

LEADING HOUSE AFRICA

Call for Proposals: PhD Graduate Programme

Call for PhD-level Seasonal Schools in or outside of Switzerland to sponsor Swiss participants, organised by a Swiss Higher Education Institution in collaboration with an African partner institution.

Grant per Seasonal School:	Maximum CHF 60,000
Duration of the Seasonal School:	Minimum 1 week
Eligible applicant:	Organizers of Seasonal Schools (e.g. Summer or Winter Schools) in or outside Switzerland that are affiliated with a Swiss institution of higher education and take place until October 2027.
Targeted participants of the Seasonal School to be funded:	Minimum 12 PhD students enrolled at Higher Education Institutions in eligible African countries (excluding the Maghreb region and Egypt) and/or Switzerland.
Additional third-party funding:	In-kind contributions by participating institutions to the Seasonal School are strongly encouraged.
Submission deadline:	30 November 2026
Review process:	1 December 2026 to 15 February 2027
Decision:	15 March 2027
Project start date:	Earliest start: 1 April 2027; Latest start: 15 September 2027

Background

For the 2025–2028 funding period, the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), has commissioned Swiss TPH, in partnership with the University of Basel, as the Leading House for bilateral cooperation in education, research and innovation with African partner institutions. Under this framework, the funding cycle will introduce three research instruments: (i) Research Partnership Grants, (ii) Lectureship-Research Stays, and (iii) PhD Graduate Programme. The implementation of instruments (ii) and (iii) are entrusted by the Leading House Africa to the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern.

Goal

Leading House Africa, in conjunction with CDE, invites organizers of Seasonal Schools at Swiss Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to apply for the PhD Graduate Programme.

The goal of this instrument is to promote research collaboration between Swiss and African PhD students of HEIs through a Seasonal School. The Seasonal School should include inter- and (if applicable) transdisciplinary sessions to bring Swiss and African PhD students together to develop solutions for sustainability challenges, geared towards the implementation of the [UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the [African Union's Agenda 2063](#). The idea is to acquaint a group of Swiss and African PhD students with different disciplinary backgrounds to collectively address issues of major global concern during the Seasonal School (e.g. decline of biodiversity and food security; climate change, flooding, and deforestation; migration; natural resource depletion; epidemics and pandemics, etc.). To this end, the role of science is to provide knowledge and engage in dialogue with policymakers and civil society to shape transformations towards more sustainable development.

Eligibility

The call is open to all Seasonal Schools organised by Swiss HEIs in Switzerland or a country in sub-Saharan Africa scheduled until October 2027. The selected Seasonal School should be flexible to host at least 12 PhD students in total based at Swiss and African HEIs.

Lead applicant: Researchers at any career stage affiliated with a Swiss HEI (cantonal universities, Swiss federal institutes of technology, federal and cantonal research institutes, universities of applied sciences, and universities of teacher education). Applicants must indicate their career stage in the application. The Swiss lead applicant must be employed as a scientist before, during and on the project completion date. The lead applicant shall submit the jointly prepared proposal, developed in collaboration with the African partner (if applicable). All project-related correspondence with the Leading House Africa will be handled exclusively through the Swiss lead applicant.

Funding and Budgeting

The maximum funding available per Seasonal School is CHF 60,000. The budget shall contribute costs incurred by the Swiss HEI for the organization of the Seasonal School (in Switzerland or a country in Sub-Saharan Africa), as well as for the participation of PhDs based at Swiss HEIs. Sponsorship for PhD students from African HEIs have to be covered through other means.

The mutual commitment of the applicants in Switzerland and the African country will serve as an important indicator of the strength and sustainability of the partnership, as well as the financial viability of the Seasonal School. This commitment includes financial co-funding and in-kind contributions from all partners, as well as, where applicable, contributions from third parties. Beyond the immediate project, the partnership is expected to generate added value by taking advantage of the complementary expertise, resources, and networks of the participating institutions, while creating prospects for further collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the development of future joint initiatives.

Grant expenditures must stay within the approved budget lines. Awardees may move up to 10% of the total grant between activity lines without permission from the Swiss Leading House Africa; any larger reallocation requires the Leading House's written approval in advance.

The grant will be disbursed in two tranches: 80% after signing the grant agreement (contract) and 20% after Swiss Leading House Africa approves the final project report. Any unspent grant must be sent back to the Swiss Leading House Africa no later than 2 months after completion of the project.

Detailed Cost Eligibility

Cost category: overhead

Eligible for Swiss Applicant: No

Eligible for African Applicant: No

Comment: Overheads are strictly not permissible under any circumstance.

Cost category: salary

Eligible for Swiss Applicant: No

Eligible for African Applicant: No

Comment: Salaries are strictly not permissible under any circumstance.

Cost category: work-related institutional costs

Eligible for Swiss Applicant: Yes, under specific conditions (see comment section below)

Eligible for African Applicant: No

Comment: Seasonal Schools strictly affiliated with University of Applied Sciences or University Teacher Education in Switzerland may cover personnel costs for existing staff, but strictly for

the time they devote to the project. Funds may not be used to create new positions, and no more than 20% of the total grant may be allocated to this budget line.

Cost category: travel

Eligible for Swiss Applicant: Yes

Eligible for African Applicant: No

Comment: Only travel expenses directly related to the Seasonal School are eligible for grant funding. Economy class airfare may be charged to the grant.

Cost category: subsistence costs

Eligible for Swiss Applicant: Yes

Eligible for African Applicant: No

Comment: Applicants may include a single lump-sum budget line to cover their accommodation and meals while working on the project. The lump sum must not exceed what one would typically spend at a mid-range hotel and restaurant—luxury rates won't be reimbursed.

Cost category: venue and consumables

Eligible for Swiss Applicant: Yes

Eligible for African Applicant: No

Comment: Costs directly related to the implementation of the Seasonal School are eligible for funding. These may include conference venue rental, room hire, equipment required for the event, field supplies, printing and documentation materials, and laboratory materials. Costs must be directly related to the project and be reasonable and proportionate to the scale of the event. Luxury or non-essential costs will not be reimbursed. All materials and equipment must be used exclusively for the Seasonal School.

In-kind contributions

In-kind contributions from participating institutions for the Seasonal Schools are strongly encouraged. These could include conference and meeting costs, as well as the use of institutional facilities.

Project Duration

Projects must be completed within two to nine months (April to December 2027).

Evaluation and Selection

The Swiss Leading House Africa and CDE, University of Bern team will conduct an initial screening of all proposals to ensure eligibility and compliance. Applications that pass this initial check will be forwarded to independent experts for evaluation following standard international peer-review procedures.

The major criterion on which all proposal evaluations will be based on is **on individual capacity development of PhD students from Swiss and African HEIs and prospects of further research collaboration.**

Proposals will be selected based on the following:

- Set-up and track record of the organizing entity of the Seasonal School.
- Programme of Seasonal School and potential to include inter-and (if applicable) transdisciplinary sessions to bring Swiss and African PhD students together to develop solutions for sustainability challenges.
- Potential of Seasonal Schools to align with the UN 2030 Agenda, the African Union Agenda 2063, and related sustainability topics.
- Detailed plan for selecting at least 12 prospective PhD students.
- Originality and innovativeness of the Seasonal School.
- The potential for future research collaboration between the Swiss and African PhD students and / or the participating institutions (e.g. alumni programme of Seasonal Schools).
- Budget (including availability of third-party funding and in-kind contribution).

Outcomes of the evaluation will be consolidated and approved by the Swiss LH Africa and CDE, University of Bern team. Subsequently, the Swiss LH Africa will communicate the final decision to the main applicant by means of a decision letter.

Extension of Completion Date

No-cost extensions will not be granted. Applicants are encouraged to plan the Seasonal School timeline carefully.

Management and Reporting

The Swiss lead applicant and the African partner must jointly prepare one consolidated scientific (technical) and financial report. The Swiss lead applicant submits this report via email to kobinaassan.ampah@swisstph.ch and serves as the sole contact for all reporting matters. Reports are due two months after the project ends and must include both qualitative analyses and quantitative output data along with financial reporting on expenses. Swiss Leading House Africa will provide all reporting templates with detailed submission instructions.

Timeline

Launch of call: 20 October 2026

Submission deadline: 30 November 2026; 17:00 CET

Notification of results: 15 March 2027

Project start date: Earliest start: 1 April 2027; latest start: 15 September 2027

Final report due: Two month after completion.

Application

Please include the following information in your application:

- Cover letter from the lead applicant.
- A letter of support from the institution to which the Seasonal School is affiliated.
- A list of three potential reviewers with whom you have not worked in the last five years.
- Abstract (max. 200 words).
- Concept and programme of the Seasonal School, including organizational information, the number of PhD students who will receive support, potential links to the UN 2030 Agenda and the African Union Agenda 2063, and planned follow-up activities (maximum three pages).
- Requested funding with a budget justification and indication of available third-party funding and in-kind contributions.

It is the lead applicant's responsibility to ensure that the formal requirements are met and that the content is accurate and complete. Otherwise, the application will not be considered. All information provided must be written in English. You may use the application form available on the [Leading House Africa website](#).

Applications should be submitted as a single pdf document to callafrica.cde@unibe.ch by 17:00 CET on 30 November 2026.

Questions?

Please check first the FAQs below.

Contact information

Dr. Brigitte Portner

Centre for Development and Environment, University of Bern

callafrica.cde@unibe.ch

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Which African countries are eligible for collaborations under the Leading House Africa funding instruments?

Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo Brazzaville, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Cote D'Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

2. I have a scientific partner in Africa whose country is not on the list of countries eligible for Leading House Africa collaboration. Are there other instruments targeting these countries?

Please refer to the [Leading House MENA](#) for instruments specific for North African countries.

3. I already have a running project funded by Leading House Africa. Am I still eligible to apply for this call?

Yes you can – as long as you meet the eligibility requirements of the current call.

4. As a Swiss (main) applicant, can I collaborate with multiple scientists from more than one institute in the same country?

Yes you can- provided all applicants meet the requirements of the call

5. I have prepared a competitive proposal for the call. Can Leading House Africa assist me with finding a Swiss-based collaborator?

No. Leading House Africa does not match scientists and does not have a matching database now. Please refer to the Leading House Africa homepage for updates.

6. Currently, I am based outside of Switzerland for a project funded by a third-party mobility scholarship. Am I still eligible to apply for leading House Africa call?

Yes you can - provided you still have an active employment contract with a Swiss Higher Education Institution.

7. I just found out about the call, but it is past the submission deadline. May I still submit my application now for future consideration?

No you may not. Please check Leading House Africa homepage for more information on upcoming calls.

8. Where can I find guidance on conducting fair, efficient, transboundary research?

See the Guide for Global Research Partnerships. 2025. Swiss Alliance for Global Research Partnerships. grp-guide.ch.

9. Is there a Leading House Africa Newsletter I can subscribe to?

Should you be interested in staying abreast with Leading House Africa instruments, kindly contact Dr. Kobina Ampah (kobinaaassan.ampah@swisstph.ch) with a request to be included in the distribution list.