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Call for VAUD projects

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SWISS DATA SCIENCE CENTER – CANTON OF VAUD
CALL FOR PROJECTS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How is the maximum contribution of CHF 125,000 allocated to project stakeholders?
The SDSC will pay the funds directly to the Project Leader who will be responsible for the redistribution to any Project Partners, according to the budget and distribution submitted and approved by all parties before the project begins.

- Example 1: CHF 75,000 for co-candidate from the private sector and CHF 50,000 for the co-candidate from the research team at a cantonal university, forming a consortium of two candidates;
- Example 2: CHF 125,000 for the company acting as the sole lead candidate.

What does SDSC do with intellectual property (IP) from projects funded by this call?
The spirit of this call is to ensure that funding recipients can commercially exploit the results and methods of the project. IP will therefore be flexible and similar to that of the SDSC's Project Agreements with private companies.

How does IP work in the case of a consortium?
Each party is required to reach an IP agreement and formalise it within three months of the project start date.

How does the 20% contributed by the company/consortium work, FTEs or cash?
Each stakeholder needs to contribute according to their nature.

- For private companies: a cash contribution of 20% proportional to the funding they receive is expected. Example: the lead applicant requests 100'000 CHF, they are expected to contribute in cash of minimum 20'000 CHF (20%).
- For other stakeholders (e.g. academic, research team), an in-kind (FTE) contribution is expected.

Is the minimum 20% cash contribution paid to SDSC or deducted from the funding provided by SDSC?
It must be paid to SDSC in a separate fund. Upon contract signature, the Project Leader will receive an invoice for 20% (incl. VAT) of the requested amount.

Can we use the allocated funding to purchase research equipment?
The main usage of the budget is intended to be for human resources involved in the project. Depending on specific cases, an exception could be made. In the pre-projects, you can include in the budget an estimate of the material costs (like access to computing infrastructures and similar) but no more than 5K. We will evaluate each request case by case.

Can the main applicant not declare any costs? In that case, would they not have to contribute in cash?
Yes, this is technically possible, although somewhat unusual.

Can or should academic partners include overheads in the budget?
The SDSC will not impose overhead rates on participating academic partners. However, academic institutions may apply their own overhead policy for their members' contribution to the project, as a form of "insurance". Applicants are therefore encouraged to check with their own institution.

How many pre-proposals will be selected for the full project submission phase?
Any pre-proposal submission fitting the scope of the call, meeting the formal criteria and containing sufficient level of detail will be considered for the second and last selection phase.

How many projects will be selected following the full project submission phase?
Up to 20 projects may be selected, depending on the total amount of funding requested by applicants. The repartition is as follows: up to 3 one-year projects with direct funding and up to 17 six-month projects that will receive support through a coaching or accompanying program if their AI maturity level is deemed insufficient. .

What are the rules when a Vaud-based company collaborates with an institute or laboratory outside of Vaud?
The same rules apply regarding allocated funding, required corporate and/or institutional contributions, and intellectual property. However, the lead applicant in a consortium must be registered in the canton of Vaud.

Can the consortium include European members (e.g., data providers), given that the main applicant is based in the Canton of Vaud?
Yes, European partners can be part of the consortium, but the lead applicant must be an SME or startup based in the Canton of Vaud. Ideally, all members should contribute to the project's impact within the canton.

Is a consortium between a small or medium-sized business (SME) and a public authority eligible to apply?
Yes, such a consortium is fully eligible and strongly encouraged. Partnerships that bring together different sectors—such as industry, public authorities, and academia—are particularly valuable in the context of data science and innovation.

Can an entity submit multiple projects as the lead partner?
Yes, but a maximum of two projects per entity.

How will the SDSC assess the AI maturity of candidates?
SDSC experts will evaluate AI maturity based on the technical description provided in the pre-proposal and responses to key questions, including:

- Does your company have a digital or innovation strategy that includes AI?
- What is the current stage of AI adoption in your organization?
- What are your main motivations for using AI?

Do you target AI-mature companies or those that are less experienced with AI?
We aim to support both. Rather than dismissing proposals from less AI-mature companies, we offer tailored support through specific coaching and workshops.

Does the project need to be data-intensive or involve advanced data manipulation techniques (e.g., machine learning, clustering)? Or is a project based solely on large language model (LLM) workflows also acceptable?
Projects involving both standard AI techniques (machine-learning regression, classification, clustering, etc.) and modern AI ones (GenAI, LLM, Agentic, etc.) are accepted. The key requirement is innovation through a data-driven solution with clear business or societal impact—regardless of the specific technical approach.

What role will SDSC play in the project?
SDSC will provide up to 1 FTE (full-time equivalent staff) for 12 months to support project management and implementation of the selected projects. This person can be a data scientist, data engineer, AI operations expert, or experienced project manager, depending on the project's needs.

Is the publication of results mandatory?
Publishing results—such as academic papers, data sets, or white papers—is strongly encouraged, but not mandatory. Dissemination helps maximize the impact of the innovation. However,we understand that companies may have proprietary knowledge, but even a joint announcement or non-confidential report would be a valuable contribution.

Can the pre-project and full project be submitted in English?
Yes, we can accept both in French or in English.