

Bern, 9 September 2024

UniBE Venture Fellowship Guidelines

1. Fellowship Objectives

The UniBE Venture Fellowship aims to foster the creation of knowledge-driven ventures and promote an entrepreneurial culture at the University of Bern, the Bern University Hospital (Inselspital) and the University Hospital of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy (UPD). The Fellowship supports academics in translating cutting-edge research into new products and services.

Through the program, financial support is provided, allowing the Fellows to:

- further develop application-focused research to validate their proof of concept (PoC) and determine its commercial potential with the intention to create their own venture, and
- acquire entrepreneurial skills and develop a relevant network essential for their venture creation.

2. Eligibility Criteria

An applicant must meet the following requirements:

- MA and PhD applicants as well as applicants with a medical degree can submit their application at the earliest up to 6 months before the graduation date.
- Postdoctoral applicants, assistant physicians, and scientific staff of the University and the Inselspital are also eligible to apply but will need to end the current employment contract before starting the Venture Fellowship (see [section 6.2.](#))
- Basic research projects are not eligible.
- The candidate must be supported and hosted by the lead professor or researcher of their respective research group at the University of Bern (Head of Research Group), the Inselspital, or the UPD, which confirms the Fellows' access to the necessary infrastructure during the entire Fellowship (see [section 4.2.](#)).

- In principle, applicants have not yet incorporated a company with the purpose of commercializing the product or service mentioned in the application.

In case of an initial rejection, the applicant may re-submit the proposal for the same project on the condition that there are substantial improvements. Candidates may not apply more than twice for the same project. Upon specific request or recommendation, applications of individuals who have not yet been affiliated with the University of Bern, the Inselspital or the UPD can be accepted on a case-to-case basis, provided that they are supported by a Head of Research Group of either institution by the start of the Fellowship.

The accepted Fellow must start the Fellowship within six months of being accepted into the program. There is no legal entitlement to the awarding of the UniBE Venture Fellowship to any person nor entity.

3. Funding Sources and Scope of Research

The Fellowships are funded jointly by:

- the Vice-Rectorate Research and Innovation of the University of Bern,
- the ARTORG Center for Biomedical Engineering Research,
- the Directorate for Teaching and Research (*Direktion für Lehre und Forschung – DLF*) of the Inselspital.

Additional Fellowships may be funded through sponsors in collaboration with the UniBE Foundation.

4. Application Requirements

4.1. Application Form

The applicant applies through the application form in English, which includes:

- An **executive summary** outlining the proposed solution's innovation potential, market potential, and the planned steps to realize these potentials through the Fellowship.
- A **brief motivation statement** outlining the applicant's motivation for pursuing a research-driven venture creating project and how it aligns with their long-term career goals.
- A detailed **description of the idea** based on the applicant's research. The description should focus on:
 - addressing the problem for which the proposed solution is intended,
 - which type of product or service the proposed solution will be developed into,
 - why the product or service is considered innovative (e.g. providing a unique solution to an existing market, addressing a new market, creating a new

business model or revenue stream, providing the first solution to a long-standing problem, etc.)

- a business plan, which details the target market and its needs, as well as the unique value proposition (UVP) of the product or service,
 - technical feasibility and market analysis, and
 - current or potential stakeholders (e.g. research partners, first customers, business angels, etc.).
- A **project plan** including the main activities to be carried out during the Fellowship, including milestones, deliverables, and expected outcomes.
 - Information related to **IP protection** (see [section 4.3](#)).
 - A **budget plan** detailing the intended use of the grant (e.g. salary¹, consumables, etc.).
 - A full disclosure of any **potential conflicts of interests** and/or any other factors that may adversely affect the applicant's successful completion of the Fellowship.

4.2. Annex

In addition to the application form, the following documents are required:

- **A completed and updated Curriculum Vitae** of the applicant.
- **A letter of support issued by the Head of Research Group**, which states the following:
 - The motivation to support the applicant in pursuing the Fellowship.
 - A confirmation that the Institute or the Department will grant the Fellow access to the necessary infrastructure to conduct the research for the entire duration of the Fellowship.
 - An acknowledgement of the terms and conditions as outlined in the Venture Fellowship guidelines, particularly those related to the financial responsibility and accountability.²

4.3. Basic Intellectual Property Assessment

Applicants are required to disclose the invention/discovery/idea to Unictetra with explicit reference to the UniBE Venture Fellowship application prior to the start of the UniBE Venture Fellowship. Unictetra is the organization responsible for protecting and licensing of research results produced at the University of Bern.

Applicants are also required to meet with the relevant Technology Transfer Manager for an initial assessment of the IP protectability. Please refer to [Unictetra's website](#) for more information.

¹ Salary must be budgeted according to the conditions and salary classification outlined in [section 6.2](#).

² The Fellow must create a third-party funding account (Drittmittelkonto) at the start of the Fellowship and is solely responsible for the use of funding (see [section 6.1](#)).

5. Evaluation Process

5.1. Formal Evaluation

The Innovation Office will check the eligibility (as per [section 2](#)) and the completion (as per [section 4](#)) of the submitted applications. Incomplete and/or ineligible applications will be instantly rejected by the Innovation Office.

5.2. Evaluation Criteria

The application will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

5.2.1. Criteria 1: Quality of research project and innovation potential

- The research plan is clear, coherent, well-structured, and feasible with attainable milestones within the given timeline of the Fellowship.
- The problem statement is relevant and clear.
- The novelty of the proposed solution is evident.
- Any questions or concerns relevant to the IP rights are addressed and clarified.

5.2.2. Criteria 2: Market and product

- Applicant successfully identifies an addressable market for the product or service and demonstrates their understanding of this market's challenges and opportunities (e.g. through a brief SWOT Analysis, Porter's Five Forces analysis, or any other market analysis models).
- Applicant successfully demonstrates their understanding of the problems of the customers or end-users, for which the product or service will solve.
- The solution provided through the product or service has a competitive advantage through its clearly defined UVP.
- The product or service has a clear impact on the environment, the society, and/or the economy (e.g. by referring to [the UN's Sustainable Development Goals](#) or by using any impact innovation analysis tools).

5.2.3. Criteria 3: Business model

The applicant presents a clear and sustainable business model, which includes the following aspects:

- a viable revenue model,
- the scalability of the proposed solution,
- a pricing strategy,
- a sales channel (direct sales) or a distribution network (indirect sales),
- resource requirements, and
- existing or planned partnerships.

5.2.4. *Criteria 4: Entrepreneurial skills/attitude and team*

The applicant must:

- demonstrate a strong entrepreneurial mindset, relevant skills, and high personal motivation,
- have previous professional or academic experience in venture creation or within the start-up ecosystem, or has previous trainings in entrepreneurship topics, and
- receive strong and relevant support from their host department, Head of Research Group, and other relevant supporter(s) or advisor(s).

5.3. Evaluation Committee

The Evaluation Committee consists of representatives from the following institutions:

- The Inselspital
- ARTORG, University of Bern
- The Innovation Office, University of Bern
- Two to three experts within the university of Bern or within the ecosystem (i.e. UniBE spin-off founders, foundations, investors, industry experts, etc.)

The two partner institutions – Unitectra and Be-Advanced – can, upon request, support the evaluation process by offering insights and addressing questions from their respective perspectives.

5.4. Pre-Selection

The Evaluation Committee will conduct a pre-selection based on the written applications and may request additional input from subject matter experts.

5.5. Pitch and Final Selection

The applicants who successfully pass the pre-selection round will be invited to a 15-minute interview. The interview includes a short pitch followed by a Q&A section. The interview panel consists of the Evaluation Committee, the Vice-Rector for Research and Innovation, and representatives of the partner institutions (i.e. Unitectra, Be-Advanced). The Vice-Rector for Research and Innovation will make the final decision upon the recommendation of the interview panel.

6. Funding and Employment

6.1. Funding

The Fellowship includes a funding budget of CHF 100'000, which must not be exceeded.

6.2. Employment Conditions

In principle, the Fellow will be employed as a research assistant (Wissenschaftliche*r Mitarbeiter*in). The Fellowship employment is based on a workload equivalent to 80% of a full-time position. The Fellowship typically lasts 12 calendar months³. The probation period is six calendar months from the start of the Fellowship. The salary of the Fellow will be classified according to the following categories:

- Candidate with a Master's degree⁴: WisMa⁵ VI, GK 19, GS 6
- Candidate with a PhD degree: WisMa IV, GK 20, GS 6
- Candidate with at least 2 years of Postdoc experience: WisMa III, GK 21, GS 6⁶

Note: The official salary class table of the Canton of Bern (applicable also to the University of Bern) can be consulted [here](#). To estimate the total personal costs, an additional 20% for the employer's social security contributions must be added to the salary indicated in the salary class table.

6.3. Employment of Additional Team Members

In justified cases, the agreed workload percentage of the UniBe Venture Fellows in the employment contract may be reduced to cover the salary costs of an additional team member, provided that the lead Venture Fellow remains fully focused on the innovation project. The additional team member is hired by the same institute that hosts the Venture Fellow.

The salary class of the additional team member will be determined through the standard hiring processes of the institute. If the applicant is planning to hire an additional team member, they are strongly advised to contact the Innovation Office before submitting the application to determine the details of the arrangement.

6.4. Fund Transferring

Upon the creation of the third-party funding account, the Innovation Office will transfer the funds to the Fellow's account as follows:

³ As the funding budget of CHF 100'000 must not be exceeded, the Fellowship may be shortened if necessary. An employment contract based on a workload equivalent to 100% of a full-time position is possible, contingent upon the availability of additional salary expenses (see [section 6.2.](#)) and other necessary research expenditures (see [section 7.3.](#)).

⁴ Including applicants with a medical degree

⁵ Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin / Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter: research assistant

⁶ Applicants above the age of 31 years old will be categorized in a different salary level.

- 75% of the funding budget (up to a maximum of CHF 75'000) is transferred at the start of the Fellowship.
- The remaining amount, up to the total Fellowship amount of CHF 100'000.-, is transferred after the Case Manager confirms the Fellow's completion of the program.

If the Fellow covers all the costs incurred by their project with the 75% of the funding budget, there will be no transfer of the remaining fund to the Fellow. If there are unused funds at the end of the Fellowship, this amount must be transferred back to the Innovation Office.

6.5. Eligible Costs and Budget Responsibilities

The funding budget can be used to cover the following expenses:

- Salary, including employer social security contributions, based on the University of Bern's salary categories for research assistants (see [section 6.2.](#)),
- Costs for essential training and coaching in venture creation (see [section 7.6.](#) and [section 7.7.](#)),
- Expenses for patent searches conducted through the Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property (IGE)⁷,
- Expenditures for research and development (R&D) operations (e.g. consumables, machinery, etc.), and
- Expenditures for travel and networking events related to the project.

The Fellow is designated as the budget manager through the creation of a third-party funding account (*Drittmittelkonto*) for their Fellowship project. The Fellow has the discretion to allocate project funds within the budget framework and is responsible for spending the money in a responsible and effective manner. The Fellow must regularly provide the Head of Research Group, who remains liable for any budget overspending, with an extract of the expenditures. The Fellow and the Head of Research Group will agree on specific mechanisms and processes with respect to accountability and budget discipline at the start of the Fellowship.

6.6. Supplementary Grants

In general, the Fellowship grant may be supplemented with project grants from other organizations that support applied research and commercialization, but not with grants for basic research. For BRIDGE PoC grants, the following conditions apply:

- If the applicant submits the same application in parallel to both the UniBE Venture Fellowship and the BRIDGE PoC program, they must disclose this on the Venture Fellowship application form. If both grant applications are

⁷ Note that the Innovation Office has a partnership with the IGE, according to which expenses for assisted patent searches and assisted patent landscape analysis is covered until February 2026. The search will also be conducted on behalf of the University of Bern – an academic institution – rather than on behalf of an individual.

successful, the applicant must choose one program and promptly inform the Innovation Office of their decision.

- If the Venture Fellow applies for and is accepted for the BRIDGE PoC grant *during* the Fellowship, they may request approval from the Innovation Office to use any remaining Venture Fellowship funds for expenses other than their own salary.

6.7. Ownership of Acquired Assets

Any assets and materials, including IT equipment, phones, software, machines, and other items purchased with the Venture Fellowship grant, shall remain the property of the University of Bern. Should the Venture Fellow wish to acquire used items at the end of the Fellowship, they must negotiate the terms with the designated representative of the institute.

7. Program Overview and Benefits

Venture Fellows receive both tangible and intangible support from the Innovation Office and its partner organizations. Besides funding, these include coaching, training, and any other resources essential for the Fellows' success. There are also certain conditions and expectations for the Fellows within and beyond the Fellowship program.

7.1. Individual Support and Coaching

The Innovation Office assigns each Fellow a Case Manager, who will provide support and guidance throughout the Fellowship. All Case Managers are Innovation and Startup Advisors of the Innovation Office.

The Fellow officially begins the Fellowship with a kick-off meeting between the Fellow and their assigned Case Manager. The meeting will outline key aspects of the Fellow's journey, including expected milestones, identified skill gaps and required training, as well as establishing a regular meeting schedule with the Case Manager.

7.2. Milestones

The milestones and deliverables defined in the accepted proposal will be reviewed and, if necessary, adapted prior to the kick-off meeting with the Case Manager and potentially other stakeholders (e.g. Head of Research Group, be-advanced Coach, etc.).

Please refer to the document "[Defining Milestones for the UniBE Venture Fellowship](#)" for further details and guidance.

7.3. Infrastructure

The Head of Research Group will ensure that the Fellow has full access to the essential R&D infrastructure, as explicitly stated in the Head's letter of support.

7.4. Intellectual Property

The University of Bern retains all the rights to the outcomes of the research project during the Fellowship, including any related intellectual property rights. Any commercialization of research results and property rights is subject to licensing agreements with the University of Bern, represented in these negotiations by Unitectra. A meeting between the Fellow and Unitectra at the beginning of the Fellowship is required.

7.5. Research Integrity and Spin-off Regulations

The UniBE Venture Fellow adheres to the principles of scientific integrity⁸ and follows the guidelines from the Executive Board for the establishment of spin-off companies at the University of Bern (April 13, 2021).

7.6. Training

The Innovation Office may recommend relevant training programs in consultation with the Fellow. Primary training partners include the Entrepreneurship Center of the University of Bern, which offers the Business Concept course (Innosuisse Module 2), and the sitem-insel School (sitem Center for Translational Medicine and Biomedical Entrepreneurship), which provides education in translational medicine. Unless otherwise specified, the Fellowship grant should be used to cover any costs incurred by these training programs.

7.7. Coaching

The Innovation Office will refer the Fellow to be-advanced for support from be-advanced Coaches and potential participation in the be-advanced Challenge program. be-advanced is a cantonal agency responsible for innovation promotion in the canton of Bern. Please refer to [the website of be-advanced](#) for more information.

Additionally, depending on the needs and progress of the Venture Fellowship project, the Innovation Office may introduce the Fellow to its network of industry experts. The Fellowship grant should be used to cover any costs incurred by additional coaching.

⁸ See the University of Bern's [Regulations concerning scientific integrity](#), dated March 27, 2007.

7.8. Networking

The Fellow is required to proactively participate in networking events organized specifically for the UniBE Venture Fellowship program. This includes the InnoForum in the Fall semester and the Founders Forum in the Spring semester.

The Innovation Office may also suggest other internal and external events. Nevertheless, it is ultimately the Fellow's responsibility to identify and attend relevant events and platforms to connect with potential experts, partners, investors, and other key players. Unless otherwise specified, the Fellowship grant should be used to cover any costs incurred by these activities.

7.9. Communication

The UniBE Venture Fellow is required to:

- mention and reference the UniBE Venture Fellowship support and use the UniBE *innovation* label⁹ in all pitches and communication materials, and
- participate in communication activities of the UniBE Venture Fellowship program, which includes a personal interview and a photo shooting session.

UniBE Venture Fellows and alumni consent to being featured in communication and content on multiple communication platforms of the Innovation Office and the University of Bern.

The Fellows is also expected to participate as a presenter or speaker in any outreach activities associated with the Venture Fellowship program (see [section 7.8.](#)).

7.10. Final Evaluation and Presentation of Results

As the Fellowship nears completion, the Fellow will have a final meeting with their assigned Case Manager, the Head of the Innovation Office, and the Fellow's Head of Research Group for a final evaluation of the milestones. Additionally, a presentation of the progress and results achieved during the Fellowship to a selected panel of stakeholders may be considered.

7.11. Fellowship Completion and Beyond

The Fellow officially completes their UniBE Venture Fellowship program only upon the confirmation of their assigned Case Manager. Upon completion, the Fellow will receive a certificate of successful completion.

UniBE Venture Fellowship alumni are expected to continue promoting the program within their networks, share their experiences with prospective Fellows, and engage with other academic entrepreneurs at the University of Bern, the Inselspital, and the

⁹ Once incorporated, the UniBE Venture Fellow's startup must use the UniBE *startup* label instead of the *innovation* label (intended only for startup projects that are not yet incorporated).

UPD. This ongoing involvement will contribute to the entrepreneurial and innovation landscapes in the canton of Bern.