

FAQs? Spin-off Lab

Application

- **Who is allowed to apply?**

Spin-off lab is designed as intermediate program for people who want to found a company based on interesting research results / product ideas. Applicants require at least a bachelor's degree. An active employment contract with the University of Graz is not necessary at the time of application.

- **What are the requirements for an application?**

In addition to the completed application form and the applicant's CV, the Letter of Commitment (see template form) signed by the head of the future host research group has to be submitted.

- **Can I continue with my current employment?**

Clearly spoken – no. It is absolutely necessary that the research fellow is working 100 percent for the *Spin-off lab* project. Employment law compliance may require individual solutions.

- **What kinds of ideas can be submitted?**

Basically, *Spin-off lab* is open to all research areas and topics. However, greater consideration will be given to ideas with a strong focus on new future business opportunities. During the application process, the candidate will outline how the research results can be transferred into a spin-off company. Feasibility and market potential are strong criteria for the selection of the project.

Individual applicant vs. project team

- **Should I apply individually or with a team?**

Spin-off lab fellowship is designed for researchers / academics pushing a brilliant idea to market with strong personal commitment. As part of this (transition) research fellowship, the university is offering one full-time employment contract for the duration

of the project. The person selected will have to work 100 percent for the fellowship project. However, being able to define a suitable team and other members of the research group given the host (PI) is of great advantage.

- **Can more than one person be funded in the project?**

Spin-off lab is designed to support a fellowship project. If the benefit for the project can be successfully shown, more than one person can be employed. But this would mean that the budget of up to one full-time post-doc salary has to be shared among the fellowship team. Employment law compliance may require individual solutions.

- **Can my team change or expand while the project is running?**

The research fellow receiving the employment contract with the University of Graz cannot change his/her position during the project. Members of the extended team can change of course.

Project phase

- **Is the project duration fixed at 18 months?**

No. The project is set up as a 12 + 6 months scheme. If it turns out within the first 12 months that the project aim cannot be reached and no alternative way of solving the specific research challenge can be applied, the project ends after 12 months. Also, the ongoing performance of the research fellow to reach the agreed milestone goals has to be considered. In certain situations, shorter project durations can also be agreed upon individually. The 18 months can be seen as a maximum time frame.

- **How is the progress of the project evaluated?**

If the fellow has been designated for the *Spin-off lab* program, a milestone plan is going to be defined and agreed on together with experts from industry, research and university incubator. Monthly meetings with mentors and coaches will help to keep the project plan on track. These meetings are mandatory.

- **Where can I work on my project?**

The lab space – if necessary – has to be provided by the host professor. Therefore, it is wise to get in contact with the potential host as soon as possible. The approval has to be proven by a signed letter of commitment from the host professor.

The office space is provided by the university. The physical presence at the startup-uni space in the unicorn building is agreed upon individually with the program management team.

- **Do I have to set up a company as part of the programme?**

Particularly in the first 12-month period, the successful candidate should focus on reaching the set milestone goals, mainly in the area of research. *Spin-off Lab* team will work with them on a mentoring and coaching plan to enable the research fellow to gain start-up and business know-how from the beginning.

After reaching the 12-month milestone, the research fellow needs to start working on a post-fellowship strategy, considering funding, team and company building. The research fellow will receive full support from the team. Legally setting up a company during the fellowship is not mandatory.

- **Do the mentors remain the same over the 18 months?**

Basically, yes. Changes for personal reasons are possible.

- **Will I also receive support in raising funds to found the company?**

Startup-uni & Unicorn will activate its broad network to provide access to institutional funding organisations as well as to private investors. Nevertheless, it is the company of the fellow(s) that has the full responsibility for launching the start-up.

Fellowship contract

- **What legal contracts are going to be signed?**

First, together with program management, external experts and the host professor, a binding milestone plan will be agreed on. This milestone plan is the core of the fellowship program and has to be executed by the research fellow.

Second, the research fellow will sign an employment contract with the University of Graz for at least 12 months, having the option to extend for another 6 months. Note: due to ongoing changes in Austrian university law, this may be slightly adjusted.

Third, the university as the host institution is investing a lot of money into the project. The university will possess ownership of the inventions derived from the fellowship project and also cover the patent application costs. Such (patented) inventions and confidential know-how will be exclusively reserved for and licensed under fair conditions to the future spin-off company. Therefore, an individual option agreement between the university and the research fellow has to be signed at the beginning of the fellowship.

- **What kind of support do I get as a research fellow?**

The research fellow will have access to lab space provided by the host professor, office space, an entrepreneurial network, education and mentoring provided by university team and its partners, and support by scientific and industry experts as well as a budget for consumables.

- **Will I be employed by the University of Graz for the duration of the project?**

The research fellow will receive an employment contract from the university for the duration of the fellowship project. Due to employment law, the personal situation and background of the candidate has to be considered. Note: University law might determine that a further limited employment contract cannot be signed (*Kettenvertragsregelung*).

- **Are there fixed times when I am supposed to work on my idea?**

Research fellows will be employed by the university and as employees they have to consider the general obligations and duties. The host professor will be your superior. Your work has to be 100 percent dedicated to the *Spin-off lab* fellowship.

Commercial and IP rights

- **Is a patent necessary to successfully apply for the fellowship?**

Patents are an important tool to become unique and successful in business. Each fellowship project has individual rules and conditions depending on the project itself, addressed market and research area, so it is also possible to generate protectable inventions during the fellowship.

- **Do I assign the rights of my new product to the university?**

Inventions and confidential know-how defined by patent law have to be transferred to the university for legal reasons. The provided option agreement ensures that the future spin-off company will retain nothing less than an exclusive licence to the IP.

Project end

- **What happens once the fellowship project is completed?**

By the end of the fellowship, a roadmap for the further establishment of the spin-off company will exist. This might include a further incubation process within a known incubation provider, as well as the immediate establishment of a company.

- **Can the programme be cancelled at any time?**

If the chances of success diminish due to unexpected problems, the project can be terminated by the participants as well as by the university. This can also be due to a lack of commitment or failure to meet milestones.