



---

<sup>b</sup>  
**UNIVERSITÄT  
BERN**

Digitization commission

---

## Application Procedure for the Funding of Profile Rising Projects "The Human Being in Digital Transformation" (Status 04/2024)

---

### Brief Description:

- *The procedure specified here concerns the application for funding for research projects with a strong potential for profiling the University of Bern around the lead topic of its 2030 Digitalization Strategy "The Human Being in Digital Transformation."*
- *Eligible applicants are persons mainly employed at the University of Bern as researchers with a remaining contract duration that covers at least the four-year project period.*
- *Funding can be requested for projects with a total volume of 500'000 CHF, 750'000 CHF, or 1'000'000 CHF.*
- *If the application is successful, the first two project years are to be financed with university funds amounting to 250'000 CHF, 375'000 CHF, or 500'000 CHF, while financial commitments of the same amount must be provided by a faculty or several faculties for the last two project years.*
- *The deadline for submitting applications for project financing starting in the 1st quarter of 2025 or at the latest in July 2025 is September 20, 2024.*

### (1) Strategic Scope

In its [Digitalization Strategy 2030](#), the University of Bern formulates the strategic goal of (a) creating basic and applied knowledge on the lead topic "The Human Being in Digital Transformation" ("Mensch in Digitaler Transformation", MidT) and (b) promoting knowledge exchange between internal and external researchers, critical reflection of research results, and sustainable knowledge transfer to society (Ziel 2.2). The derived field of action concerns "digitalization-related research activities that are to be promoted at the university level if they have a direct connection to the lead topic of the university's digitalization strategy. In particular, projects focusing on the human being in the digital transformation process or the development of digital tools that support them in coping with existing challenges, be it in professional, everyday life or in university research, teaching, administration, or service." (Handlungsfeld 3.4).

## **(2) Implementation**

To implement the goal formulated under (1), the Universitätsleitung (UL) has allocated funding of 20 million CHF for the years 2023–2027. Of this amount, 17 million CHF (as of 04/2024) is intended for the funding of MidT profile rising projects and potentially additional funding lines, if applicable, with the allocation of funds proposed by the university's Digitalisierungskommission (DigiK) in four waves of 2–4 million CHF each to support four-year research projects starting in 2023, 2024, 2025, or 2026.

The remaining 3 million CHF (as of 12/2022) is intended for addressing research assignments formulated by the DigiK focus group "Digitale Lehre" (with representatives from VRL, ZUW, HD, iLUB, SUB), financing MidT-related events, and promoting perspective projects of the academic middle class. Implementation provisions for these measures, including descriptions of any necessary application procedures, were developed for the FS 2023.

The previously defined fund allocation and details of the application procedure specified here for the funding of MidT profile rising projects have been and will be subject to ongoing critical reviews with the consequence of any necessary adjustments. In case of a positive final evaluation, it is planned to examine the continuation of the measures beyond 2026.

## **(3) Eligibility for Application**

Eligible to apply for funding for profile rising projects are members of the University of Bern with a research component in their full-time employment, as well as with an existing contract duration or one planned within the scope of a *tenure* process, which covers at least the four-year duration of the project being applied for funding.

Applications for financing the first two project years can be submitted by individuals or groups of individuals, provided that the application is accompanied by a commitment from one or more faculties to finance the last two project years. Researchers at the Kompetenzzentren submit (if applicable, shared) applications through their disciplinary faculties and not through their administrative faculties.

## **(4) Project Volum and Duration**

Funding can be applied for the implementation of projects with a total volume of 500'000 CHF, 750'000 CHF, or 1'000'000 CHF for a four-year duration. This means that if the application is successful, funding amounts of 250'000 CHF, 375'000 CHF, or 500'000 CHF must be used for the first two project years, while financing for the last two project years - in the absence of any third-party funding - must be provided through the financial commitment of the participating faculty(ies).

In the medium term, the DigiK aims to propose projects for support from the given funding volume beyond profile rising projects of previously specified sizes at the UL, which are characterized by a special potential in terms of the expected acquisition of third-party funding and therefore justify funding beyond the mentioned amounts. In this context, the expectation associated with the approval of funding for profiling projects is that successful applicants will attempt to acquire third-party funding within the four project years and thus subject their research to the competitive scientific review process.

## **(5) Faculty Involvement and Commitment**

The allocation of funds requires - in the sense of a "matching fund" - a financial guarantee of the same amount for the realization of the last two project years. This guarantee must be provided by the faculty to which the applicant (in the case of researchers of the Kompetenzzentren: disciplinary) belongs when submitting the application. In the case of multiple applicants with different faculty

affiliations, proportional financial guarantees from all participating faculties must be included in the application.

Considering the total funding of 2-4million CHF per application wave, only between nine (exclusively projects with a total volume of 1'000'000 CHF) and 18 (exclusively projects with a total volume of 500'000 CHF) funding applications can be approved across the entire university. Against this background, the requirement for faculties to provide a financial guarantee is also to be understood as a call to the deans to strategically assess this process at the faculty level and in terms of the actual contribution of the faculty to the university's profiling regarding the MidT guiding theme. The submission of guarantees should therefore be limited to a manageable number of project applications that are of particular strategic interest to the faculty(ies) in terms of their contribution to the university's profiling on the MidT lead topic and that are also in line with any existing faculty (digitization) strategies and coordinated with the relevant faculty committees. It should be noted that the submission of financial guarantees is tantamount to a factual preliminary examination and evaluation of the applications by the faculty(ies). In this context, faculties are also encouraged to support the DigiK members in the cross-faculty evaluation of timely submitted applications by submitting procedural suggestions.

Faculties are free - taking into account any conflicting budget requirements - to choose which resources to use for providing financial guarantees. This means, in particular, that in addition to drawing on strategic faculty reserves, funds can also be contributed by the applicants themselves or the institutes, departments, or Kompetenzzentren to which they are assigned. However, in the case of mixed financing of this kind, it should be noted that the use of third-party funds, e.g., from the SNF, for related topics is not desired (see evaluation criteria in (7) (b)) and that this does not relieve the faculty(ies) of the sole responsibility for providing the financial guarantee to the DigiK, nor from limiting the number of applications it supports based on aspects of the faculty's strategic orientation and its contribution to the university's profiling on the MidT topic.

## **(6) Using of the Funds**

The intended use of funds must be specified in the application on an annual basis, with the purposes of use being derived stringently from the formulated project goals and content. In view of the sub-strategy 4 of the *University Strategy 2030* to promote young researchers, it is particularly expected that the question will be examined to what extent a focus on using funds for financing research personnel with qualification tasks appears to be appropriate.

Against this background, it is expected that applications will primarily focus on project funding in the form of personnel resources (doctorates or post-doctorates, but also research associates, teaching assistants or – possibly only temporarily employed – developers). Applications can also be made for necessary scientific services from internal support units of the university (both faculty-based, such as *technology platform*, *Clinical Trial Unit*, or *statistical consulting*, as well as interfaculty from the newly established *Data Science Lab*, *DSL*, of the university). Requested material resources should preferably concern costs incurred in the context of research (e.g. test subject payments) or dissemination activities (e.g. conference participation). When applying for material resources for the acquisition of hardware or software (or similar), evidence is expected that these acquisitions cannot be made from other sources (budgets of institutes, faculties or Kompetenzzentren, but also the university's *Steuerungsgruppe Digitalisierung* SDIG).

## **(7) Review process and evaluation criteria**

For the application wave of 2024, a three-stage (peer) review process will be carried out - following coordination with the Universitätsleitung and all faculties - comprising the following stages:

- (a) content and faculty strategic pre-assessment of applications, including matching fund decision at the faculty level, with a detailed specification of the procedure by the respective faculty, preferably involving a faculty selection committee and, if necessary, requesting external expert opinions,

- (b) assessment of applications by the Forschungskommission with regard to scientific quality, separated by the criteria of qualification of the applicant(s), innovation and novelty of the project idea, quality of the research plan, suitability of the (research) methodology, feasibility of project work, and expected leverage effect of project implementation, each with 0-3 points (with 0 = to be rejected for formal reasons; 1 = significant weaknesses; 2 = good; 3 = very good), and transmission of the respective detailed evaluations and the resulting unrounded average as the overall score to the DigiK,
- (c) ranking of applications by the voting members of the DigiK based on the evaluations of the Research Commission and additional consideration of strategic criteria - particularly with regard to the MidT profile rising potential of the application for the university - in cases of doubt, involving (external) expert opinions and forwarding the final recommended funding applications to the UL.

### **(8) Project Implementation**

Projects positively assessed by the DigiK and decided upon by the UL must start no later than July of the following year (for the 2024 application wave, this means no later than July 2025) and must be completed within four years from that point. In the case of using the granted funds for financing doctorate positions, the successful completion of the project-related doctoral degree(s) should also be aimed for during the project duration.

By accepting the project funds, the supported individuals also commit to:

- presenting their respective projects on a designated university website and/or at a university event upon invitation of DigiK,
- submitting a generally understandable summary and maintaining a project tile on the designated university website during the project duration,
- submitting a content and financial progress report no later than 3 months after the end of the second project year, and
- submitting a content and financial final report no later than 3 months after the end of the project.

In the event of missing presentations or reports, the DigiK reserves the right to recommend to the UL the suspension of project financing or even the reclaiming of transferred funds.

### **(9) Application Wave 2024**

In the 2024 application wave, proposals for funding profile rising projects can be submitted, which must start no later than July 2025 (preferably already during the 1st quarter of 2025) and have a duration of four years from that point.

Funding applications and reporting templates can be downloaded at the following address on the University of Bern's website for project funding, under the keyword "Profile Raising Projects":

[https://www.digitalisierung.unibe.ch/implementation/applications/applications\\_to\\_the\\_digik/](https://www.digitalisierung.unibe.ch/implementation/applications/applications_to_the_digik/)

Submissions of funding applications must be sent electronically in PDF format as an email attachment by the deadline of Friday, September 20, 2024, 12:00 noon, to the Head of the Digitalization Office of the University of Bern and Managing Director of DigiK, Dr. Sascha Tayefeh:

[fs-digitalisierung@unibe.ch](mailto:fs-digitalisierung@unibe.ch)