

Academy-Industry Training Nepal

Section I: Introduction to AIT Nepal

1. Introduction

The Academia-Industry Training (AIT) Nepal is an innovation-based bilateral program between Switzerland and Nepal through a collaborative initiative between the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (Leading House- South Asia) and the Embassy of Switzerland in Nepal (through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation Nepal – SDC).

The AIT program is an early-career development and market discovery program to support researchers who want to transform their science into a business. The program empowers researchers from both countries through training, mentoring, exposure to the innovation ecosystems of both countries, and networking opportunities to help bring their ideas closer to market readiness.

2. Relevance and strategic alignment

Nepal offers a timely and strategic opportunity to pilot the AIT model in an emerging, underexplored market. Recent policy reforms, a growing innovation ecosystem, and successful bilateral platforms signal readiness for structured Swiss-Nepali collaboration. The AIT Nepal pilot would build innovation-bridges, create scalable impact in clean energy, ICT, and tourism, and strengthen Switzerland's innovation presence in South Asia.

- **High-growth potential innovation momentum:** Nepal hosts a vibrant and fast-growing ICT ecosystem and is reforming fast—ICT companies can now reinvest abroad and open international branches. Over 220 new tech firms attracted foreign interest in under a year.
- **Young tech-savvy talent:** Nepal's growing startup scene and skilled workforce provide a cost-effective base for Swiss R&D and digital partnerships.
- **Hydropower transformation:** With 941 MW already approved for export and a 10,000 MW target, Nepal's shift to a net electricity exporter offers opportunities for Swiss innovation in clean energy and infrastructure.
- **Tourism synergies:** Record visitor numbers and major hotel investments (Hilton, Marriott, Hyatt) create demand for expertise in sustainable, alpine, and wellness tourism—Swiss specialties.

3. Goals and objectives

The AIT Nepal programme aims to test and evaluate the feasibility of a bilateral science-entrepreneurship training model in the context of Switzerland and Nepal. The program supports early-stage sciencepreneurs from both countries in developing entrepreneurial skills, validating their ideas in a cross-border context, and building long-term connections.

Nepal is an emerging innovation landscape with strong academic institutions and a growing entrepreneurial ecosystem. Launching AIT Nepal will:

- Strengthen academic and innovation ties between Switzerland and Nepal
- Support science-based entrepreneurship in both countries
- Explore opportunities for sustainable and inclusive innovation
- Build a foundation for long-term bilateral collaboration

Nepal's academia-research-entrepreneurship ecosystem, particularly in the sciences, remains underdeveloped and fragmented. Despite growing youth interest in startups and tech innovation, investment in applied research and innovation is limited, and collaboration between academia and industry is insufficient. To effectively foster "sciencepreneurs," interdisciplinary collaboration between early- to mid-stage science-based ventures and academia is likely to be more successful than approaches focused solely on research-driven entrepreneurship.

Section II: Eligibility and application

4. Eligibility of participants

The Nepali participant can be researchers or entrepreneurs using academic research in and for Nepal. As such, eligible participants could be

- Undergraduate and graduate students of Nepali or foreign university
- Senior scientists, PhD students, Postdoctoral researchers developing academic research backed product development
- Existing companies that have prototyped or developed a product based on academic research or with an academic affiliation

5. Selection criteria

Following the closing of application period, applications will be pre-screened for completeness and mandatory criteria. Complete applications will be screened for eligibility based on the eligibility criteria (Section 5). The Jury with representation of academia, industry experts, ecosystem representatives and SDC will evaluate the qualitative criteria. Shortlisted applicants (max 10) will be invited for a pitch by the jury, leading to final selection decision.

8.1 Mandatory criteria (that must be met to proceed to qualitative evaluation)

- a. Completeness of application
 - All sections of the application form must be filled
 - All requested documents must be submitted
- b. Affiliation
 - Must be a Nepali undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate student of a recognized academic institution in Nepal or abroad OR a Nepali entrepreneur with academic affiliation in Nepal or abroad
- c. Stage of business idea
 - Early-stage business idea i.e. proof of concept to prototype stage
 - No or limited external funding secured (excluding academic grants)
- d. Expectation and commitment
 - The applicant should state their expectation from the program
 - Must commit for full participation in the program (Swiss week 21-25 September 2026 and Nepal week 8-12 March 2027)

8.2 Qualitative criteria

- Innovation & Market Potential
- Entrepreneurial Drive & Team
- Understanding of the Nepali market & relevance for AIT Nepal
- Communication & Clarity

6. Application process

Application forms are available to download from the website of Embassy of Switzerland in Nepal. Duly filled application form, with requested additional documents (e.g. CV) should be submitted by email on the given email address prior to the stated application deadline. Any incomplete application, or application received after the deadline will not be considered.

7. Timeline

Launch Call	13 April 2026
Application deadline	10 May 2026
Screening and selection process	15 May- 20 June 2026
Jury day	11 June
Communication of decision	22- 26 June 2026
Kick-off day	14 July 2026
Switzerland-week	21- 25 September 2026
Nepal-week	8- 12 March 2027