

Guidelines for applicants

Agora funding scheme

With a budget of up to 200'000 CHF

August 2023

Significant changes or new features are indicated in the form of boxed paragraphs.

1 Introduction

The Agora scheme aims to foster dialogue between scientists and society. It encourages researchers to communicate their current research to a non-specialist audience. Agora projects must initiate a dialogue between researchers and the target audience in which they interact and listen to each other. Such a dialogue should go beyond knowledge dissemination and foster an increased participation and involvement of non-academic persons in the outreach activities.

The present document describes in detail the expected parts of the Agora project plan.

For general information on the Agora funding scheme, refer to its website (www.snf.ch/agora).

1.1 Assessment criteria

The project plan is used in the evaluation process to answer the following questions related to the Agora assessment criteria:

- Is the content to be communicated of high quality and connected to the current scientific research of the applicant(s)?
- Will the proposed communication methods allow for a high-quality and fruitful dialogue between scientists and the target public? Are the means of communication well suited to the target group?
- Will the proposed project achieve its objectives in the given time and with the proposed communication methods?
- Does the proposed project have the potential to have a positive impact on society?
- Does the project consider and, if applicable, contribute to the best of its ability to raise diversity and equal opportunities awareness?

The precise form used by external reviewers during the evaluation process is available on the Agora page of the SNSF.¹

Make sure that the relevant information is clearly described in your project plan.

1.2 Diversity² and Equal Opportunities Awareness

Agora is a scheme where diversity awareness in research can be efficiently raised. The fact that it encourages activities at the interface between research and society makes it an ideal instrument for representing and promoting diversity in research to a wide, mainly non-academic, audience.

Scientific advancements benefit from a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. One of the most prominent ways in which these perspectives and experiences differ is linked to gender. Gathering a diverse team means that individuals from various backgrounds, genders, and identities contribute to and participate in scientific discussions, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues and encouraging innovative solutions. Unconscious biases and stereotypes can inadvertently make their way into scientific communication. These biases can influence the way research is conducted, interpreted, and presented, leading to skewed results and perpetuating stereotypes. Gender and diversity awareness encourages researchers and communicators to critically examine their work for potential biases and to present findings in an unbiased and accurate manner. Encouraging gender and diversity awareness in scientific communication paves the way for future generations of researchers from all backgrounds. By promoting an inclusive environment, young individuals can be inspired to pursue scientific careers and contribute their unique perspectives to the advancement of knowledge.

Gender and diversity awareness may be reflected on the level of content, audiences, and project team. In terms of content, displaying gender and diversity awareness means that an intersectional approach is considered. More specifically, gender and other dimensions of diversity such as socioeconomic background, ethnic and migratory background, sexual orientation, disability or age, are considered in the elaboration of the project plan.

With regard to audiences, it is important to consider with whom scientific dialogues are established. Some social groups are more often invited to engage in exchanges with researchers than others. Hence, diversity awareness also means seeking to establish a dialogue with groups that seldom have opportunities to meet researchers. Finally, on the level of the project team, gender and diversity awareness requires applicants to show that they have taken all the possible and necessary steps to arrive at a gender-balanced and diverse team. Ideally, this results in a team that includes persons from different groups that are under-represented in science (e.g., female, gender non-binary team members.).

Gender and diversity awareness is considered good when applicants are mindful of their planned project's potential gender and diversity dimension and when they discuss this plausibly in their project plan. It does not mean that Agora proposals must by all means include a gender and diversity

¹ https://www.snf.ch/media/de/0bpRp6auGMJQd2Tu/Evaluation_form_Agora_December_2022.pdf

² In our understanding diversity refers to preventing discrimination and the under-representation of people drawn from under-recognized groups as we advance in the academic hierarchy and seeking to achieve an academic workforce that mirrors the composition of students in each discipline in terms of gender, sexual orientation, migratory and ethnic origins, first generation students, and disabilities.

dimension. But Agora requires applicants to reflect on their project's stance on gender and diversity, and to display this reflection.

Scientific communication aims to reach a wide audience, including individuals from diverse backgrounds and identities. When communication materials consider and respect gender and diversity, they become more accessible and relatable to a broader audience. Representation matters and seeing diverse role models in science can inspire individuals from underrepresented groups to pursue careers in research.

1.3 Gender-neutral language

Furthermore, the project plan must be written in accordance with the rules of good scientific practice and sources must be cited correctly (www.snsf.ch > The SNSF > Research policies > Scientific integrity).

Project plans must employ gender-neutral language wherever possible. Unless the subject matter requires gender-specific text, gender-inclusive and non-discriminatory language must be the default. There are various strategies that applicants writing a project plan may turn to: They may use plural pronouns (*they, their, them* can be used as singular and gender-neutral pronouns), pairing (mentioning of several pronouns), alternation of feminine and masculine forms throughout the text (this is often done in newspapers), passive voice, or any other strategy of gender-inclusive language. The use of masculine pronouns and nouns to denote a group that encompasses both genders is not acceptable. In a similar vein, stereotypical depiction must also be avoided, e.g., avoid *Jane and Joe both work full-time; he helps her with the housework*, but prefer instead *Jane and Joe both work full-time; they share the housework*. Many institutions offer guidelines on the use of gender-neutral language.

1.4 Communication Experts as co-applicants³

Agora projects must now be submitted jointly by a researcher and a communications expert. Having communicators as applicants is an asset for Agora projects as their expertise is often necessary to realize the project, e.g., to break down the scientific contents into clear messages. Furthermore, a good partnership with media or outreach experts helps with the promotion of the events.

Giving them the status of applicants reflects their contribution and active responsibility in the project as project leaders. It also allows the SNSF to offer an incentive to attract excellent communicators. At the same time, researchers should be valorised as public figures of expertise and be the vectors of the dialogical aspects of research. In this framework, an Agora project solely led by communicators is not justified.

The communicators' expertise will be evaluated similarly to the scientists', based on their previous experiences and achievements which should appear sufficient to ensure the feasibility of the project. Communicators will be asked to follow the framework of the narrative CV, which is flexible enough to be used as it is (i.e., the Portal can be used to generate their CV as well).

Instructions for submitting the application

In mySNF, the co-applicant communication expert is listed under "Other applicants" with their

³ To avoid any misapplication of the regulatory concepts relating to scientific co-applicants, the Agora regulations use the term "Agora Specialists" for communication experts acting as co-applicants for an Agora project.

professional address. Please indicate "Specialist Agora" in the "Remarks" field under "Applicants' employment". Except for those employed at Swiss higher education institutions, communication experts can include their salary in the Agora project funding ("The applicants' own salaries" under "Requested funding").

2 Project Plan

Adopt the titles of the sections listed below word for word. In general, the project plan must not contain any annexed documents. A minimum font size of 10pt and line spacing of 1.5 must be used.

1. Summary - *maximum 1 page*

- The summary must characterise the project application and place the project in a wider context.

2. Project description - *maximum 40'000 characters (with spaces, tables and figures) on maximum of ten (10) pages*

2.1 Context	<p><i>This section allows evaluators to assess the "quality of the content to communicate".</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the information and message that you wish to communicate to the public, as well as your motivation. • Describe how the content to be communicated is related to your current research. Provide evidence that this research has gone through a competitive evaluation procedure (e.g., in a peer-reviewed article and/or in a grant proposal).
2.2 Methods	<p><i>This section allows evaluators to assess the "suitability of the methods" and "feasibility of the project".</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define and describe the target public as well as the communication concept. List the chosen means of communication, explaining why they are suited to the project and to the needs of the target group(s). <li style="background-color: #e6e6fa; padding: 2px;">• Describe how your project helps to promote and develop the dialogue between scientists and society. • Outline the elements of the project that will enable the dialogue between researchers and the target group(s) for each mean of communication. Specify how the interaction is intended to take place and how the public will participate. • Describe the measures intended to create awareness of the project among the target group(s) (e.g., marketing, advertising).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Position the project in relation to the best practices in public science communication. • Describe your contribution to diversity awareness. • If applicable, explain how and to what extent the project will be integrated into existing initiatives. • If applicable, describe and explain how and to what extent the communication project could continue beyond the funding period.
2.3 Implementation	<p><i>This section allows evaluators to assess the “feasibility of the project” and “expertise of the project team”.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the schedule for the project, including different milestones and interim objectives. • Describe the roles and responsibilities of the project team (applicants including the communication expert, project partners, collaborators and third parties). • Highlight the specific expertise of the involved persons that is relevant to the project. • In the case of third-party funding, describe the role and contribution of each funding partner. • If applicable, state in what respect the project goals may not be reached and which alternatives may be foreseen (risk management plan).
2.4 Expected impact	<p><i>This section allows evaluators to assess the “expected impact” and “feasibility of the project”.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the impact you expect from the project in quantitative (e.g., number of visitors to an event or a website) and qualitative terms (e.g., creating or increasing awareness on the topics). • Describe methods and criteria that will allow assessing the success of the project.

3. Bibliography

- List the sources of all concluded and/or forthcoming works referred to in the project plan. Give the full reference, especially the title, source and full author list. The bibliography is not included in the maximum number of pages (10) and character count (40'000).

3 Ideas and online resources

- *How to formulate SMART goals?* (example: WiD's [how-to-series](#), UKRI's [Evaluation guidelines](#)), IPR's [guide](#))

- *How to choose the right activities?* (example: WiD's blog [Wissenschaftskommunikation](#), V&A's [Science Communication Toolbox](#))
- *The [SAGER Guidelines](#) provide a practical tool on how to consider sex and gender in research.*
- *The [Gendered Innovations](#) website provides information on how to harness the creative power of sex, gender, and intersectional analysis for innovation and discovery.*
- *The [Guidelines for the Submission of SPIRIT Applications](#) presents how Gender Awareness applies to the research content and to the research team. It also presents recommended formulations for a gender-sensitive research plan.*
- [SPIRIT Gender Awareness videos](#)
- *How to conduct an evaluation step-by-step?* (example: WiD's [how-to-series](#), SFI's [Evaluation toolkit](#), UKRI's [Evaluation guidelines](#))
- *How to define appropriate measures for the output, outcome, and impact stages?* (example: AMEC's customizable and interactive [evaluation template](#); AMEC's overview of [measures](#); GCS's overview of [metrics](#))
- *How to conduct an online survey / how to develop a feedback form?* (example: UKRI's [Evaluation guidelines](#); referral to WiD's customizable [survey platform](#))
- *Where to read more about the state-of-the art of science communication research?* (collate reading list)