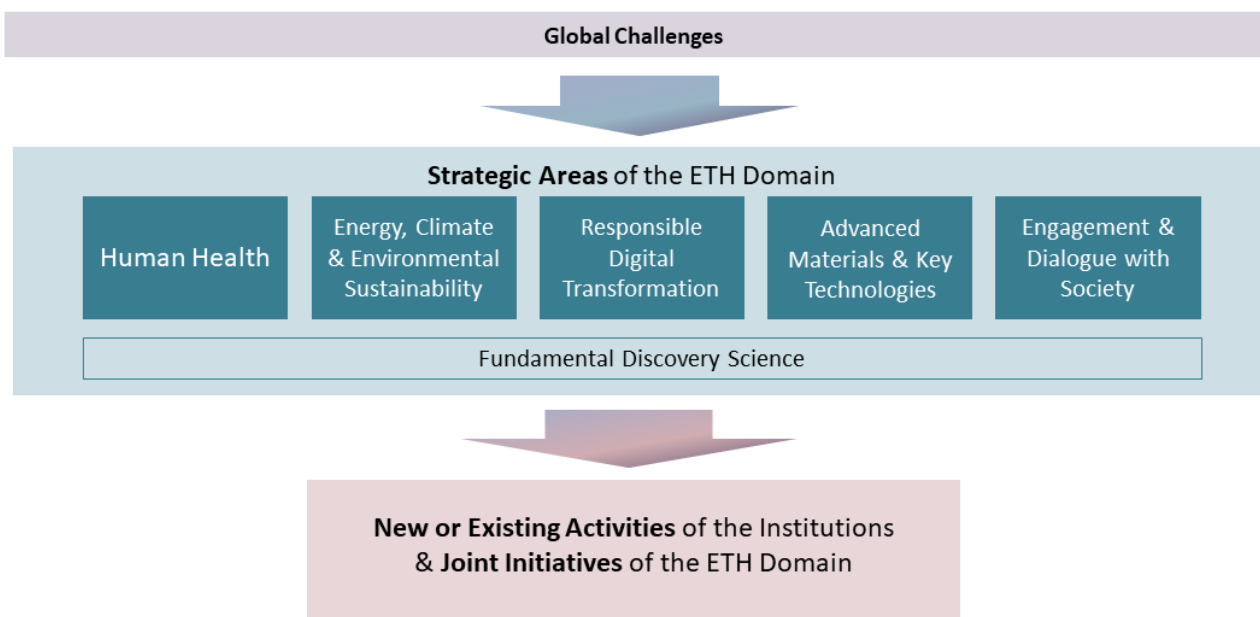


Fig. 1: Addressing challenges of global trends in environment, economy and society, the five strategic areas of the ETH Domain for the period 2025-28 aim at creating sustainable impact through institutional activities and in particular, through strategic collaborative Joint Initiatives between institutions (Figure adapted from p16 of the Strategic Plan 2025 – 2028 of the ETH Board for the ETH Domain).

This call for Joint Initiatives focuses on the three Strategic Areas **Human Health, Responsible Digital Transformation** as well as **Advanced Materials and Key Technologies**. [Joint Initiatives in the remaining two Strategic Areas](#) were selected in an open call in 2022, are supported by the ETH Board by 39 MCHF over three years, and are currently being implemented.

<sup>1</sup> Besides these defined Strategic Areas, the ETH Board emphasises the importance of **fundamental discovery science** as the cornerstone of all the ETH Domain institutions' research activities.

**Joint Initiatives** are large, strategic, and collaborative initiatives in one or more Strategic Areas of the ETH Domain. They should include at least two institutions of the ETH Domain and cannot be realized without seed funding.<sup>2</sup>

Engagement with external partners is encouraged and exceptionally proposals can be submitted by one institution of the ETH Domain with an external partner if that partner is essential for the ETH Domain to create critical impact.

Joint Initiatives include cash or in-kind contributions by all partners (= *co-funding*) and will be co-financed by the ETH Board based on matching contributions, i.e., at most 50% of the cost of the Joint Initiative will be funded by the ETH Board (= *matching*).<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Scope of the Call

The **Strategic Areas** targeted in this call are:

- **Human Health**
- **Responsible Digital Transformation**
- **Advanced Materials and Key Technologies**

The content of each Strategic Area is described on p.16-25 in the [Strategic Plan](#) of the ETH Board for the ETH Domain. All proposed Joint Initiatives must fall within the definition of **at least one of the targeted Strategic Areas**.

In addition, each proposed Joint Initiative must be of **high strategic importance** for the institutions involved and the ETH Domain as a whole.

In addition, Joint Initiatives:

- involve at least two institutions of the ETH Domain.
- strive ...
  - to create solutions of national or global relevance and to achieve a tangible impact on the economy and society in Switzerland and beyond and/or
  - to build up new competences and capabilities inside the ETH Domain that enable cutting-edge research in the addressed Strategic Areas
- require a high level of inter-institutional coordination and cooperation that an individual institution cannot bear alone to achieve (inter-)national excellence.
- have a longer-term horizon and lead to new institutionalised forms of collaboration beyond the period of receiving matching funds by the ETH Board.
- exploit the potential lying in the diversity of disciplines within the ETH domain and utilise complementary competencies across disciplines and institutions.

*Out of Scope are:*

- Standard (collaborative) research or innovation projects that receive or are eligible to submit proposals to the available funding instruments of e.g., SNSF or Innosuisse.
- Projects submitted to the call for Open Research Data (ORD) activities in the ETH Domain.

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<sup>2</sup> As per decision of the ETH Board from 21 September 2021.

- Projects on the Swiss Research Infrastructure Roadmap
- Initiatives that do not have an evident long-term horizon (e.g., do not provide a basis for lasting institutionalised forms of collaboration)

### 3 Applicant Eligibility

All prospective applicants must discuss their ideas for Joint Initiatives with their institutions to **receive institutional support** as soon as possible (see section 6.1 for the institutional contacts). Institutions will provide the Steering Committee with a list of potential ideas prior to their next meeting on 18 October.

**Only ideas for Joint Initiatives that receive such institutional support can subsequently be invited to submit a pre-proposal and proceed with the process.**

At the pre-proposal and full proposal stages a team of applicants consists of **at least two leading applicants from at least two different institutions of the ETH Domain**. As an exception and only if required to achieve the aim of the Joint Initiative or its impact, one of the leading applicants may be from a partner institution outside the ETH Domain.

All leading applicants must be employed permanently or in a tenure track programme, covering the duration of the proposed Joint Initiative, and in a position to carry out initiatives under their responsibility and to lead/employ staff both scientifically and as personnel.

External partners may participate in a Joint Initiative proposal but are not eligible to receive matching funds from the ETH Board.

### 4 Budget and Eligible Costs

The maximum total budget for matching funds by the ETH Board foreseen for this Call for Joint Initiatives in all three Strategic Areas is **20 million CHF per year for a period of 3 years**. Within this budgetary frame, the Steering Committee intends to propose to the ETH Board **a small number of Joint Initiatives per Strategic Area** for funding. Joint Initiatives may request matching contributions from the ETH Board for a maximum of **36 months** via this call.

**Eligible are costs directly aimed towards achieving the goal of the Joint Initiative (JI).**

These may include:

- materials and equipment,
- networking activities, public events, and workshops,
- knowledge and technology transfer activities, including costs for communication, dissemination, and exploitation of results within the co-financing period (as far as they can't be covered by other means)
- staff salaries and other costs directly attributable to achieve the aim of the JI.

*Not eligible are:*

- the applicants' own salaries

- costs for research activities that fall within the scope of a project, already receiving or being eligible to receive funding from national research and innovation funding agencies (e.g. SNSF, Innosuisse, etc.)
- costs for activities already receiving or being eligible to receive funding in the call for Open Research Data (ORD) activities in the ETH Domain.
- costs for projects registered in the Swiss Roadmap for Research Infrastructure 2023.

For clarification: Not eligible means that the costs can neither be requested as matching contributions from the ETH Board nor can they be used as co-funding contributions by the institutions.

## 5 Co-Funding Rules

- The ETH Board will finance up to 50% of the total costs of a Joint Initiative (= matching funds).
- ETH Board matching funds are only available for ETH Domain institutions.
- The institutional contribution can be in-kind or cash. Management costs for the initiative should be included in the institutional contribution.
- Co-funding means funds that are not earmarked for any other purpose. Eligible are:
  - basic funds (first party funding) of the institutions,
  - other funds (also from external partners) which were specifically raised for the Joint Initiative, and
  - other funds that are at the free disposal of the applicants without being tied to another project.

*Not eligible as co-funding are:*

- contributions that are used outside the ETH Domain institutions, e.g., at external partners, and
- funding granted for other projects (see also section 4).

## 6 Application and Assessment Procedure

### 6.1 Institutional pre-process

All institutions of the ETH Domain are invited to provide the Joint Initiatives Steering Committee with a list of strategically important potential Joint Initiatives (those that received institutional support). This pre-selection process takes place at senior management level within the institutions and is based on the institutional strategic planning.

The Steering Committee will meet on **18 October 2023** to discuss the submitted lists of ideas and select those that will be invited for pre-proposals (Step 1). The Steering Committee decision will take the following factors into account:

- **Strategic relevance for the institution and the ETH Domain as a whole**
- **Balance of topics within a Strategic Area**
- **Availability of resources**

The **invitation to submit a pre-proposal** (Step 1) will be issued to the contact of the leading institution on the list of ideas. Every institution of the ETH Domain will receive a full list of selected ideas for their information.

## 6.2 Step 1 – Pre-proposal

Applicants must submit a **2-page pre-proposal** in English, using the official pre-proposal template (Annex A) until **13 December 2023** (midnight) to [grants@psi.ch](mailto:grants@psi.ch). **By participating in a submission, the involved institutions confirm in principle the availability of the necessary co-funding contributions.**

The Steering Committee assesses the submitted pre-proposals based on the Scope of the Call (*see section 2*). Applicants will receive an invitation to submit a full proposal if a pre-proposal passes this assessment.

## 6.3 Step 2 – Full proposal

Applicants who are invited to submit a full proposal will be informed until 05 February 2024. Full proposals must be submitted in English until **24 March 2024** (midnight) to [grants@psi.ch](mailto:grants@psi.ch) using the official proposal template (Annex B) and providing a yearly budget breakdown by institution (Annex C). Please refer to sections 5 and 6 as well as to Annex D for detailed guidance regarding eligible costs and co-funding requirements. Full proposals must include a commitment letter from each contributing ETH Domain institution, detailing the institutional co-funding commitment to this initiative (template in Annex E).

Full proposals will be reviewed by a group of experts consisting of

- a) senior members of the ETH Domain institutions not involved in any proposal
- b) national and international scientific experts from outside of the ETH Domain
- c) external stakeholders within the fields covered by the Strategic Areas targeted in this call

Each Strategic Area will have its own expert group. Chaired by an independent senior figure with a broad understanding of the Swiss landscape in the field, it will provide the Joint Initiatives Steering Committee with a consolidated detailed review report, focusing on improving the quality of the Joint Initiative. Full proposal applicants will receive detailed guidance at the time of the invitation.

On the basis of this report, the Steering Committee makes a final recommendation to the ETH Board for its funding decision.

## 7 Follow Up

Each participating institution must name a scientific co-chair who is responsible for the deliverables and reporting requirements for their institution to the leading house of the Joint Initiative. All Joint Initiatives are encouraged to establish a consortium agreement to clarify their respective rights and responsibilities. The Management Office will provide a consortium agreement template which can be amended as required.

A Management Office with dedicated Scientific Officers – see “Contacts” below - (i) acts as contact points for the communication between the Joint Initiatives, the Steering Committee, and the ETH

Board, (ii) oversees the management of the assessment process, and (iii) supports the Joint Initiatives during implementation.

Initial matching funding by the ETH Board is granted for 3 years. The first tranches of matching funds will be transferred to the leading institution of a selected Joint Initiative in January 2025. But Joint Initiatives may start after acceptance already in autumn 2024. Possibility for an extension will depend on the strategic planning of the ETH Board beyond 2028 and will be communicated to successful grant holders in due course as appropriate.

The selected Joint Initiatives will provide a **detailed implementation plan**, which must be approved by the Steering Committee **before the start** of the Joint Initiative. Each Joint Initiative must submit an **annual financial and scientific report**.

### Important Dates:

Steering Committee for selection of pre-proposals	18 October 2023
Pre-proposal submission deadline	13 December 2023
Information of applicants invited to submit full proposals	05 February 2024
Full proposal submission deadline	24 March 2024
Information of successful applicants	15 July 2024
Submission of the Implementation Plans	End of September 2024
Approval of Implementation Plans and earliest start	October 2024
First transfer of approved ETH Board matching funds	January 2025

### Contacts:

- For general and administrative questions regarding the call: [Dr. Michèle Erat \(PSI\)](#)
- Scientific Officer **Human Health**: [Dr. Friederike Saathoff \(ETH Zürich\)](#)
- Scientific Officer **Responsible Digital Transformation**: [research@epfl.ch](mailto:research@epfl.ch)
- Scientific Officer **Advanced Materials and Key Technologies**: [Dr. Lars Sommerhäuser \(Empa\)](#)

Frequently asked questions will be made available on the call website: <https://www.psi.ch/de/strategic-areas-eth-domain/joint-initiatives-eth-domain>

## 8 Additional documents provided to invited applicants

- A) Template Pre-proposal
- B) Template Full proposal
- C) Budget Table
- D) Guidance regarding eligible costs and co-funding requirements
- E) Template Commitment Letter of the contributing institutions