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**UNIVERSITÄT
BERN**

Digitization Commission

Application Procedure for Funding Preparatory Projects for Network Project Proposals by the Digitization Commission, DigiK (As of 04/2024)

Brief Description:

- *The procedure specified here concerns the application for funding to prepare network proposals that are intended to enhance the national and international profile of the University of Bern within the framework of its [Digitization Strategy 2030](#).*
- *If the application for a preparatory project in 2024 is successful, the applicants are obliged to submit an application for funding for a network project worth between 2'000'000 and 3'000'000 CHF for 4 years in the following application round in 2025.*
- *For preparatory projects, funding of up to 100'000 CHF can be applied for a duration of one year.*
- *The aim of network proposals is to build innovative, integrative and sustainable synergies between research units and centers ("Zentren"), involving 4 applicants from at least 2 faculties, in order to investigate relevant complex research topics in a multidisciplinary manner.*
- *By submitting a network proposal, the applicants commit themselves, if successful, to submit a third-party funding application of a comparable amount to the funding sum in the first half of the 4-year funding period (if not approved, with a prompt resubmission), as well as to offer at least 3 new, ideally interdisciplinary, student courses related to the project.*
- *Network projects will be evaluated midway after two years, including the realization of the above-mentioned obligations. The basis for this will be a general and scientific interim report as well as a presentation within the framework of a one-day workshop with the DigiK.*
- *Eligible to apply for preparatory projects and larger network projects are full-time researchers at the University of Bern with a contract duration of at least 1+4 = 5 years from the start of funding, and whose research component allows for a correspondingly high level of commitment.*
- *Applications for network projects can also be submitted without prior submission of a preparatory project.*
- *The deadline for submitting applications for the financing of preparatory projects, which must be started by January 2025 at the latest, is 20.09.2024.*
- *The first call for network proposals is planned for spring 2025 with a submission deadline of 19.09.2025.*

(1) Strategic Framework

After evaluating the previous funding measures of the DigiK, in the form of profile-raising and perspective projects in research as well as teaching-related projects, with the respective funding invested in them so far, the Executive Board of the University of Bern decided to launch an additional funding line for establishing larger innovative network structures within the university following a suggestion of the DigiK. These should be designed to be sustainable, interfaculty and integrative, promote synergies between existing research units and centers, and have the potential to establish a novel research association/center and/or to apply for an NCCR or comparable research focus areas. In order to explore these potentials and underline the character of overcoming faculty boundaries, this funding line will not require matching funds from faculties, but rather oblige the applicants to submit a third-party funding application during the first half of the funding period in a comparable amount to the funding sum. If this is not approved, the applicants are obliged to promptly resubmit the third-party funding application.

The new orientation of this funding line is also intended to emphasize that the complexity of today's pressing research topics in the field of digital transformation and its global, national, and individual impacts requires the interaction of a wide variety of disciplines. It should also encourage making use of the university-wide framework in Bern to combine technical/natural-scientific, humanities, social sciences, economics, law, medical and ethical aspects in innovative combinations. The required offering of three new, ideally interdisciplinary courses related to the project is intended to guarantee the impact of this interdisciplinary approach in teaching.

(2) Implementation

For the allocation of preparatory projects, 500'000 CHF is available per call in 2024 and 2025, and for network proposals, 3'000'000 CHF is available per call in 2025 and 2026.

The DigiK plans to leave the funding volume for profiling projects unchanged in the current 2024 application round and to reduce it to 2'000'000 CHF in favor of network projects in the last 2025 application round.

The DigiK reserves the right to adjust the respective financial frameworks for strategic reasons if the application situation in the respective funding lines requires it.

(3) Project Volume and Duration

The new funding line consists of two application rounds and has two temporally staggered parts in each case, consisting of a preparatory project of up to 100'000 CHF for one year and the subsequent network proposal of 2'000'000 to 3'000'000 CHF for four years. Preparatory projects can be applied for on 20.09.2024 or 19.09.2025, with the following network proposals to be submitted on 19.09.2025 or 18.09.2026, respectively.

(4) Eligibility and Conditions for Applicants

Eligible to apply for funds to support preparatory projects and subsequent network projects are members of the University of Bern with a full-time research component in their employment and with an existing or envisaged contract duration as part of a *tenure* procedure that covers at least the 1+4 = 5-year funding period of the preparatory project and the mandatory subsequent network proposal.

Both applications for preparatory projects and for the subsequent network projects must be submitted by at least 4 applicants from at least 2 different faculties, each with significant commitment and financial contribution.

The employment situation of the applicants and the research component of their position must allow them to maintain the required high level of commitment for 5 years in the event of success, including the submission of a substantial third-party funding application.

Applications for network projects can also be submitted without prior submission of a preparatory project, in principle, outside of the circle of funded preparatory projects, provided that all other required conditions are met.

By submitting a network proposal, the applicants undertake to submit a third-party funding application of a comparable amount to the funding sum during the first half of the 4-year funding period, as well as to offer at least 3 new, ideally interdisciplinarily relevant courses with at least 3 ECTS credits related to the project. Furthermore, the applicants are obliged to resubmit the third-party funding application if it is not approved.

(5) Use of Funds

The intended use of funds must be specified in the application for a preparatory project, whereby the purposes of use should follow stringently from the nature and research orientation of the planned subsequent network project.

(6) Review Procedure and Evaluation Criteria

In the 2024 call for preparatory projects, DigiK will evaluate the submitted proposals based on the following criteria, which also determine the structure of the content section of the proposal:

1. Potential for enhancing the University of Bern's research profile with regard to the Digitalization Strategy 2030 and other strategic goals;
2. Innovativeness, interdisciplinarity and sustainability of the project idea;
3. Qualification of the applicants in terms of research and implementation of the project idea;
4. Potential for synergies with existing research units and centers from different faculties, concretized in a research program that addresses an overarching research goal to be achieved through cooperation and close interweaving of the research work of the participating groups.
5. Impact on junior researcher training at various levels;
6. Feasibility of the project idea within the University of Bern.

Each voting member evaluates every proposal for which there is no conflict of interest, awarding 0-3 points each (with 0 = to be rejected for formal reasons; 1 = significant weaknesses; 2 = good; 3 = very good). The overall score of a proposal is the unrounded mean resulting from all evaluations.

The resulting ranking of the proposals forms the basis for DigiK's recommendation of the preparatory project proposals deemed worthy of funding to the University Board.

Applications for network projects are evaluated in a multi-stage process in cooperation with the Research Commission and involving external reviews. In addition, they undergo an interim evaluation after two years.

(7) Project Implementation

Projects positively evaluated by DigiK and approved by the University Board must commence no later than January of the following year (in the 2024 call: no later than 1st of January 2025) and must be completed within one year from that date.

By accepting the project funds, the applicants also commit to:

- to use the funding as requested;
- to submit a network proposal in the scope detailed above by the 19th of September 2025.

In case of no network proposal being submitted, DigiK reserves the right to recommend to the University Board that project funding be discontinued or that transferred funds be reclaimed.

(8) Application and Deadline for 2024 Call

The content part of an application for a preparatory project must not exceed a total of 4 pages (minimum font size 11pt). It is structured into the following sections: 0. Description of the project idea and the planned network project (maximum 2 pages), the further points 1. to 6. correspond to the structure from section (6) (maximum 2 pages).

Funding application forms can be downloaded from the University of Bern's project funding website under the "Preparatory Projects" section at the following address:

https://www.digitalisierung.unibe.ch/implementation/applications/applications_to_the_digik

Funding applications for preparatory projects must be submitted electronically by **20th of September 2024 / 12:00 pm (noon)**, to the Head of the Digitalization Office of the University and Executive Secretary of DigiK, Dr. Sascha Tayefeh:

fs-digitalisierung@unibe.ch