**NCCR Catalysis Project Office**

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# Boost Fellowship

Fostering the next generation of female talents in catalysis research

## 1 Aim

Chemistry and catalysis impact our daily lives and are popular areas of study at the undergraduate level. In Switzerland, however, there is a sharp drop in female talent at the PhD level and above. The Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research, NCCR Catalysis, strives to address this disparity through the Boost Fellowship.

This fellowship aims to support prospective female PhD researchers with outstanding academic achievements or potential, especially those facing barriers in the current structures. Successful applicants are funded by NCCR Catalysis for the first year of their PhD in one or several research groups associated with the program. The goal is to help these talented individuals forge connections and cultivate ideas within a multidisciplinary, cross-fertilizing environment of research excellence, and to prepare them to become leaders in their field.

## 2 Eligibility criteria

We encourage NCCR Catalysis PIs to identify and prepare an application with prospective female PhD candidates who:

**2.1** Are planning to start their PhD with one or several NCCR Catalysis PIs. Their start date must be within three months after the submission date.
**2.2** Show exceptional motivation and potential to conduct their PhD in the broad field of sustainable chemistry and catalysis, connected to the topics of NCCR Catalysis.
**2.3** Meet the enrollment requirements of the institution(s) where they plan to conduct their PhD.

## 3 Fellowship

With the Boost Fellowship, recipients will benefit from:

**3.1** **Financial support.** Coverage of the first year's salary of the PhD student in one or several NCCR Catalysis member groups and support for project-related expenses.
**3.2** **Guidance & environment.** Immersion in the vibrant research environment of member lab(s), and involvement in the program for the entire duration of their PhD.
**3.3** **Networking & engagement.** Participation in scientific and social activities alongside NCCR Catalysis peers.

Important considerations:

**3.4** **Recipients per PI.** Per NCCR Catalysis Phase, there is a maximum of one recipient per NCCR Catalysis PI. A recipient co-supervised by two PIs counts as one recipient for each of them.
**3.5** **Cost coverage.** The fellowship consists of:

- CHF 55'000 for the PhD student's first-year salary, i.e., the maximum allowable amount as defined by the SNSF.
- Social costs as defined by the contract-issuing institution.
- CHF 1'000 for travel and project-related expenses (e.g., for NCCR Catalysis events or relevant trainings).

**3.6 Exclusive source of support.** The NCCR Catalysis Boost Fellowship cannot be combined with other excellence fellowships during the first year of the PhD. The salary of CHF 55'000 from the Boost Fellowship may be topped up with other salary sources to meet institutional or departmental salary levels, provided these don't come from another fellowship.

**3.7 Availability and use of funds.** The fellowship is awarded to the supervising PI's group, which then covers the student's first-year salary, social costs, and expenses. If the student is co-supervised, the relevant PIs must decide which of them will manage the fellowship funds. The funds may not be used for other personnel, uses, or beyond the PhD student's first year. Unused funds are reallocated within the program; no exceptions will be made.

**3.8 Funding beyond the first year.** The fellowship serves as seed funding, allowing NCCR Catalysis PIs to hire exceptional talent who may otherwise not be supported. It is the responsibility of the supervising PI(s) to acquire and allocate funds (NCCR Catalysis or other) to cover the remaining years of the recipient's PhD studies.

**3.9 Affiliation with the program.** A recipient remains affiliated with NCCR Catalysis throughout their PhD unless, before their PhD end date, the PI leaves the program or the program doesn't continue to Phase III.

## 4 How to apply

To apply for the NCCR Catalysis Boost Fellowship, PIs need to submit the information and documents below exclusively via this application form. A template for the project description is available here.

- **Project description.** Outline the research plans, addressing a new aspect that is not yet tackled in funded/in-kind NCCR Catalysis projects (max. three pages), including the justification for:
  - The need for the project, its fit to NCCR Catalysis research activities, and its uniqueness.
  - The choice of candidate and how they would benefit from the fellowship. Explicitly state the candidate's planned start date.
- **Candidate dossier.** As **one** PDF document, in the order outlined below, provide:
  - The candidate's concise CV (max. two pages).
  - A copy of their Bachelor's and Master's diplomas, if available, and transcripts, showcasing all grades. Ensure that an explanation of the grading system is provided.
  - A statement on any scholarships or fellowships they have benefited from, if applicable.

## 5 Application procedure and selection criteria

Applications undergo the following stages:

**5.1 Application submission.** Applications must be submitted exclusively via the link above; we don't consider applications submitted by email.

**5.2 Selection criteria.** Applications are assessed and graded based on the following factors:

- **Excellence.** Track record of academic excellence, potential as a young researcher within NCCR Catalysis, potential career advancement through the fellowship, and alignment with its objectives.
- **Fit with program.** Project novelty and alignment with/complementarity to NCCR Catalysis projects, alignment of background and motivation with prospective supervising PI(s).

**5.3 Review process.** The NCCR Catalysis Project Office prepares the received applications for review by the NCCR Catalysis Equal Opportunities & Ethics (EOE) Committee (excellence) and Management Team (fit with program), involving relevant WP Coordinators and Project Delegates as needed.

- Each EOE Committee member provides a grade on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

- The Management Team provides a grade on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Candidates with an average grade below 4 will not be recommended to the SC as potential fellowship recipients.

Based on these assessments, the Steering Committee (SC) decides on each application. Candidates with an average grade below 4 in either category will not be recommended to the SC as potential fellowship recipients.

PIs with a conflict of interest (e.g., evaluating their own candidate) may contribute to the evaluation discussion without providing a grade, or fully abstain from the discussion in which they perceive a conflict of interest.

## 6 Timeline

**6.1 Application deadline.** PIs can submit applications at any time. These will be evaluated four times per year, depending on the submission date.

- 31 January
- 30 April
- 31 July
- 31 October

**6.2 Decision notification.** All applicants will be contacted about their application after the SC has made a decision. Successful applicants must confirm their participation in the NCCR Catalysis Boost Fellowship within two weeks of receiving the acceptance notification.

**6.3 Fellowship start date.** The fellowship will be granted only to those who have completed enrollment at their degree-granting institution. Successful applicants are expected to commence their PhD with the supervising PI(s) as indicated in their application documents. They need to be reported to the Project Office as NCCR Catalysis members through *Compass*.

## 7 Contact

For questions about the NCCR Catalysis Boost Fellowship, please contact our Project Office at office@nccr-catalysis.ch.