

Media Release

Five deep-tech pioneers shortlisted for the ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark 2026

Zurich, March 31, 2026 – Five Swiss startups working in photonics, robotics, pharmaceutical technology and renewable energy storage have been named finalists for the ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark 2026. The finalists are competing for a CHF 100,000 top prize at one of Switzerland's leading deep-tech awards and will present their technologies live on May 12 at Technopark Zurich.

The jury of the ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark has selected the five finalists for the 2026 edition of one of Switzerland's leading deep-tech startup awards. The decision was made during the last jury meeting chaired by Lothar Thiele, who presided over the jury for the last time this year.

Chosen from a shortlist of 13 nominated startups, the selected finalists represent some of the most promising deep-tech ventures emerging from Switzerland. Competing for the CHF 100,000 main prize, they will present their innovations on 12 May 2026 at Technopark Zurich in front of 350 guests.

“The quality of this year's nominees is exceptionally high,” says Lothar Thiele, Chairman of the Jury. “We are seeing scientifically grounded technologies with clear commercial potential, combined with remarkable thematic diversity. This breadth reflects the growing maturity and strength of Switzerland's deep-tech ecosystem.”

Strong technologies, diverse fields

The finalists illustrate the breadth of innovation emerging from Switzerland's research ecosystem. Three out of five startups integrate artificial intelligence or machine learning into their technologies. Their fields of innovation span energy, robotics, photonics and pharmaceutical technology. Four of the startups have roots in ETH institutions, highlighting the strong link between academic research and entrepreneurial innovation in Switzerland.

Diversity within the founding teams is slightly below last year's level: 40 percent of the startups include women at founder or C-level positions. While one startup is based in Neuchâtel, the remaining finalists are located in the Zurich region.

Interest in the Pionierpreis continues to grow. The 2026 edition attracted 76 applications, marking the highest level of participation in the award's history. Following an intensive selection process, the jury has now shortlisted the following five finalists.

The Five Finalists (in alphabetical order)

Ccraft SA (Neuchâtel)

Ccraft addresses a growing bottleneck in the data infrastructure required for the AI era. High-performance data centres increasingly rely on optical communication, yet scalable production of energy-efficient photonic chips remains limited. As an independent foundry specialising in Thin-Film Lithium Niobate (TFLN) technology, Ccraft manufactures high-performance photonic chips in Switzerland that convert electrical into optical signals with exceptional efficiency. The technology enables faster and more energy-efficient data transmission, helping build the next generation of sustainable AI infrastructure. -- <https://www.ccraft.com/>

Glycoera AG (Zurich)

Glycoera is developing a new therapeutic approach for autoimmune diseases, where existing treatments often lack precision and produce limited clinical benefits.

The startup's in vivo glycoengineering platform enables the development of novel biologics that bind disease-causing proteins through a natural mechanism of the liver. These proteins are then selectively degraded, offering a targeted and potentially more effective treatment strategy in immunology. -- <https://www.glycoera.com/>

Roboa AG (Zurich)

Roboa tackles one of the most complex challenges in industrial inspection and rescue operations: accessing extremely confined or hazardous environments.

Its highly flexible modular snake robots can navigate narrow pipes, closed tanks or collapsed structures that remain inaccessible to humans or conventional robotic systems. The technology enables inspection, maintenance and emergency response in environments previously considered unreachable. -- <https://www.roboa.ch/>

Rtdt Laboratories AG (Zurich)

Wind turbines often operate below their potential because the aerodynamic behaviour of rotor blades cannot be measured precisely during operation.

With Aerosense, the startup has developed an innovative sensor patch that analyses rotor aerodynamics in real time. The system enables operators to optimise turbine control settings for maximum site-specific energy output, improving both efficiency and reliability in wind energy production. -- <https://rtdt.ai/>

Unbound Potential AG (Zurich)

The transition to renewable energy requires scalable and affordable energy storage solutions. Current technologies remain expensive and difficult to scale locally.

Unbound Potential has developed a membrane-free flow battery designed to deliver cost-effective and rapidly scalable energy storage. The technology enables flexible, locally producible storage solutions that support a resilient and sustainable energy infrastructure. -- <https://www.unbound-potential.com/>

Award ceremony: innovation meets perseverance

All five finalists will present their innovations live during the award ceremony at Technopark Zurich. In addition to the CHF 100,000 main prize, two further finalists will receive CHF 10,000 each. An Audience Award worth CHF 5,000 will also be presented during the event.

“At the Pionierpreis, we look beyond technology alone.” says Michelle Tschumi, jury member and Head of Startup Finance at Zürcher Kantonalbank. “What inspires us most are founders who combine curiosity with perseverance and a genuine commitment to creating societal value. Particularly compelling are solutions that bridge cutting-edge research with real-world application.”

The 2026 award ceremony will take place under the guiding theme “Perseverance”. In her keynote, philosopher, journalist and presenter Barbara Bleisch will reflect on perseverance and the human experience of failure. The event will be moderated by Tobias Müller, returning to the role after a three-year break.

About ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark

The ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark is awarded annually by Zürcher Kantonalbank and Technopark Zurich and is considered one of Switzerland's most prestigious awards for deep-tech startups. For over 25 years, the Pionierpreis has recognized projects that demonstrate exceptional innovation

and are on the verge of market entry, celebrating the boldness and dedication of startup founders. With a top prize for the winning project or startup of CHF 100,000, the award also provides two additional finalists with CHF 10,000, acknowledging their achievements and supporting their continued development. Additionally, an Audience Award worth CHF 5,000 is presented at the award ceremony, giving attendees the chance to recognize outstanding startups within the finalists. Since 2001, 46 startups have been awarded a total of CHF 2,373,764, reinforcing the Pionierpreis as a critical driver of innovation and growth for emerging companies in Switzerland. Beyond financial support, the award offers a recognized platform, providing winners with increased visibility and valuable industry connections.

More information: www.pionierpreis.ch

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