



OSS at ETH Zurich: balancing between challenges and opportunities

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September 24, 2025

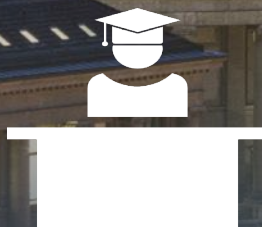
ETH Zurich at a glance



Founded 1855



~25'000 Students
(4460 PhDs)



~550
Professors

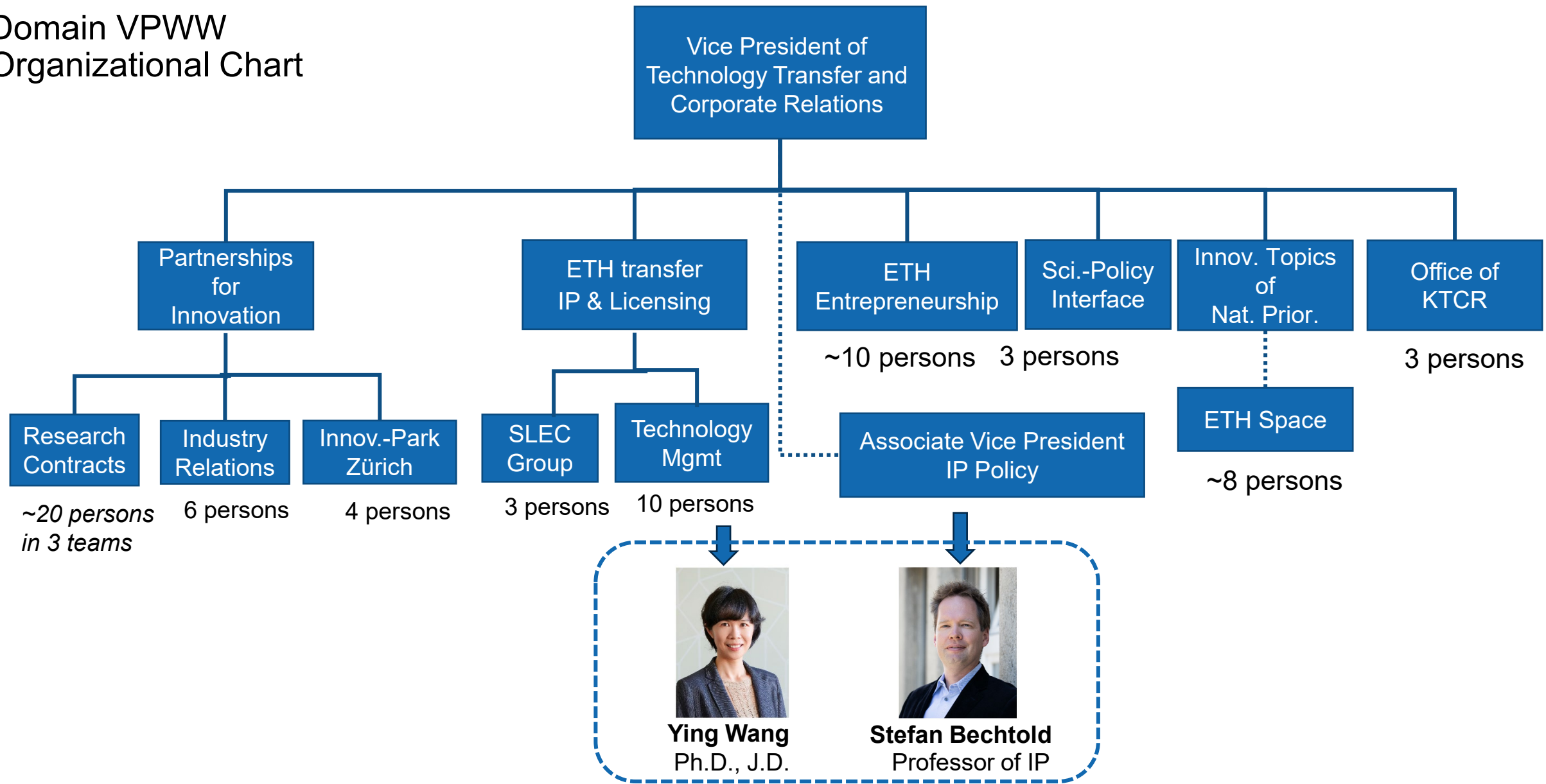


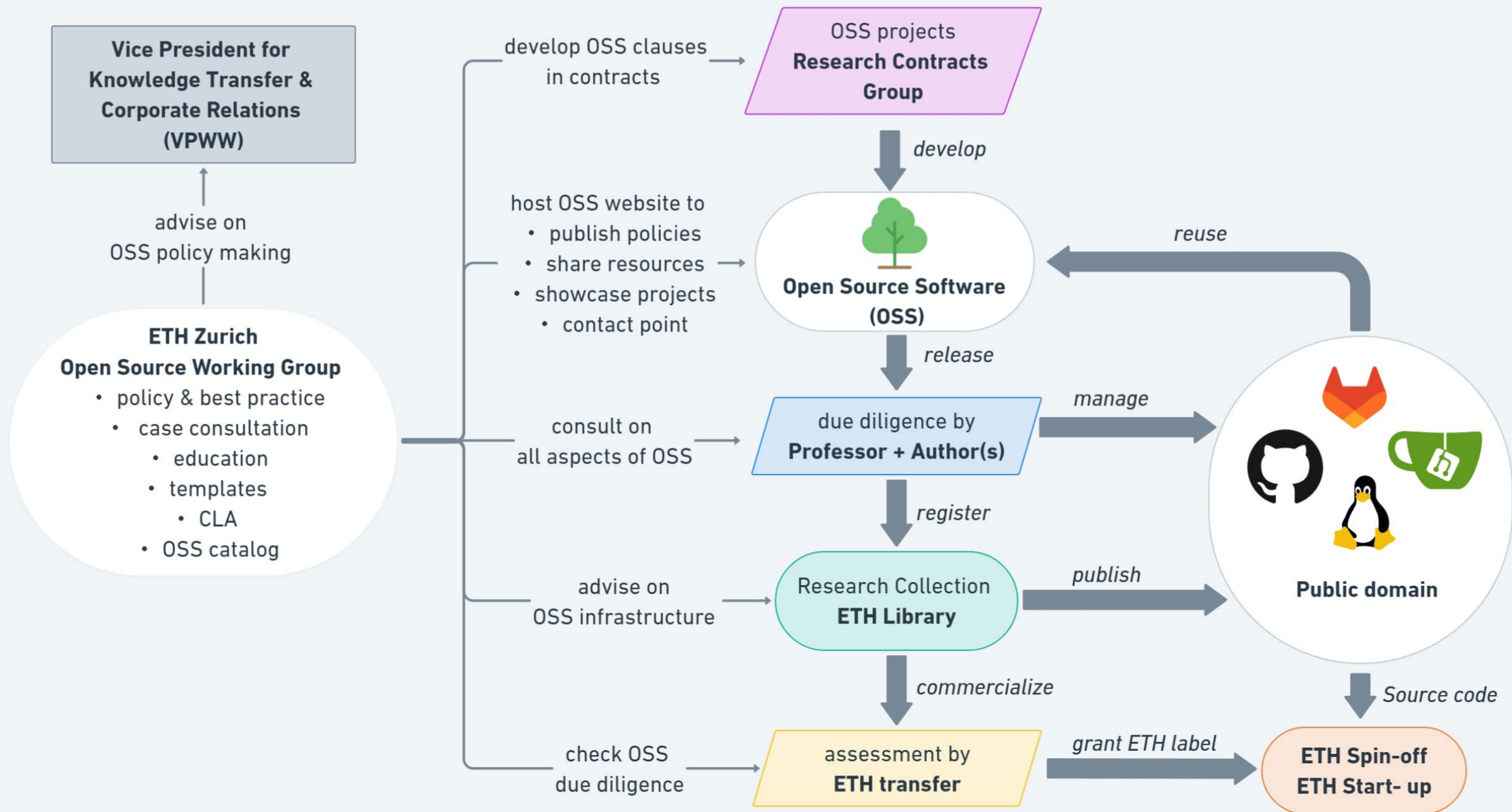
~9'900
Employees



16 programs ranked top 10
QS World University Rankings

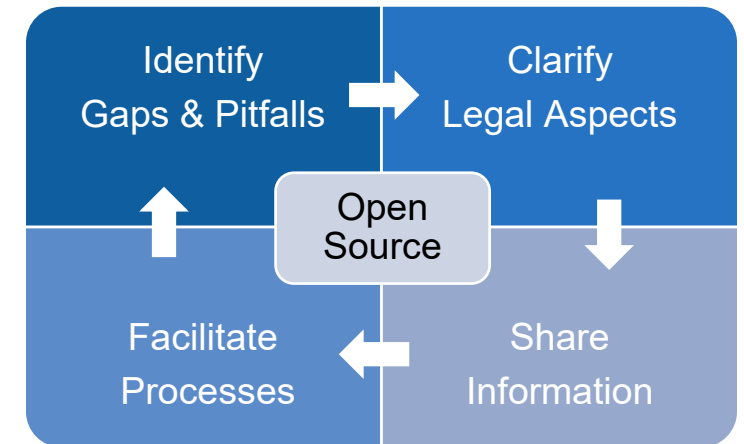
Domain VPWW Organizational Chart





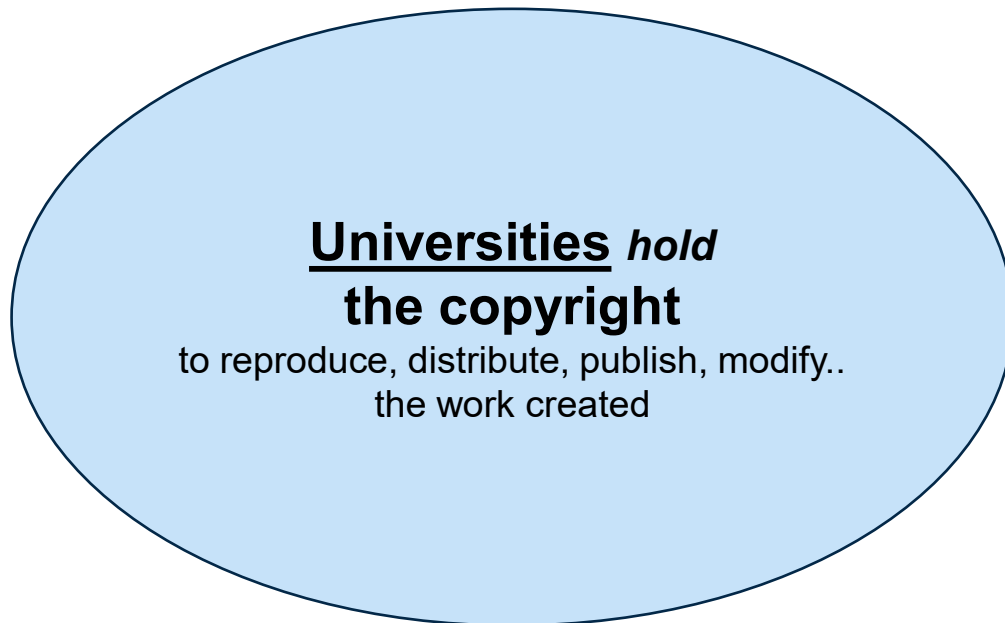
Revise the OSS policy in the ETH IP Guidelines

- Surveyed researchers and university partners
- understand how OSS is handled and to identify pitfalls and gaps in the current practice.
- clarified legal issues behind the needs and challenges people faced
- formed the foundation for policy revision
- shared information of updated policy and best practice and other recourses
- implemented the new police to facilitate OSS processes and seek feedback



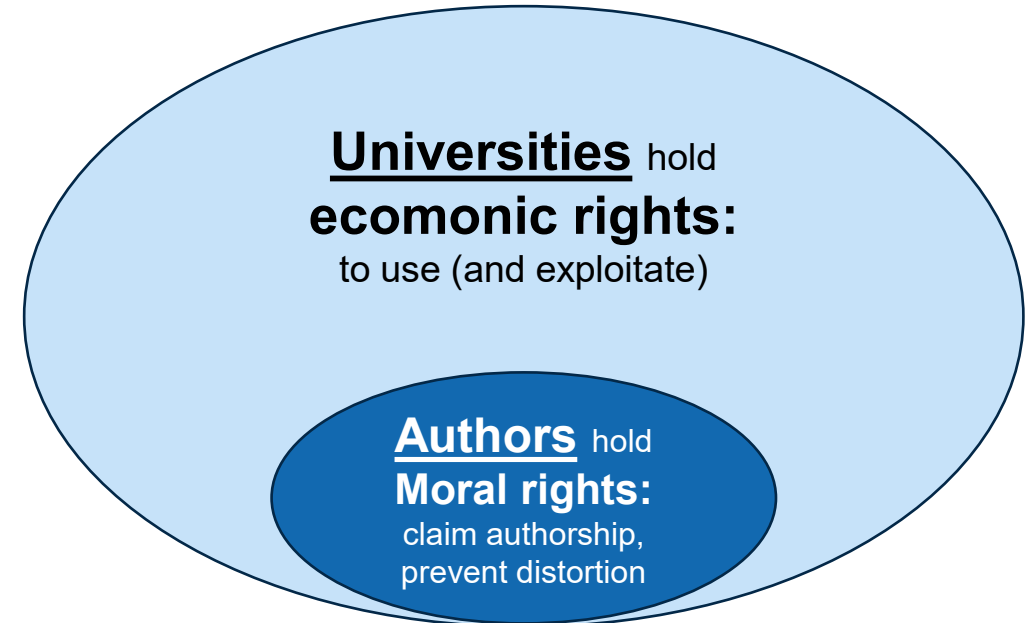
Clarify legal aspects: Authors vs. Owners

the US system



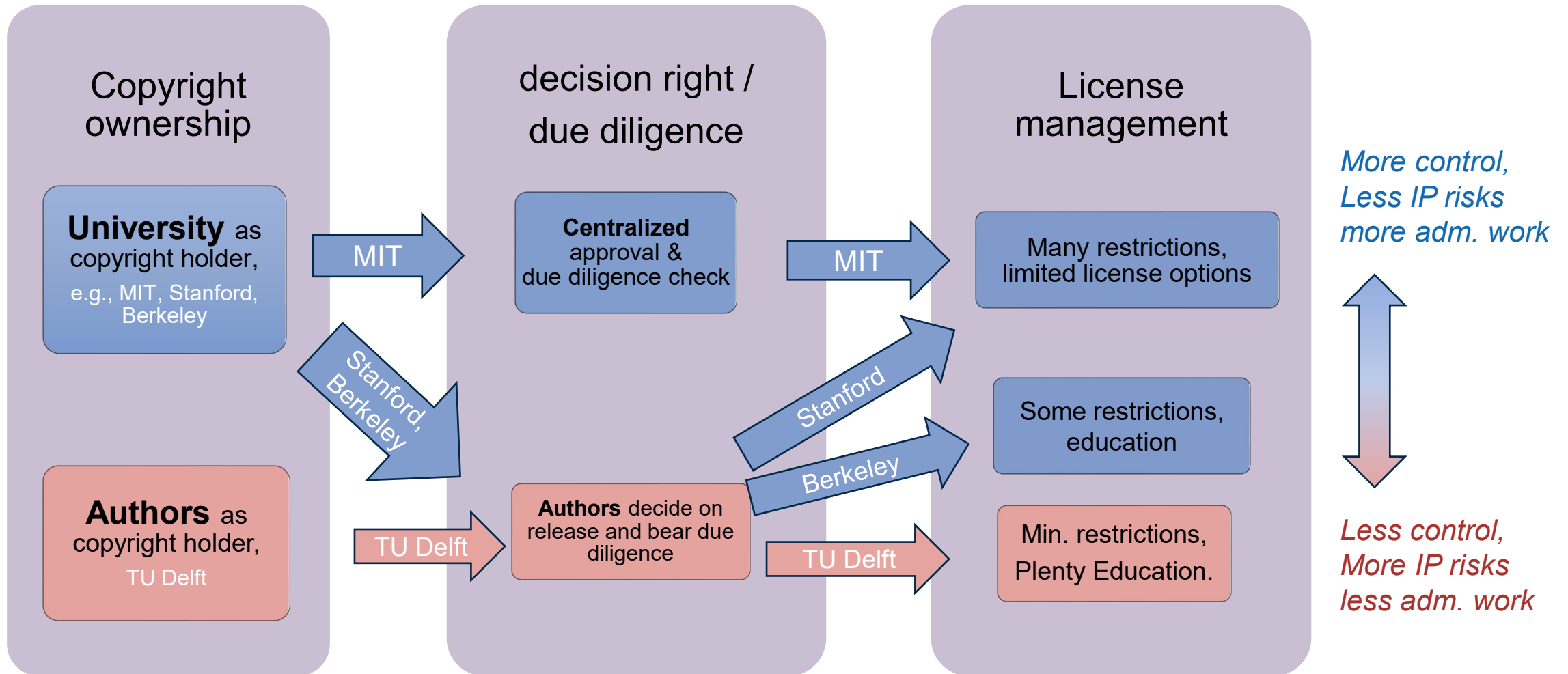
- Universities are **copyright owners**

the Swiss system (Art. 36 ETH Act; EG)



- ETH is the holder of exclusive use rights

Clarify legal aspects: Authors vs. Owners



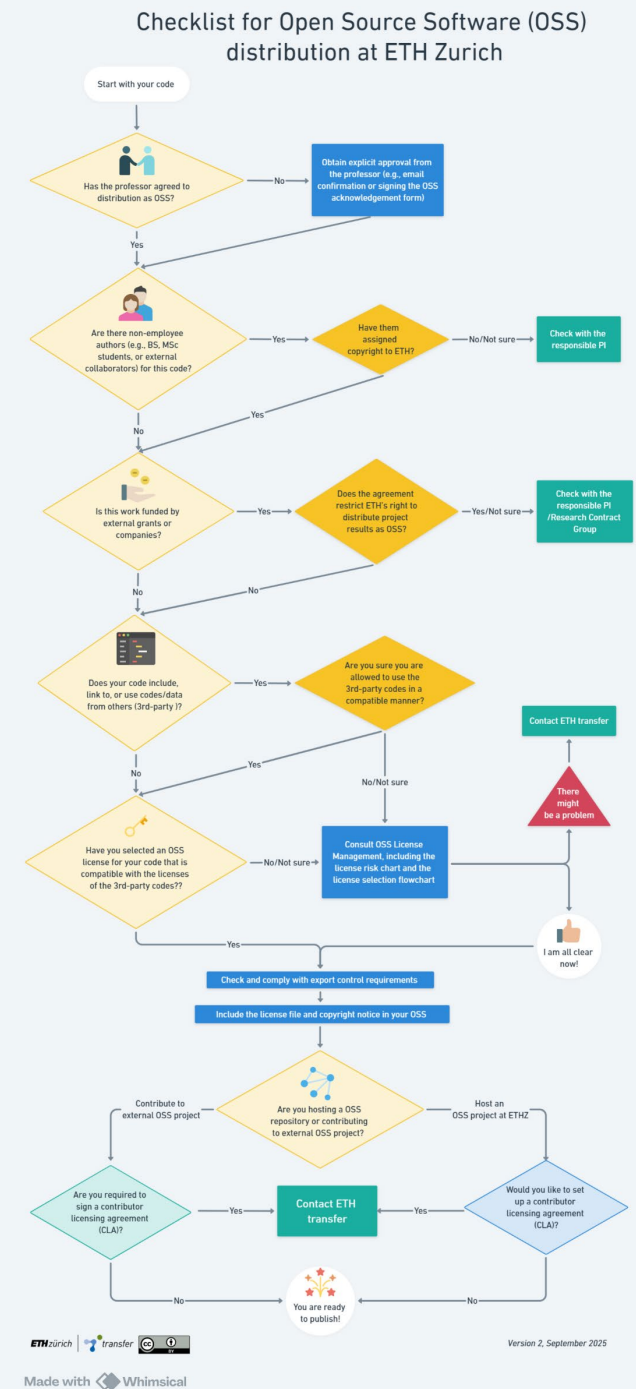
Clarify legal aspects: OSS Policy at ETH Zurich

-  **Owner/Holder** (for software created within the employment scope at ETH Zurich,)
 - ETH Zurich is regarded as **effective 'owner/holder' of the software copyright**
 - Follows international/OSS community norms
 - Facilitate further development of the software when authors leave ETH Zurich
 - Reserve flexibility for commercialization
 - *ETH Zurich **authorize its researchers to distribute the software they created as OSS, provided the conditions (for risk control) are met.***
-  **Author** (Coder/developer employed at ETH Zurich)
 - Holds **moral rights** (e.g., right to attribution)
 - **Decide whether to distribute software they created as OSS**
 - freedom of research and publication
 - align with project goal and commercialization plans
 - **Be responsible that the conditions (software due diligence) are met.**

Facilitate process:

OSS distribution checklist

1. Obtain approval by the responsible Research Group Leader
2. Assign copyrights of non-employee authors to ETH Zurich
3. Clear third-party rights related to the software
4. Ensure compliance with licenses/restrictions of background codes/data
5. Select a suitable *open source license recognized by the Open Source Initiative* for your OSS to be distributed
6. Comply with Export Control requirements
7. Include a proper copyright notice and a copy of the selected OSS license
8. Publish your OSS on publicly accessible platform(s)



Share information: OSS License Management

❖ [OSS license risk chart](#)

Open Source Software (OSS) at ETH Zürich:

licenses for internal use and external distribution of original or modified OSS

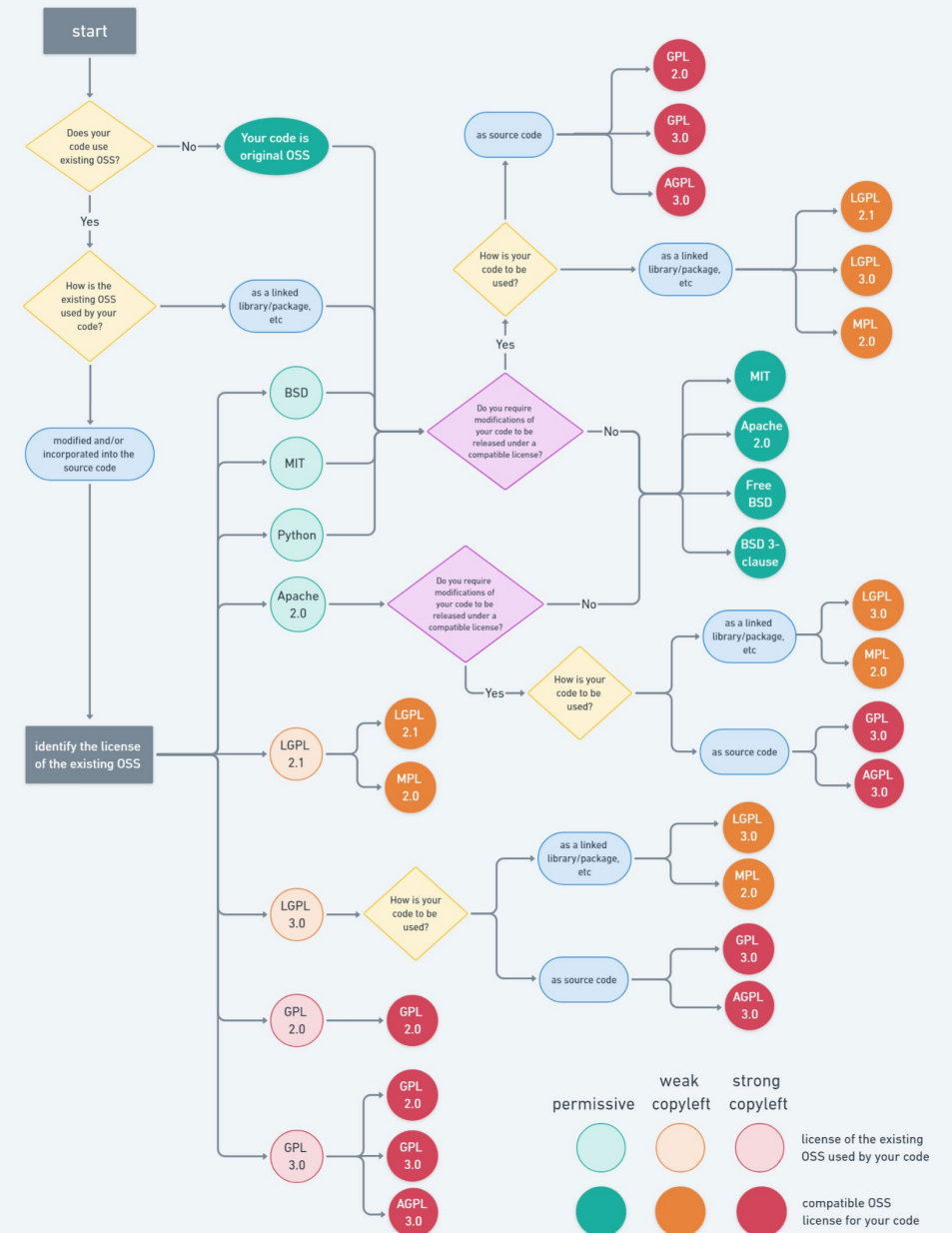
	OSS licenses ¹	Internal use		External distribution			Express grant of patent rights to licensees? ⁵
		original or bug-fixed	modified	original or bug-fixed	modified	linked as library or package	
Permissive ²	MIT	low	low	low	low	low	No
	BSD 3-clause	low	low	low	low	low	No
	Apache 2.0 ⁶	low	low	low	low	low	Yes ⁶
	Python	low	low	low	low	low	No
Weak copyleft ³	LGPL v2.1 ⁷	low	low	low	high	moderate	No
	LGPL v3	low	low	low	high	moderate	Yes
	MPL v2 ⁸	low	low	low	high	moderate	Yes
Strong copyleft ⁴	GPL v2 ⁹	low	low	high	high	high	No
	GPL v3	low	low	high	high	high	Yes
	Affero GPL v3 ¹⁰	low	low	high	high	high	Yes

This chart is modified based on the [OSS license chart from University of California](#)

Share information: OSS License Management

❖ OSS license selection flowchart

- Starts with whether and how your project incorporates existing OSS
- Leads you through key considerations:
 - How your OSS will be used?
 - compiled with source code
 - linked as library
 - Do you require derivative works to adopt the same license?
- Select from a range of compatible OSS licenses for your project.

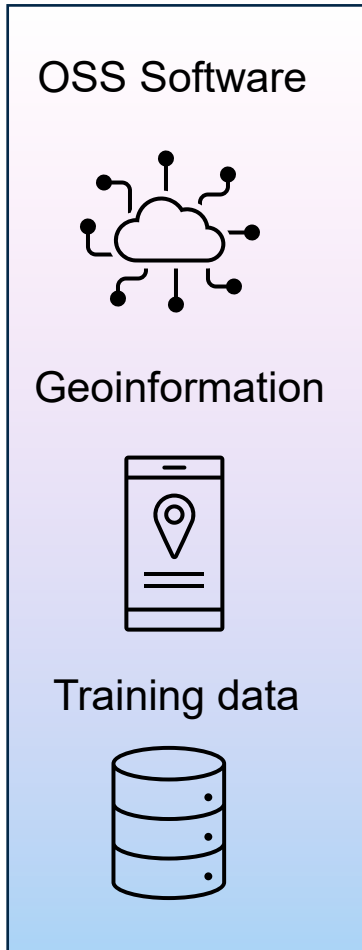


Facilitate process:

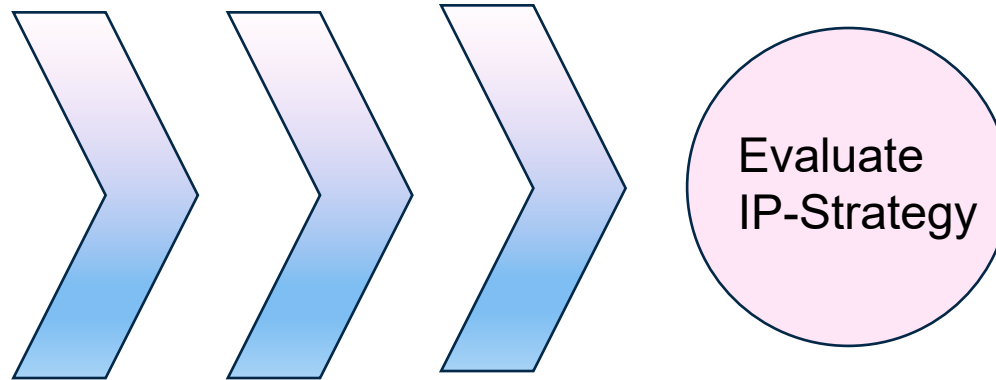
OSS in Research Contracts with Industrial Partners

Input / Background

Including e.g.



Research / software development



Output / Foreground

OSS Release

Dual License
(proprietary
and OSS)

Open
Publication of
Research but
Software kept
proprietary

All proprietary

Facilitate process:

OSS in Research Contracts with Industrial Partners



Interested in

- Freedom of research & publication
- Academic impact
- Validation/reusability
- Collaboration opportunities
- Spirit of OSS community
- Spin-off

Research Collaboration Agreement

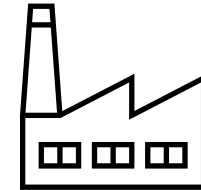


Input / background

- Company prefers to use permissive and patent-granting OSS.
- Univ. prefers to keep more options open and maximize participation.

Output / foreground

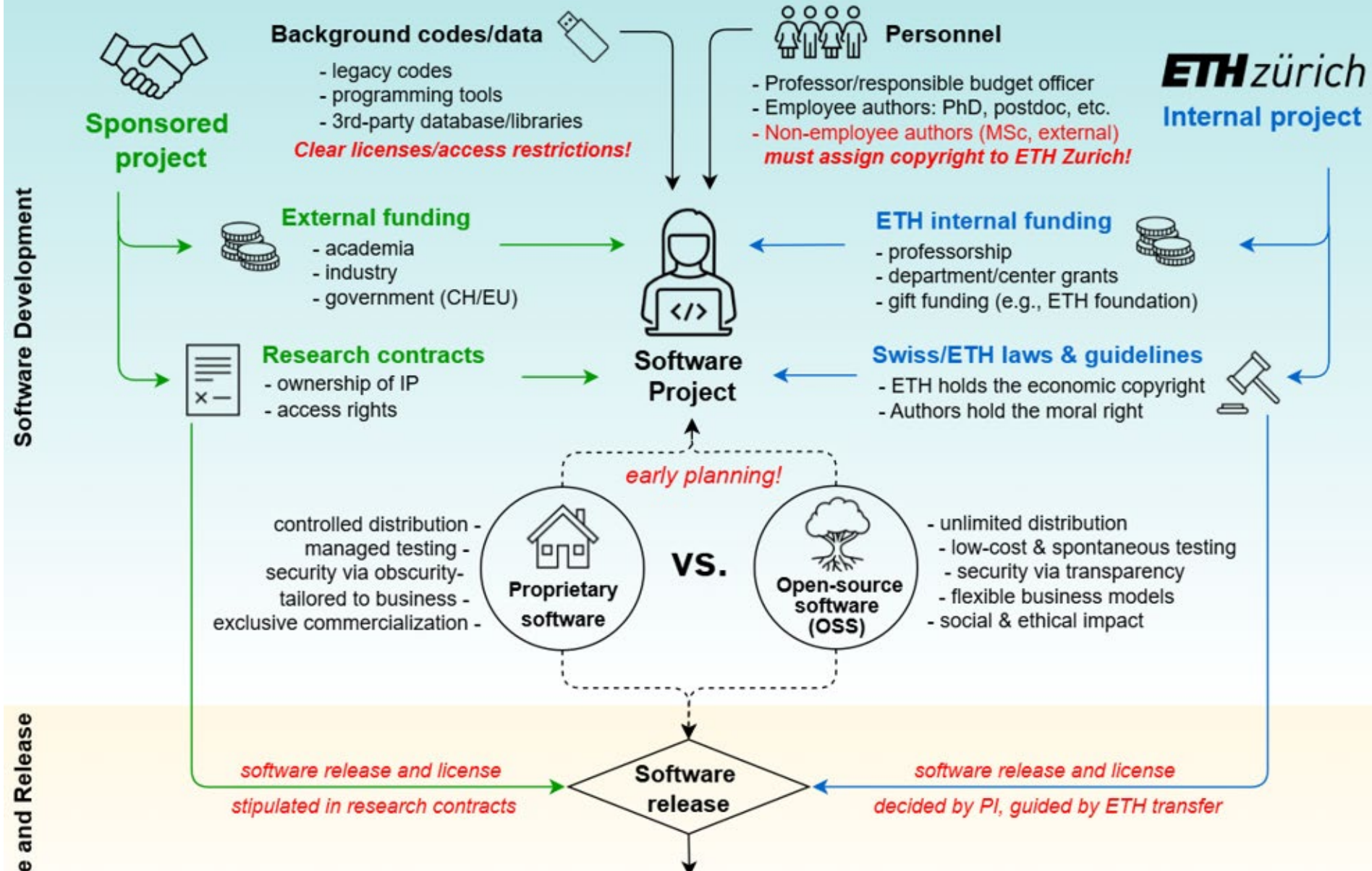
- University and Company jointly decide how software shall be released after the project.
- We provide flexible options to accommodate and balance interests from both sides:
 - non-exclusive/open source license
 - dual licensing, e.g. open source plus proprietary licenses
 - exclusive/proprietary licenses

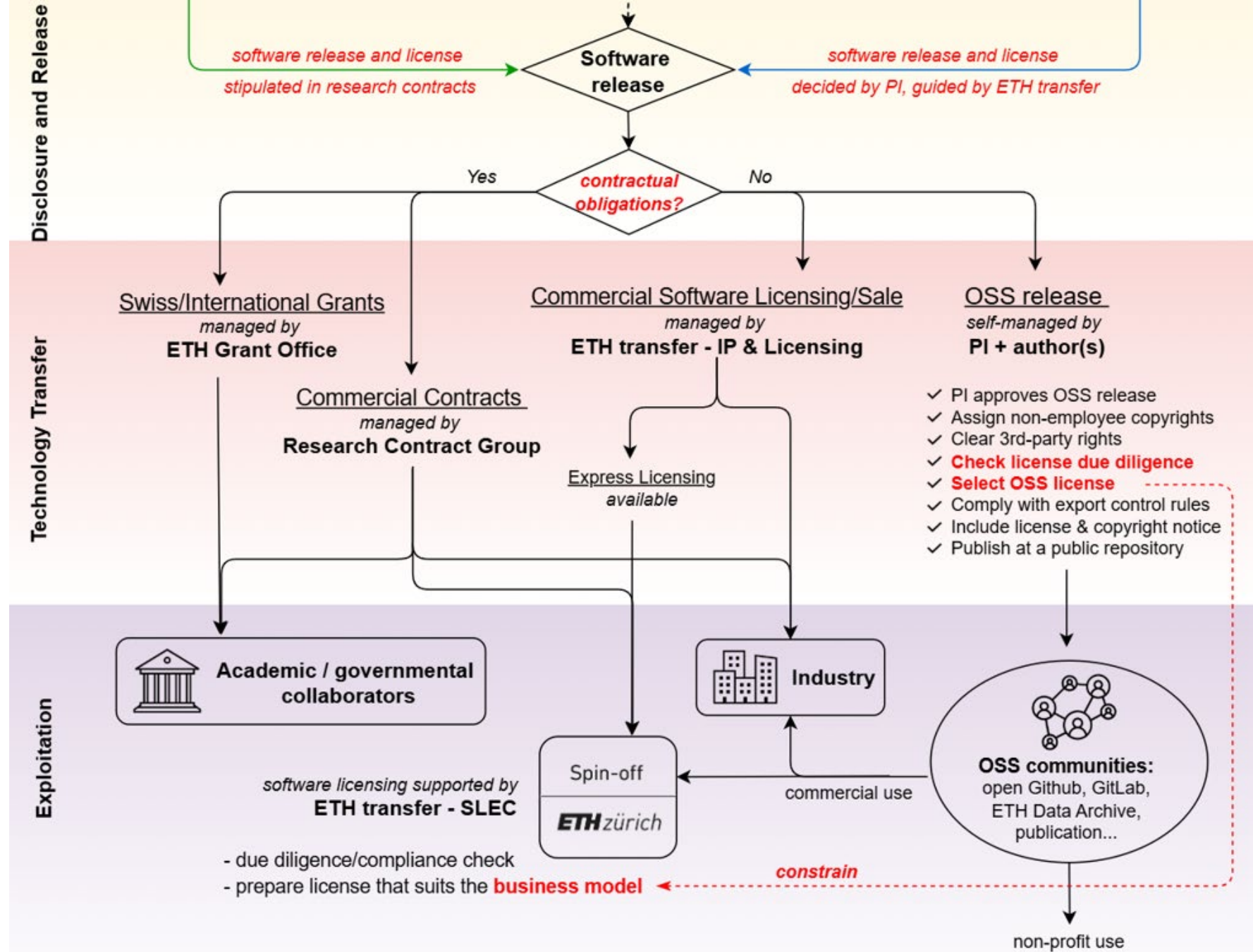


Interested in

- Code quality & security
- Clear IP & licensing rights
- Legal & compliance risks
- Advantage over competitors
- Commercial interests

ETH Zurich software development and exploitation





OSS policies and resources at ETH Zurich:
<https://transfer.ethz.ch/researchers/oss.html>

Thank you!

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