

Z-Kubator

What's next_Project 2026/27

Information for applicants

WHAT'S NEXT_PROJECT

is the Z-Kubator's support programme for ZHdK graduates, focused on developing projects with clear entrepreneurial potential.

Our programme enables you or your team to further develop projects from the arts, mediation and design using entrepreneurial strategies.

The programme offers low-threshold, early-stage and tailored support. Supported by Zürcher Kantonalbank.

New: ZHdK graduates from the last 5 years can now apply (graduated in 2021 or later).

Also new: the programme now starts on 1 October each year and is delivered in two phases:

- **Phase 1 Validation**
with up to 8 projects from October to December
- **Phase 2 Incubation**
with up to 4 projects from January to September

WHO IS THE PROGRAMME AIMED AT?

- For ZHdK Bachelor's and Master's graduates from all disciplines, up to a maximum of five years after completing their studies (graduating classes of 2021 and later)
- as well as academic staff (junior researchers) who are employed at ZHdK at the time of application.
- For anyone who wants to actively sharpen, drive forward and realise their project from an entrepreneurial perspective;
- and who would like to learn from subject-matter experts and exchange ideas with other ZHdK alumnae and alumni.

PHASE 1 VALIDATION

1 October – 31 December 2026.

- A maximum of **8 projects** (individuals or teams) will be admitted to the first phase by an expert jury.
- The aim of this phase is to test and develop your project's entrepreneurial feasibility, i.e. its market viability. It also focuses on the personal development of the founder(s) and/or team members, so they can continue pursuing their project sustainably.
- This is achieved through one full-day workshop and 5 evening workshops (4–7 pm) with internal and external experts on topics such as **business model & strategy, prototyping, finance & setting up a business, fundraising, and presenting.**
- You will also receive access to ZHdK infrastructure at Toni-Areal with the **Campus Card** (including workshops, photo cluster, editing suites, equipment loan, library, and much more).
- Phase 1 concludes at the beginning of December with a presentation to a jury.
- Each project receives financial support of **CHF 1'500** for participating in Phase 1.
- Phase 1 runs from **1 October to 31 December 2026.**

PHASE 2 INCUBATION

1 January – 30 September 2027

- A maximum of **4 projects** (individuals or teams) from Phase 1 will be selected for Phase 2 based on the presentations.
- The aim of the second phase is to further develop your project towards a self-sustaining, entrepreneurial implementation.
- Each project/team is assigned a practitioner as a coach, with a **budget for at least 6 coaching sessions.**
- Continued access to ZHdK infrastructure with the **Campus Card**, plus further benefits.
- Phase 2 concludes with a final presentation to a jury.
- Each project receives an additional financial support of **CHF 4'500** for participating in Phase 2.
- Phase 2 runs from **1 January – 30 September 2027.**

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

- **Campus Card** for access to the infrastructure at Toni-Areal (including workshops, photo cluster, editing suites, equipment loan, library, digital infrastructure, and more).
- **Workshops with experts** on topics such as business model & strategy, prototyping, finance and setting up a business, fundraising, or presenting.
- **Individual mentoring** and advice from external coaches and the Z-Kubator team.
- **Peer-to-peer exchange** with participants in the What's next_Compas programme and the Z-Kubator community.
- **Building your own business network** and opportunities to present yourself and your project.
- Direct financial support of up to **CHF 6'000** per project.

WHAT ARE THE APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS?

- The project is innovative and pioneering: we are looking for projects that aim to have a positive impact beyond purely economic considerations.
- The founder(s) pursue an entrepreneurial strategy with the aim of building a financially self-sustaining project in the longer term, not (entirely) dependent on subsidies or grants.
- The founder(s)/team have a long-term vision and are willing to invest time and energy to achieve it.
- The founder(s)/team have already tested the idea, and at least a first version or prototype exists which can be further developed during the programme.
- The founder(s)/team are BA or MA graduates from the graduating classes of 2021 or later, or academic staff (junior researchers).
- For teams, all individuals can receive financial support who meet the participation requirements and actively develop the project during the funding period. In this case, the funding amount is split between the individuals.

AND WHAT ARE THE EXCLUSION CRITERIA?

- The programme is aimed exclusively at ZHdK graduates and academic staff (junior researchers) at ZHdK.
- It is not possible to be enrolled at the same time in a BA or MA degree programme or a pre-degree programme (Propädeutikum, PreCollege Music) at ZHdK and take part in this support programme.
- Participants and graduates of ZHdK continuing education programmes (CAS, MAS) are not eligible to participate.

WHAT ARE MY COMMITMENTS IF I TAKE PART?

- The intention to develop the project professionally and over the long term.
- Phase 1: at least 80% attendance at the workshops: one full-day workshop as a kick-off plus 5 evening workshops of 3 hours each.
- Phase 2: participation in 6 coaching sessions, check-in meetings with the Z-Kubator team, and two presentation/networking events as part of the programme*.
- Presentation of the project at internal and external events by arrangement*.
- Proactive communication with the Z-Kubator team regarding your project.
- Acknowledgement of Z-Kubator support in your communication channels (e.g. project website, social media, project presentations).
- Submission of a final report per phase in the form of a presentation.

* Dates are defined jointly and by arrangement.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

We recommend taking part in one of the Zoom Q&A online sessions to learn more about the programme and to find out whether applying makes sense:

- **Thursday, 16 April 2026, 12:00-13:00**
→ [Zoom Link](#)
- **Wednesday, 6 May 2026, 12:00-13:00** →
→ [Zoom Link](#)
- **Thursday, 2 July 2026, 12:00-13:00**
→ [Zoom Link](#)
- **Wednesday, 5 August 2026, 12:00-13:00**
→ [Zoom Link](#)

Language: German and English

WHICH DATES DO I NEED TO BE AWARE OF?

- **Wed, 1.4.26** Start application window
- **Sun, 16.8.26** Application deadline by 23:59
- **Wed, 26.8.26** Feedback on application
- **Wed, 9.9.26** Jury presentations, 08:30–12:00
- **Thu, 10.9.26** Announcement Phase 1 participants

Phase 1 Validation

- **Thu, 1.10.26** Programme start, access Toni-Areal
- **Tue, 6.10.26** Kick-off, full day incl. 1st workshop
- **Tue, 13.10.–10.11.26** Delivery of five themed workshops, Tuesday evenings, 16:00–19:00
- **Tue, 8.12.26** Phase 1 presentations

Phase 2 Incubation

- **Fri, 1.1.27** Start of Phase 2 programme
- **January 2027** Kick-off Phase 2
- **Thu, 30.9.27** End of Phase 2, end of programme

The dates for Phase 2 coaching sessions will be arranged individually with participants.

What's next_Project 2026/27 – Call for applications

Programme overview

APPLICATION PHASE

THU 9.4.26

Start Application Window

SUN 16.8.26

Deadline Applications

WED 26.8.26

Feedback on applications

MI 9.9.26

Jury Presentations 09–12 

DO 10.9.26

Feedback on presentations

PHASE 1: VALIDATION

up to 8 projects/teams
1 October – 31 December 2026

Ongoing during Phase 1: individual mentoring & check-ins with the Z-Kubator team

TUE 6.10.26

Kick-off + Project Management 09–16

TUE 13.10.26

Finances & Founding 16–19

TUE 20.10.26

Fundraising 16–19

TUE 27.10.26

Business Model 16–19

TUE 3.11.26

Prototyping 16–19

TUE 10.11.26

Presenting 16–19

TUE 8.12.26

Jury Presentations 16–19 

PHASE 2: INCUBATION

up to 4 projects/teams
1 January – 30 September 2027

Ongoing during Phase 2: individual mentoring & check-ins with the Z-Kubator team

JAN 2027

Kick-off Phase 2

Coach/Mentor Check-ins

#1

#2

#3

#4

#5

#6

SEPT 2027

Jury Presentations 

What's next_Project 2026/27 – Call for applications

Application + contact

ALL CLEAR!

WHERE CAN I APPLY??

- Apply online by no later than **Sunday, 16 August 2026**.
- Only complete applications that meet the application criteria will be considered.
- A complete application consists of 2 parts:

1. [Google Forms Application](#)

Administrative and content-related questions about you and/or your team and your project.

2. PDF attachment

In Google Forms you upload a PDF consisting of:

2.1. CV

For teams: from all applicants

2.2. What's next_Canvas

Fill in with bullet points, template on the next pages or to [download here](#).

2.3. Project information as a presentation

optional and must not exceed 5 pages/slides

Please name the PDF as follows:

<Surname_First name_Project title_WNP2627>

WHO DO I NEED TO CONVINCED TO BE ABLE TO TAKE PART IN THE PROGRAMME?

Our expert jury:

- **Simona Boscardin**
Founder *ON FIRE*, Lead Communication & Editing *Stiftung Team Ensemble*, What's next_Project Alumna 2025
- **Renato Soldenhoff**
Partner *Unternehmen ohne Namen*, Co-Lead ZHdK CAS *Crafting Futures* & Expert CAS *Strategic Design*
- **Nadja Stäubli**
CEO & Creative Director *Sula GmbH*, ZHdK Alumna
- **Yves Burgener**, Programme Lead Z-Kubator
- **Philipp Kotsopoulos**, Head of Z-Kubator

CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Yves Burgener, Programme Lead What's next_Project

- +41 43 446 20 87
- yves.burgener@zhdk.ch

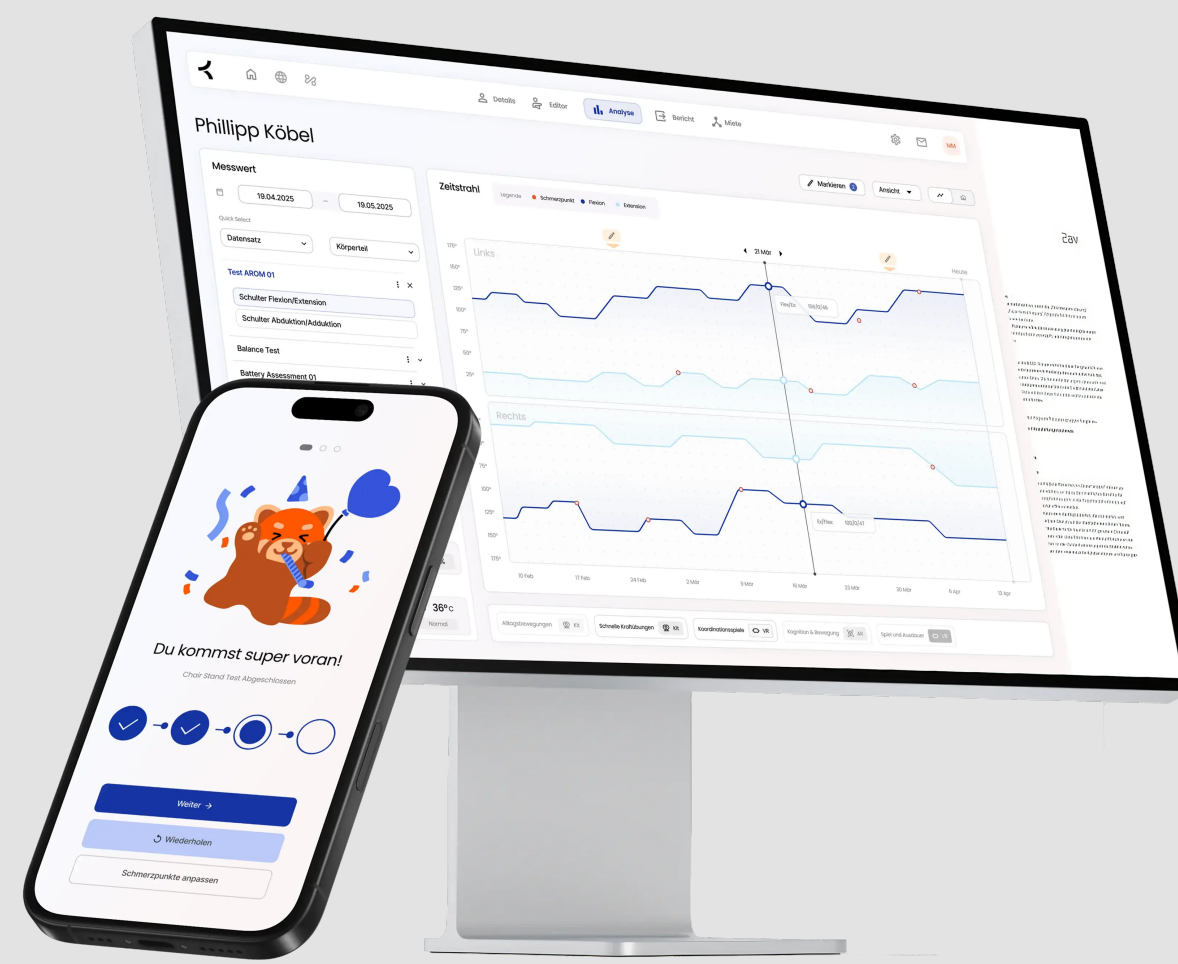
PROJECT TITLE		TEAM	
<p>SMS PITCH Describe your idea in a maximum of 160 characters, without the project title. A short, punchy teaser that makes you want to learn more about the project.</p>			
<p>1. THE OFFER: PRODUCT/SERVICE</p> <p>What exactly are you offering? What is your product or service?</p>	<p>3. YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION</p> <p>Which problem does your offer solve, i.e. what added value does it generate for your target group(s)? And what makes it unique?</p>	<p>5. RESOURCES</p> <p>Which resources are available to you (time, skills)? Who supports you and how? Which resources are you still missing?</p>	
<p>2. WHO? THE USERS & TARGET GROUP(S)</p> <p>Who exactly are you addressing? Who are the end users, who are the buyers, partners, multipliers, etc.?</p>	<p>4. YOUR MOTIVATION</p> <p>What is your/your team's motivation and the background to this project? Why do you want to take part in this support programme?</p>	<p>6. MILESTONES</p> <p>Which milestones have already been achieved and which are still ahead?</p>	
<p>7. FINANCING: EXPENDITURE</p> <p>What costs will arise for you/your team (salary, production, rent, licences, etc.) and how much will they be (rough figures)?</p>		<p>8. FINANCING: INCOME</p> <p>How will the implementation be financed and how will income be generated (sales, grants, etc.)?</p>	

PROJECT TITLE		TEAM	
SMS PITCH			
1. THE OFFER: PRODUCT/SERVICE	3. YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION	5. RESOURCES	
2. WHO? THE USERS & TARGET GROUP(S)	4. YOUR MOTIVATION	6. MILESTONES	
7. FINANCING: EXPENDITURE		8. FINANCING: INCOME	

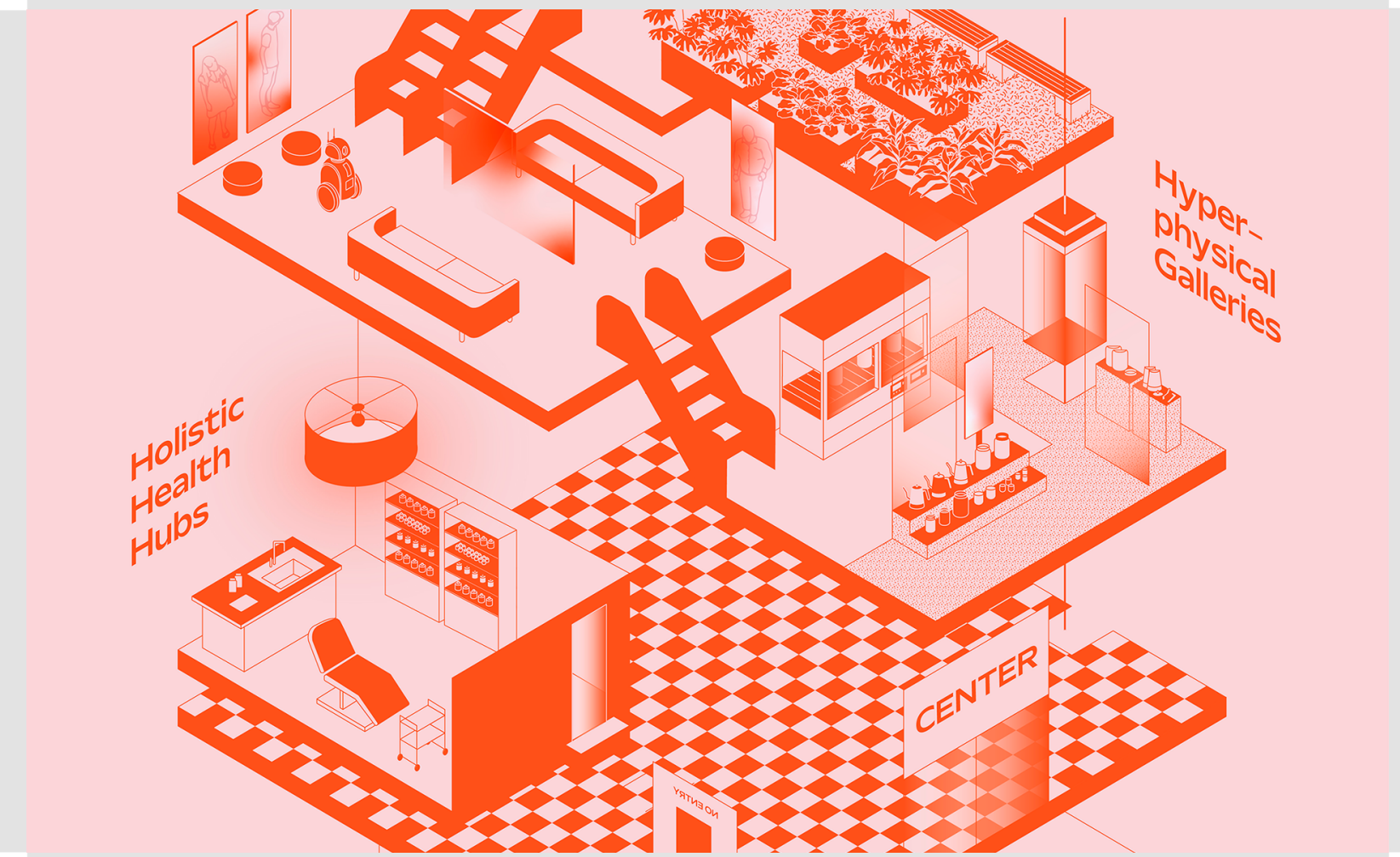
COLLECTION OF PREVIOUS PARTICIPANTS



Tara Jenkins & Anja Fritschi, Touriski
(2026—BA Interaction Design)



Stepan Vedunov & Elia Salerno, Kymu.
(2026—BA Interaction Design)



Jill Kayser, Strobo Futures.
(2024—MA Trends & Identity)



Narada Zürer, NEUNOI
(2024—BA Industrial Design)



Tabea Wschiansky, Para.
(2025—BA Industrial Design)



Tobias Gutmann, Sai Bot.
(2022—MA Fine Arts)

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Zürcher Hochschule der Künste
Zurich University of the Arts
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Z-Kubator



CONTACT

ZURICH University of the Arts

Z-Kubator

Yves Burgener

+41 43 446 20 87

yves.burgener@zhdk.ch

zhdk.ch/zkubator

The Z-Kubator is part of the
Zurich Centre for Creative
Economies (ZCCE).