

Guidelines for the NOMIS Foundation ETH Fellowship Program

September 2022

Overview

The NOMIS Foundation ETH Fellowship Program supports incoming postdoctoral researchers at ETH Zurich within the Centre for Origin and Prevalence of Life. The program is intended to foster young interdisciplinary researchers in the field of the origin and prevalence of life who have demonstrated scientific excellence in the early stages of their careers, and to enable conditions to conduct interdisciplinary, fundamental, and high-risk research with the necessary independence (funding) and autonomy.

Applications have to be made jointly by the candidate and one or two potential hosts from two different disciplines, who must be ETH Zurich professors and willing to act as the mentors of the fellow. A professor may only host one candidate at a time. There must be convincing synergies between the host groups and the NOMIS-ETH Fellow. The fellowships are intended as early support towards academic independence; hence priority will be given to applicants who propose their own projects. Thus, it is important that applicants come up with their own ideas and draft the application themselves.

Once appointed, NOMIS-ETH Fellows become an integral part of and have direct access to an international network of leading interdisciplinary researchers and institutions through the NOMIS collaborative research network.

The duration of a NOMIS-ETH Fellowship at ETH is three plus one year and cannot be prolonged. The fourth year is only granted after a review 18 months after the start of the fellowship and must be funded by the host professor(s). The fellowship is competitive with only a limited number of fellowships (usually two to three) available each year.

Submission

Eligibility criteria

At the time of the submission deadline, applicants must hold a doctorate (PhD) that must have been obtained a maximum of three years prior to the submission deadline and preferably, they must have acquired their first postdoctoral experience and/or interdisciplinary training.

Applicants must have an existing affiliation to an academic/research.

Following the initial evaluation round, top-ranked candidates must be available for a remote interview.

A professor may only submit with one candidate in each evaluation round. The host professor(s) (mentors) must have a guaranteed ETH position for the entire duration of the proposed fellowship. The host professor can only have one NOMIS-ETH Fellow at a given time. The primary hosts and supervisors shall be members of the Centre. The ETH professor must commit to providing the allowance and any additional support required beyond the fellowship allowance to carry out the research project as well as resources for the fourth year, provided the candidate successfully passes the review process.

Applications not complying with the eligibility criteria will be rejected on formal grounds.

Application

Applications are to be made jointly by the candidate and their prospective mentor(s), who must be ETH professors. The application must include the following:

- a description of the research project and the specific role and input of the candidate, as well as the way in which the NOMIS-ETH Fellow's project relates to other research directions in the host groups and the Centre (by using the template)
- a complete CV of the candidate including lists of publications and a picture; it is important that all dates at least include month and year
- a brief outline of the career goals of the candidate (1 p)
- a description of the interdisciplinary nature, the high-risk/out-of-the-box character of the proposed research and of the synergy of the proposal with the Centre's mission.
- an invitation letter by one of the host professors, stating how the candidate is deemed to be excellent and a statement of financial support for the fellowship in year 4.
- a filled-out form concerning ethical issues and research requiring authorization or notification
- The signed NOMIS code of conduct.
- two external reference letters for the candidate, to be e-mailed by the author of the letter directly to the office of the Center for Origin and Prevalence of Life until the application deadline.

Deadlines

There is one NOMIS-ETH Fellowship call per year, opening in October with a submission deadline on December 10, 17:00 Swiss local time. Applications should be submitted electronically via the online ETH job platform "ETH Zurich Job Board" (<https://jobs.ethz.ch/site/index>). The reference letters must be sent directly to the administration manager of the Centre (email: cmarchand@ethz.ch).

Evaluation

Evaluation procedure

The evaluation consists of two steps. First, the written applications (including reference letters) will be evaluated by the NOMIS-ETH Fellowship Selection Panel at ETH. The results of this initial evaluation will be communicated to the applicants before the end of the year of the call. Second, candidates whose applications pass the first step will be invited to a remote interview end of January by the Selection Panel at ETH. The applicants will be informed by the Center for Origin and Prevalence of Life about the decision/offer no later than February 10th.

It is not possible to resubmit a NOMIS Postdoctoral Fellowship application following a rejection.

Interview

The interviews last about 15 minutes and are mandatory. They are conducted end of January.

During the interview, applicants will be asked questions about their proposed research projects, the choice of the research labs, the particular strengths and skills they would bring to the host labs and the Centre, and how they would like the collaboration to develop, as well as about their future career prospects.

Evaluation criteria

The funding decisions are based on a strict, quality-based evaluation process. Applications will be assessed against criteria addressing both the candidate's aptitude as well as the quality of the proposed research and the synergy with the host labs and the Centre. Successful applications must be compelling in all respects.

The criteria pertaining to the **candidate's aptitude** are based on the CV, the reference letters and the career outline and include

- research performance and potential
- track record relative to opportunities and career stage
- competence for the proposed work and synergy with the host professorships and the Centre
- compatibility of the NOMIS-ETH Fellowship with the career goals of the applicant
- medium-term research vision

The criteria referring to the **research proposal** include

- the scientific quality of the planned research
- the interdisciplinary nature of the planned research
- significance and innovativeness of the project
- high-risk/out-of-the-box nature of the planned research
- suitability of the proposed procedures
- difficulties to be expected and chances of success
- consideration of gender aspects where appropriate

The criteria referring to the **synergies with the host labs and the Centre** include

- particular strengths and skills relevant to the host labs
- added value and integration into the host labs and the Centre
- ambition to move beyond his or her and the hosts' previous research
- embedding of the research within the Centre for Origin and Prevalence of Life

In line with DORA (The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, <https://sfdora.org/>), achievements will be assessed on the base of qualitative evaluations of a diverse range of research outputs and activities.

NOMIS-ETH Fellowship Selection Panel

An NOMIS-ETH Fellowship Selection Panel at ETH will be established by the director of the Centre. The panel shall include members of the Centre and external experts where relevant. The director does not participate to the selection but is responsible for avoiding conflicts of interest and ensuring a fair and transparent process. The NOMIS Foundation does not participate in the selection of candidates.

Gender aspects

ETH Zurich strives to promote gender equality in scientific research by integrating the gender dimension into the research content in all fields of research.

Ethical issues

The applicant must state on Form **Z01_Ethical Issues** if the intended research requires authorization or notification. By filling in the form and signing the cover sheet the applicant confirms that they are aware of the legal regulations at the federal and cantonal levels that are relevant to the research project. Once a fellowship has been accepted for funding, copies of the authorization or notification must be sent to the Center's Office.

Furthermore, the form gives instructions as to how to proceed if the intended research needs authorization or notification. This applies in particular to research on research on animals and pathogens.

NOMIS-ETH Fellows are familiar with the Guidelines for Research Integrity at ETH Zurich.

Funding

The duration of a NOMIS-ETH Fellowship is three plus one years and cannot be prolonged. Employment after the granted time must be financed from other sources. Salaries are paid according to the ETH standard (100%). NOMIS-ETH Fellows are also entitled to an individual travel/mobility allowance and a contribution to the research costs not exceeding CHF 20,000 annually in total. The budget allocated for travel and research costs may not be used to cover salary costs, and vice versa. During the entire fellowship, the NOMIS-ETH Fellows must be employed at ETH Zurich on the basis of a valid working contract.

Adjustments of the salary may be made in adherence to the general ETH domain remuneration policy as defined by the ETH Board. Any extra costs associated with salary scale increases effected during the funding period must be borne by the host professorships.

Post-grant processes

NOMIS-ETH Fellows are expected to start their fellowship at the latest September 1 of the following year (about 8.5 months after the submission deadline). If they cannot adhere to this date, approval for a later start must be requested from the Centre's Office.

Whenever possible, Open Access should be granted to publications resulting from a NOMIS-ETH Fellowship, as per ETH's Open Access Policy. Publication fees (APCs) are taken over by the ETH Library for most of the important journals. Otherwise, the research cost budget of the fellowship may be used to cover them. The fellowship program must be acknowledged in publications, conference presentations (including abstracts), and symposia, e.g., in the form "The NOMIS Foundation ETH Fellowship Program and related research are made possible thanks to the support of the NOMIS Foundation".

To monitor and improve the program, each NOMIS-ETH Fellow is requested to submit a final report within four weeks after completion of their fellowship to the Center's Office. The relevant request and form will be sent to the applicant in due course.

Other

The NOMIS-ETH Fellow is expected to actively participate in the Centre for Origin and Prevalence of Life by attending events therein and by giving a presentation at the midpoint and end of the fellowship.

NOMIS-ETH Fellows are actively involved in NOMIS events and activities (as their schedule permits) and establish independent research ties with other members of the network and beyond.

NOMIS-ETH Fellows are also expected to be given the opportunity to take part in the teaching activities of their host groups, to a certain extent. The proposed teaching duties and an estimate of the average load must be specified in the application.

NOMIS-ETH Fellows must sign the code of conduct of the NOMIS Foundation.

After the candidates have been selected and the offers have been sent out, the NOMIS Foundation ETH Fellowship program will share the applications with the NOMIS Foundation if the applicant permits.

About NOMIS

The NOMIS Foundation supports and enables insight-driven science across all disciplines, focusing on researchers who put forth bold new ideas, exhibit a pioneering spirit and seek to inspire the world around them. The foundation's vision is to "create a spark" in the world of science by enabling pioneering research in the natural sciences, social sciences and the humanities that benefits humankind and our planet.

The foundation serves as a catalyst for scientific and human progress by supporting interdisciplinary research, establishing collaborative research networks and developing strategic partnerships. In addition to providing financial support, NOMIS endeavors to develop and strengthen the conditions conducive to the pursuit of high-risk basic research.

To learn more about the NOMIS Foundation and the research they support, please visit <https://nomisfoundation.ch/>