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**UNIVERSITÄT  
BERN**

**innovation** | *u<sup>b</sup>*

Bern, 30 March 2026

## UniBE Digital Venture Fellowship Guidelines

### 1. Fellowship Objectives

The Digital Venture Fellowship (DigiVeFe) is designed to support academic entrepreneurs and promote an entrepreneurial culture at the University of Bern (UniBE). The Fellowship aligns with the [Digitalization Strategy 2030](#) of the University of Bern, emphasizing “Human Being in Digital Transformation” – recognizing that digitalization is not merely a technological shift but a societal transformation that must place people at its center.

The programs provide researchers with the funding and coaching needed to:

- take the first steps toward commercializing their application-focused research and lay the foundation for their own venture,
- acquire entrepreneurial skills and build a relevant network essential for venture creation,
- ensure responsible implementation of digital solutions that address societal, environmental, and economic challenges.

By fostering a human-centered and innovation-driven approach, the UniBE Digital Venture Fellowship empowers researchers to bridge the gap between research and real-world impact while shaping the future of digital transformation.

### 2. Eligibility Criteria

An applicant must meet the following requirements:

- Individuals affiliated with the University of Bern holding a Master’s, PhD — and students enrolled in these programs who are within six months of completing their degree, are eligible to apply.
- Postdoctoral applicants and scientific staff of the University are also eligible to apply but will need to end the current employment contract before starting the UniBE Digital Venture Fellowship (see [section 6.2.](#)).
- Basic research projects are not eligible.

- Researchers and physicians employed at the University Hospital of Bern (Inselspital) and the University Hospital of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy (UPD) are not eligible.
- The candidate must be supported and hosted by the lead professor or researcher of their respective research group (Head of Research Group) at the University of Bern, which confirms the UniBE Digital Venture Fellows' access to the necessary infrastructure during the entire Fellowship (see [section 4.2.](#)).
- Applicants must not yet have founded a company related to the product or the service described in the application. Exceptions may be considered, provided the project is still at an early stage.

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 with the same project.

The appointed Digital Venture Fellow may begin the Fellowship no earlier than April 1, 2027, and no later than October 1, 2027. There is no legal entitlement for any individual or entity to be awarded the UniBE Digital Venture Fellowship.

### 3. Funding Sources and Scope of Research

The UniBE Digital Venture Fellowship is part of the [Digitalization Strategy 2030](#) and is funded by the [Digitalization Commission \(DigiK\)](#).

### 4. Application Requirements

Applicants are encouraged to review [the Digitalization Strategy 2030](#) in preparation for their application.

#### 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 relevance, digital or digitalization-related business model, along with a strategy to achieve these goals 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,
  - the format of the proposed digital solution (e.g. platform, software, AI-driven tool, data-centric system, or another digital product or service),
  - why the product or service is considered innovative, particularly with regard to digital transformation (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 model emphasizing on digital scalability, 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**, including patents and/or digital rights management (see [section 4.3](#)).
  - A **budget plan** detailing the intended use of the grant (e.g. salary<sup>1</sup>, consumables, software development, cloud services, data storage, cybersecurity measures, and other digital tools and infrastructure).
  - 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 UniBE Digital Venture 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 UniBE Digital Venture Fellowship guidelines, particularly those related to the financial responsibility and accountability.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4.3. Basic Intellectual Property Assessment

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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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](#)).

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

## **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 over two rounds, according to the following criteria:

#### **Criteria 1: Quality of Proposal**

The proposal presents a clear problem statement and a coherent, well-structured, and feasible project plan with well-defined objectives and milestones.

#### **Criteria 2: Innovation Potential**

The project shows potential to generate economic, societal or environmental impact at scale through the use of digital technologies (e.g. through alignment with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals or by using any impact innovation analysis tools). The proposed innovation demonstrates a clear advantage, or differentiation compared to existing alternatives, highlighting a novelty or credible approach to innovation.

#### **Criteria 3: Business Plan**

The project is clearly linked to a market challenge that is well described and estimated. The potential customers/users are identified, and IP related questions are addressed. The solution provided through the product or service has a competitive advantage through its clearly defined Unique Value Proposition (UVP).

#### **Criteria 4: Entrepreneurial Motivation**

The applicant demonstrates a strong entrepreneurial mindset, relevant skills, and high personal motivation, and/or wish to translate their vision outside the academic setting.

#### **Criteria 5: Digital Component of the Project**

The business model effectively integrates digital strategies to enhance scalability, efficiency, and market reach. It could include the following aspects:

- Digital technologies are leveraged, where applicable, to enhance efficiency and product development.

- A viable revenue model that incorporates digital monetization strategies where relevant (e.g., subscriptions, platform-based economies, digital marketplaces).
- A scalable solution that leverages digital tools, automation, or AI-driven optimizations.
- A pricing strategy aligned with digital distribution and data-driven cost efficiency.
- A sales channel (direct sales) or a distribution network (indirect sales) utilizing digital platforms, e-commerce, or online engagement strategies.
- Resource requirements, including digital infrastructure and services.
- Existing or planned partnerships for technological adoption.
- A robust approach to cybersecurity, data protection, and regulatory compliance to ensure a secure and legally sound digital framework.
- The product or service integrates digital strategies to enhance market fit, operational efficiency, or scalability (e.g., digital platforms, AI, automation, or data-driven decision-making).

For the second round, in addition to the criteria of the first round, evaluations will be done according to the following criteria:

#### Criteria 6: Excellence of Proposal

Projects that demonstrated excellency on the first round will be invited for the second round.

#### Criteria 7: Quality and Clarity of the Presentation and Consistency of the Proposal

The applicant delivers a clear, structured, and compelling presentation of the problem, solution, and opportunity, which is consistent with the proposal.

#### Criteria 8: Impact of the Fellowship – personal and financial

The Fellowship will significantly contribute to the development, validation, or commercialization of the project. It will be significant in supporting the applicant's personal and professional development as an entrepreneur.

#### Criteria 9: Entrepreneurial Attitude and Ownership

The applicant demonstrates initiative, commitment, and responsibility for the project's development, resilience, adaptability, and openness to feedback. They show a strong sense of ownership and long-term vision for the venture.

#### Criteria 10: Diversity (Tie-breaking criteria)

In cases of equal evaluation scores, diversity considerations will be used as a tiebreaker. This may include diversity in disciplinary backgrounds, gender balance, international representation, or innovation domains.

### 5.3. Evaluation Committee

The Evaluation Committee will consist of the Head of the Innovation Office, two internal jurors (affiliated with the University of Bern) and two external jurors. One member of Unitectra and one member of be-Advanced might be part of the jury, without voting rights.

Its primary role is to assess all applications and applicants. Based on this evaluation, the committee will recommend two candidates for funding under the UniBE Digital Venture Fellowship Program to the Digital Commission (DigiK). If DigiK approves the recommendation, the selection will be forwarded to the Executive Board of the University of Bern for final approval.

### 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

Applicants who successfully pass the pre-selection round will be invited to deliver a 15-minute pitch presentation, followed by a Q&A session. The jury panel consists of the Evaluation Committee and representatives of the partner institutions (i.e. Unitectra, Be-Advanced). The final selection will be done by DigiK commission based on the recommendation of the jury.

### 5.6. Feedback

On the first round, feedback will be provided during walk-in hybrid sessions with the Innovation Office's advisors. If your project is selected for the second round but not selected for the Fellowship, you will be assigned to an advisor to provide you with feedback and discuss alternative support for your project.

## **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 months<sup>3</sup>. 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 degree: WisMa<sup>4</sup> 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 6<sup>5</sup>

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.

Please note that the employment contract and job description should be shared with the Innovation Office as soon as they are available.

### 6.3. Employment of Additional Team Members

In justified cases, the agreed workload percentage of the UniBE Digital Venture Fellows in the employment contract may be reduced to cover the salary costs of an additional team member, provided that the lead Digital 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. Measures for Equal Opportunities

The Innovation Office and its "Womxn who start up" initiative are committed offer equal opportunities and access to everyone dedicated to implementing their innovative idea or technology.

To support applicants with care responsibilities or certified medical conditions that necessitate a postponement or reduction in employment conditions, applicants can request either:

- To postpone the beginning of the grant for 12 months from the date of the communication to the successful applicants.

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<sup>3</sup> As the funding budget of CHF 100'000 must not be exceeded, the UniBE Digital Venture 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 6.5.](#)).

<sup>4</sup> Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin / Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter: research assistant.

<sup>5</sup> Applicants above the age of 31 years old will be categorized in a different salary level.

or

- To extend the duration of the grant to max 18 months without budget extension and with a minimum employment basis of 50%.

or

- A reduction of the employment rate to 60%, combined with the hiring of a support person to assume tasks that cannot be performed due to the reduced level of employment. If the funds released through the reduction are insufficient to hire a qualified support person who can fully compensate for the gap, an appropriate increase to the applicants' budget may be requested.

To be eligible of an increase in budget, applicants must demonstrate that either:

- they provide care to close family members (according to subsection C.2 of the information leaflet on reconciling work and family life of the Personal Office of the Canton of Bern, close family members constitute: own children, children, who live in the same household, married couples or registered partners or partners who live in the same household, parents, parents-in-law, parents of the registered partners, parents of partners who live in the same household, grandparents, grandchildren and siblings), and that the available budget is insufficient to compensate for the reduced workload.

or

- that they have a certified medical condition that requires a reduced employment rate of min. 60%.

The request can be presented and justified in the application template and relevant documents should be provided together with the application. The jury has the right to accept or deny the request.

These provisions also apply to UniBE Digital Venture Fellows who – during the course of the Fellowship – are faced with care duties or medical conditions.

In any case, applicants and Fellows are advised to contact the Innovation Office at the earliest, to discuss the available options and a potential application in advance.

#### 6.5. Fund Transferring

Upon the creation of the third-party funding account, the Secretariat of the Digital Commission (DigiK) will transfer the funds to the Fellow's account as follows:

- 100% of the funding budget (up to a maximum of CHF 100'000) is transferred at the start of the Fellowship.
- If there are unused funds at the end of the Fellowship, this amount must be transferred back to the Secretariat of the Digital Commission (DigiK).

## 6.6. 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)<sup>6</sup>,
- Expenditures for research and development (R&D) operations (e.g. consumables, data storage, cybersecurity measures, 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 Digital Venture 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 Digital Venture Fellow must regularly provide the Head of Research Group, who remains liable for any budget overspending, with an extract of the expenditures. The Digital Venture 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.

## 6.7. Supplementary Grants

In general, the UniBE Digital Venture 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 Digital Venture Fellowship and the BRIDGE PoC program, they must disclose this on the Digital Venture Fellowship application form. If both grant applications are successful, the applicant must choose one program and promptly inform the Innovation Office of their decision.
- If the Digital 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 Digital Venture Fellowship funds for expenses other than their own salary.

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<sup>6</sup> 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.

## 6.8. Ownership of Acquired Assets

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

## 7. Program Overview and Benefits

Digital 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 Digital Venture Fellows within and beyond the Digital Venture Fellowship program.

### 7.1. Individual Support and Coaching

The Innovation Office assigns each Digital Venture Fellow an Advisor, who will provide support and guidance throughout the Fellowship.

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

### 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 Advisor and potentially other stakeholders (e.g. Head of Research Group, DigiK, be-advanced Coach, Unictetra etc.).

Please refer to the document "[Defining Milestones for the UniBE Digital 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 Digital Venture 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 Digital Venture Fellow adheres to the principles of scientific integrity<sup>7</sup> 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 will recommend relevant training programs in consultation with the Digital Venture Fellow. It is strongly recommended that the Fellow participates in at least one training program during the Fellowship. 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 Digital Venture Fellowship grant should be used to cover any costs incurred by these training programs.

#### 7.7. Coaching

The Innovation Office may refer the Digital Venture Fellow to be-advanced for support from be-advanced Coaches and potential participation in its various programs. 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 Digital Venture Fellowship project, the Innovation Office may introduce the Digital Venture Fellow to its network of industry experts. The Digital Venture Fellowship grant should be used to cover any costs incurred by additional coaching.

#### 7.8. Networking

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

The Innovation Office may also suggest other internal and external events. Nevertheless, it is ultimately the Digital Venture Fellow's responsibility to identify and attend relevant events and platforms to connect with potential experts, partners,

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<sup>7</sup> See the University of Bern's [Regulations concerning scientific integrity](#), dated March 27, 2007.

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 and Testimonials

The UniBE Digital Venture Fellow is required to:

- mention and reference the UniBE Digital Venture Fellowship support and use the UniBE *innovation* label<sup>8</sup> in all pitches and communication materials,
- mention and reference the MiDT<sup>9</sup> support and use the MiDT logo in all pitches and communication materials,
- participate in communication activities of the UniBE Venture Fellowship program or within the MiDT initiative, which may include a personal interview, a photo shooting session and – if requested – the presentation of the project at the “Digitalization Days”.
- submit a generally understandable project summary and maintain a project tile on the designated university website during the project duration, if requested by MiDT.

UniBE Digital Venture Fellows and alumni consent to being featured in communication materials across multiple platforms of the Innovation Office and the University of Bern, including testimonials, quotes, videos, or other content highlighting their project and experience.

Fellows are also expected to participate as presenters or speakers in outreach activities associated with the Venture Fellowship or the MiDT 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 Advisor, the Head of the Innovation Office, and the Fellow’s Head of Research Group as well as other key stakeholders for a final evaluation of the milestones.

Additionally, the Fellow needs to submit a content and financial report no later than 3 months after the end of the Fellowship, which will be submitted to the DigiK.

### 7.11. Fellowship Transfer

If the Digital Venture Fellow is unable to continue the fellowship at the host institution, the fellowship may, under certain circumstances, be transferred to another host institute within the University of Bern. The transfer is subject to approval of the Vice-Rector for Research and Innovation and all involved parties.

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<sup>8</sup> Once incorporated, the UniBE Digital 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).

<sup>9</sup> Mensch in digitaler Transformation (Humans in Digital Transformation)

## 7.12. Fellowship Completion and Beyond

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

UniBE Digital 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. This ongoing involvement will contribute to the entrepreneurial, innovation, and digital transformation landscapes in the canton of Bern.