Press release

Eleven deep-tech start-ups shortlisted for the ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark 2024

Zürich – The panel of judges has made its shortlist: From 45 applications, eleven start-ups are still in the running for the Pionierpreis 2024 – an initiative by Zürcher Kantonalbank and Technopark Zürich – which will be presented on 7 May at Technopark Zürich. Winners can look forward to a check for CHF 100,000 at one of Switzerland's most significant deep-tech awards.

Zürich, 25 January 2024 – For more than two decades, the ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark has been promoting technology start-ups that stand out for their level in deep-tech innovation. A total of 45 applications were received for this year's competition. After an initial meeting of the judges, eleven nominated start-ups still remain – eight of them from the Zurich area. Almost half of the nominees concentrate on technology solutions in the Medtech sector, two-thirds are spin-offs from ETH and EPFL.

"This year, without exception, all applications took a considerable innovative step in the field of deep tech. This is unique and makes the nominated start-ups stand out even more. It was not an easy decision and discussed extensively on a technical level." emphasises Matthias Hölling, jury member and team leader foundation affairs at Technopark Zurich.

The judges, consisting of eight experts from the fields of physics, medical technology, computer science, chemistry, and economics, focused on projects that were considered technologically feasible and, at the same time, promise to have a positive impact on society and the economy.

The nominated start-ups are (in alphabetical order):

4QT (Zurich)
Excavators, dumpers, and other heavy construction machinery are significant polluters and challenging to electrify owing to their high energy requirements and difficult access to charging stations. 4QT's patented double-rotor drive offers a solution to this problem and contributes significantly to climate-neutral construction. www.4qt.ch

Avelo (Schlieren)
Avelo's innovative breath aerosol collector uses existing PCR tests to provide a simple and rapid diagnosis of lower respiratory tract pathogens, leading, for example, to better and more targeted treatment of tuberculosis – the fourth most common cause of death worldwide. www.avelolife.com

Decentriq (Zurich)
Decentriq offers a SaaS platform with data protection technologies and advanced AI solutions. It enables companies to work together on confidential data and create insightful statistics or AI models without the need to share raw data. www.decentriq.com

Deepjudge (Zurich)

Deepjudge is an AI-powered knowledge-based search engine with a chat assistant that helps law firms and legal experts use natural language quickly and effortlessly to extract insights from large corporate document- and knowledge-management systems. https://deepjudge.ai

Eightinks (Schlieren)
One of the biggest challenges in energy transition is how to store energy. Eightinks has developed a manufacturing process for next-generation lithium-ion batteries based on a multi-layer curtain coating for electrodes. This will make it possible to resolve issues relating to scalability, costs, energy density, charging times, safety, and recyclability – fundamentally changing the state of the art. https://eightinks.com

Flybotix (Lausanne)
Aerial inspections by drones are often hindered by confined spaces and limited flight times. Flybotix's technology overcomes these challenges by equipping a cage drone with a patented propulsion system that doubles the flight duration currently possible. https://flybotix.com

Haya Therapeutics (Lausanne)
HAYA Therapeutics develops treatments to reprogram disease-driving cell-states associated with fibrosis, the cause of 45% of lethalities in the world. We have developed a proprietary platform to gain novel insights into the biology and 'druggability' of long non-coding RNAs, the 'dark genomes' features that dictate these disease-driving cell-states. www.hayatx.com

Limula (Lausanne)
Cell and gene therapies (CGT) offer hope for patients with previously incurable cancers. However, these treatments are inaccessible to most eligible patients because their production is based on a complex manual process. Limula is developing a sophisticated bioreactor that enables automation in manufacturing and promises to make CGT scalable and accessible to a greater extent. https://limula.ch

NexMR (Schlieren)
Magnetic resonance (MR) is used not only for imaging and diagnosing patients but is also the most precise instrument for analyzing chemical substances in drug development. NexMRs' technology combines in vitro sample illumination with photochemistry to create a process that promises to be 20-50 times cheaper and 100 times faster than today's standard. https://nexmr.com

Stimit (Zurich)
Intensive care patients lose up to 50 percent of their diaphragmatic function within the first three days of artificial ventilation. Stimit's innovation aims to maintain this function non-invasively by stimulating the phrenic nerves to activate the diaphragm. This encourages faster, unaided breathing and avoids potentially unnecessary intensive care costs. www.stimit.com

Unisers (Zurich)
Every year, billions of computer chips are wasted during production because dirt particles are not detected early enough. Unisers' intelligent contamination analysis uses the combination of an ultra-thin coating and Raman spectroscopy to detect impurities. This technology can increase the yield of chip production in semiconductor manufacturing, while waste reduction also positively impacts the environment. https://unisers.ch

About the ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark

The ZKB Pionierpreis Technopark is presented by Zürcher Kantonalbank and Technopark Zürich and is considered the most significant award for deep-tech start-ups in Switzerland. For over 20 years, the Pionierpreis has honored projects whose innovative implementation is about to enter the market – with special recognition given to the commitment and willingness of start-up founders to take risks. In March, the expert jury will shortlist the top three start-up finalists, who will take to the stage at Technopark Zürich for the award ceremony on 7 May 2024. In addition to the winning team receiving CHF 100,000, the runners-up are presented with CHF 10,000 each. As one of the most prestigious innovation awards in Switzerland, it helps young companies acquire further capital and offers them a recognized platform for introducing themselves to the wider public.

Further information: www.pionierpreis.ch

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