

News Release

12 Zurich SMEs join next AI Innovation Program edition

Strong results encourage further AI exploration to sustainably simplify daily operations and boost the competitiveness of SMEs in the Canton of Zurich.

Zurich, Switzerland. October 15, 2026 – The Division of Business and Economic Development at the Canton of Zurich and the Swiss Data Science Center (SDSC) announce the second term of their AI Innovation Program for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Canton of Zurich. The 2026 call attracted more than 40 applications, from which 12 companies have been accepted to join the program. Over one year, the participating SMEs will work directly with SDSC experts to develop and validate AI concepts and to move from initial ideas to viable pilot projects in their businesses.

Empowering a new cohort of SME innovators

The first SME AI program edition demonstrated how structured AI support can help SMEs translate business challenges into tangible product and process innovation. Key outcomes include two open-source prototypes [1] and detailed output reports documenting the chosen AI approaches developed and tested to address specific needs: “[From Documents to Answers with RAG-Systems](#)” and “[AI-Based Forecasting for Business Impact](#).”

Building on the experience and results of the first edition, the program now enters its second round, welcoming a new cohort of SMEs from across the Canton of Zurich.

The participating companies are:

- [Armit AG](#)
- [bb trading werbeartikel ag](#)
- [EE AG](#)
- [FOND Design GmbH](#)
- [Frei Metallbau AG Herrliberg](#)
- [Gossweiler Ingenieure AG](#)
- [Lerch AG](#)
- [OKEY AG](#)
- [Rubi Group](#)
- [Schreinerei Eigenmann AG](#)
- [Timelec AG](#)
- [Virtuos 3D Modeling AG](#)

“The first program edition has demonstrated that SMEs can turn concrete business challenges into promising AI solutions when they have access to the right expertise and structured support. With the second cohort, we look forward to building on these experiences, supporting new companies in exploring the potential of AI, and helping them turn their ideas into practical business value - contributing to the innovation power of our Canton,” said **Raphael von Thiessen**, Program Lead

¹ **2025 Program Outputs – Open-Source Code for free download:**

- Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) tool: <https://github.com/SwissDataScienceCenter/sme-kt-zh-collaboration-rag>
- Timeseries Forecasting for Business Impact: <https://github.com/SwissDataScienceCenter/sme-kt-zh-collaboration-forecasting>

Companies interested in adapting the RAG or forecasting prototypes to their business context can reach out to [Anna Fournier](#)

Artificial Intelligence, Office for Economy, Division of Business and Economic Development, Canton of Zurich.

From skill-building to deployment

Participants in this year's SME AI program will again benefit from SDSC's structured three-step approach: (1) introductory "demystification" workshops that build foundational understanding among executive and technical teams; (2) hands-on development of practical prototypes; and (3) expert-guided transition into pilot projects.

"The program goes beyond building AI skills. It helps SMEs translate emerging technologies into practical business applications, while fostering peer learning and collaboration across Zurich's SME community. By combining expert guidance with hands-on development, we aim to strengthen companies' capacity to innovate and create lasting value through AI," said **Anna Fournier**, Principal Data Scientist and Zurich SME AI Program Lead at the SDSC.

Looking ahead: Shaping future AI opportunities for Zurich SMEs

As the current program gets underway, the organizers invite SMEs based in the Canton of Zurich to share their AI-related needs, challenges, and ambitions through an online form. Their input will help identify areas of interest and inform the development of potential future program offerings tailored to the needs of Zurich's SME community.

Interested companies are encouraged to learn more about the [SME AI Program](#) and register their interest in future opportunities via [online form](#).

About the Division of Business & Economic Development at the Office of Economic Affairs, Canton of Zurich

Through our platform 'Innovation Zurich', we provide guidance and information about the region as a hub for innovation. Together with the consortium Ahead, we assist local companies in pursuing their innovation projects. We also serve as a point of contact for businesses interested in establishing operations in Zurich. More information: zh.ch/location | innovation.zuerich | ahead-zh.ch

About the Swiss Data Science Center (SDSC)

The Swiss Data Science Center (SDSC) is a national research infrastructure in data science, machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI), founded by EPFL and ETH Zurich. It provides end-to-end capabilities to turn data into impact across the full data lifecycle – from data infrastructure, management and preparation to machine learning and AI modeling to deployment – serving research, private and public sector in Switzerland. A multidisciplinary team across Lausanne, Zurich and in Villigen (at PSI), combines expertise to advance scientific discovery, build trusted data foundations, and scale data science and AI in strategic domains. The SDSC also contributes to initial and executive education programs at EPFL and ETH Zurich. More information: www.datascience.ch

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