ETH zürich | The Branco Weiss Fellowship Society in Science

Guidelines for The Branco Weiss Fellowship – Society in Science

15 July 2026

The Directorate of The Branco Weiss Fellowship – Society in Science issues the following guidelines:

Article 1 Objectives

[1] The Branco Weiss Fellowship – Society in Science is a community of exceptional young scientists who share a passion for taking research beyond the mainstream. Fellows are given the means to pursue their personal vision of a particular scientific project independently – in the best possible locations, anywhere in the world. The fellowship is awarded to postdocs for up to five years. The fellowship is international and covers all scientific fields. Besides a passion for the research itself, Branco Weiss Fellows share the desire of communicating beyond their own field of study and with society at large.

[2] The Branco Weiss Fellowship – Society in Science awards fellowships to outstanding postdoctoral researchers around the world.

Article 2 Eligibility

[1] The Fellowship is open to researchers from all disciplines and to citizens of all nationalities. There are no restrictions on biological age.

[2] At the time of the submission deadline, applicants must hold a doctorate (PhD) or must have successfully passed their doctoral examination. Applicants must have obtained their doctorate (PhD) a maximum of five years before the submission deadline. The date of the examination or of the certificate is decisive, whichever allows the candidate to become eligible. In case a candidate holds more than one PhD, the date of the one that was passed first is decisive.

[3] Professors and lecturers with or without tenure or tenure track are not eligible to apply for a fellowship.

[4] Scientists with a permanent employment are not eligible to apply for a fellowship.

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

Article 3 Applications

[1] Applications for fellowships must be written in English and submitted electronically as described on the website https://www.brancoweissfellowship.org/. The annual submission deadline is on 15 January.

[2] The application must consist of:

a. A description of the proposed research project (max. 5 pages, including timelines, tentative milestones and references)
b. An abstract, written in a form that enables the educated layperson to understand the objectives of the proposed research project, the methods to be employed and the significance of the anticipated results.
c. The applicant's curriculum vitae including a list of publications (max. 4 pages including publications)
d. A motivation letter including an explanation of why the proposed research differs from the mainstream (max. 1 page)
e. Copies of three publications (no doctoral theses, no books, only peer-reviewed journal articles or individual book chapters)
f. 5 reviewer suggestions of different research institutions (to be entered directly in the online application). The applicant should not stand in any scientific relationship to the suggested persons, which means that they should not have published together, have worked together, or plan to work together.
g. Scan of your PhD Certificate or confirmation of successful examination

[3] The application must be accompanied by an Invitation Letter signed by the potential mentor (usually a professor), stating their support for the project and the degree of independence and scientific autonomy that will be granted to the Fellow in the event of acceptance. In addition, the Invitation Letter must confirm that the mentor is willing to:

a. integrate the Fellow into their research group at the research institution,
b. provide the Fellow with a workplace and access to the infrastructure and technology required for the successful completion of the proposed research.

A mentor can only support one candidate per application round.

[4] The font of the documents submitted should not be less than 10 points with normal line spacing. Any further formatting decisions are left to the applicant's discretion.

[5] The prospective research project must comply with the applicable ethics regulations and adhere to the principles of research integrity valid at the host institution and those of ETH Zurich. Relevant ethical, legal and social considerations should be included in the proposal.

[6] Reference letters from additional reference providers should not be submitted with the application. They are only requested after the applicant has entered the second step of the evaluation procedure (Art. 4). The candidate provides the name of a potential author of such a reference letter in the online application. The reference letter should not be provided by the mentor/host professor but by a different person.

[7] Applications will be rejected for formal reasons if they are not complying with the guidelines or do not contain all of the information requested.

Article 4 Evaluation Procedure

[1] The evaluation comprises three steps:

Step 1: Reduction of the written applications to a short list by the Directorate and experts from ETH Zurich and the University of Zurich.

Step 2: Peer review of the short-listed written proposals by independent external experts. Reference letters are requested. The Directorate decides which candidates will be invited to an interview.

Step 3: Interviews with a committee of experts from various fields chaired by the Directorate. External experts might be invited to individual interviews to complement the expertise of the committee.

The results of each step are communicated to the applicants per email, the first step being completed within two months after the submission deadline.

[2] Applications will be assessed against criteria addressing the candidate's aptitude, the quality of the proposed research and the suitability of the application for The Branco Weiss Fellowship – Society in Science program (https://www.brancoweissfellowship.org/mission.html). Successful applications must be compelling in all respects.

In line with DORA[1], achievements are assessed on the base of qualitative evaluations of a diverse range of research outputs and activities.

Additional criteria taking into account specific objectives of an application may be included, such as ethical issues, etc.

[3] Reviewers are not allowed to use generative AI models for analysing and formulating reviews of proposals or provide information from documents provided for review as input for generative AI models.

[4] The interviews are held as video conferences, last about 30 minutes and are mandatory for the invited candidates. Candidates are requested to give a presentation and will be asked questions about their proposed research project, the choice of the research lab, their expectations of as well as their potential impact to the Branco Weiss Fellowship.

[5] After all interviews have been completed the performance of the candidates will be evaluated by the committee and the funding decision confirmed by the Directorate. Applicants will be informed about the decision by email within 10 days.

Article 5 Duration and funding

[1] Fellows are awarded a fellowship amounting to a maximum of CHF 600,000 for a maximum of five years to carry out their research project. Unspent funds will have to be returned at the end of the fellowship. No-cost-extensions will not be granted.

[2] The Branco Weiss Fellowship – Society in Science makes annual payments to the Fellow's host institution through ETH Zurich, contingent on the receipt of the reports (see Art. 7).

[3] The first two and a half years of a project are called the pioneer phase, for which a grant agreement is signed with the host institution (Art. 6.3). Before the end of the second year, a review and a site visit will be conducted (Art. 6.6). At this point, the project, its continued originality, and the Fellow's productivity are evaluated. If the results of the evaluation and the site visit are satisfactory, the Fellow

[1] The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, https://sfdora.org/

enters the exploitation phase for the remaining two and a half years of the fellowship. The above grant agreement is extended by a written amendment.

[4] Fellows must start their project after approval, at the earliest on 1 October and no later than 1 January in the following year.

[5] It is permitted to partially (in case that employment is funded through the host institution) or fully cover the Fellow's salary by the fellowship at a level that corresponds to the terms and conditions of employment at the host institution (Art. 6). The fellowship may also be used to cover the salaries of doctoral students, as well as all other justified expenses such as equipment, consumables, travel, technical or secretarial services within the scope of the research project.

[6] It is not permitted to purchase scientific equipment costing more than CHF 50,000 in the last two years of the fellowship.

[7] Any equipment purchased by the Branco Weiss Fellow for their project remains the property of the Fellow and the project. If the Fellow changes institutions, the host institution must hand over the equipment to the new institution.

[8] Fellows are encouraged to acquire third-party funding during their fellowship period.

Article 6 Host institution

[1] The Fellowship project can be carried out at any academic host institution worldwide. The fit between host institution/research group and the Fellow's project is part of the evaluation process.

[2] Fellows can work at one or more host institutions. One institution must be designated as the main host institution.

[3] The project grant is administered by the (main) host institution through a three-way contractual standard grant agreement between the Fellow, the (main) host institution, and ETH Zurich. The host institution ensures that the fellowship is made available to the Fellow without restriction. The host institution is allowed to retain a management fee not exceeding 10% of the fellowship.

[4] Each party may terminate the grant agreement by giving six (6) months' written notice to the other parties. The remaining amount of the fellowship must be refunded to ETH Zurich.

[5] Fellows appoint a mentor for their scientific support. The host institutions ensure that the Fellows can freely choose their mentors among the members of the institution.

[6] Site visits are planned by representatives of The Branco Weiss Fellowship. The host institution and the Fellow ensure that representatives of The Branco Weiss Fellowship are granted access to laboratories or areas where the research project is located.

[7] All results of the Fellow's research project, including copyright and all other intellectual property rights are governed by the rules and laws applicable at the (main) host institution.

[8] The Fellowship supports mobility, but a change of host institution requires confirmation by the Directorate. If a Fellow plans to move to another host institution, a request must be submitted to the Directorate, providing clear evidence that the new host institution is equally well suited to perform the fellowship project. The Directorate can request a letter of invitation from the future host institution, that confirms that the requirements in Art. 3.3 are fulfilled. After approval, a new grant agreement will be signed with the new host institution. An amendment to terminate the fellowship agreement is

signed with the previous institution. The remainder of the fellowship will be transferred to the new host institution.

[9] It is not allowed to change the host institution in the first year of the fellowship.

[10] Fellows can start a faculty position/professorship after the first year of the fellowship. The fellowship will be terminated in cases when the Branco Weiss project does not remain the focus of the Fellow's work.

Article 7 Reporting and annual symposium

[1] Fellows commit to submit a status report at the beginning of their fellowship as well as a yearly scientific and financial report. A final report is due upon completion of the project, including all relevant outcomes (publications, patents, etc.).

[2] With the intention to create a diverse, dedicated and intellectually stimulating ecosystem of researchers, an annual symposium is held in Zurich. All Fellows are obliged to participate in the symposium and present their projects on request.

Prof. Detlef Günther
Prof. Angelika Steger
Prof. Josef Zeyer
Directorate of The Branco Weiss Fellowship