

Overhead FAQs

1. Who receives SNSF overhead contributions?

Overhead contributions are paid to publicly-funded (federal or cantonal), non-profit research institutions (universities and institutions). Researchers themselves do not receive SNSF overhead-designated contributions.

2. When do my SNSF grants generate overhead contributions?

Overhead contributions may be granted as part of SNSF funding programmes which include eligibility for such (cf. Question 7). The baseline is determined by circumstances at the time of the award. Overhead goes to the research institution where the applicant conducts the research project.

3. How do I find out if my SNSF grant is applicable for overhead contributions?

From 2009 onwards, recipients of SNSF grants eligible for overhead contributions will receive a notification of the entitlement.

4. What are overhead contributions for?

Overhead contributions are to be used for indirect research expenses, such as rent or, laboratory costs etc., incurred by research institutions in the course of research projects. The universities and research institutions may decide on the specific use of the overhead contributions. The fact that research funds provided by the SNSF provide institutions with contributions to indirect research expenses makes it more attractive for researchers to apply for SNSF research grants.

5. Am I entitled to overhead contributions (or parts thereof) that my university or research institution receives on the strength of my SNSF grants?

No, the overhead beneficiaries are the universities or research institutions. They can use these funds at their own discretion. Overhead contributions may only be used specifically for compensating indirect research expenses in part (cf. also Question 6).

6. What can my university or research institution do with the overhead contributions?

The beneficiary institutions can use these funds at their own discretion. Overhead contributions may only be used for the specific purpose of partially compensating indirect research expenses. Universities have various ideas on the use of overhead contributions. The extent to which the researchers, whose approved projects have generated the overhead contributions, benefit directly is at the discretion of the research institution.

7. Which SNSF funding programmes are entitled to overhead contributions?

SNSF funding programmes eligible for overhead contributions are:

- a. Independent research projects, including interdisciplinary and interdivisionary projects*
- b. Department I long-term projects*
- c. Sinergia*
- d. Projects within the ERA-Nets and EuroCores framework*
- e. DORE projects*
- f. SNSF professorships*
- g. ProDoc*
- h. Ambizione*
- i. SCORE/PROSPER*
- j. Marie Heim-Vögtlin*
- k. NFP projects*

8. Why are NCCR projects not eligible for overhead contributions?

SNSF funding programmes which require research institutions to contribute their own resources are excluded from overhead eligibility. This policy is to prevent the mandatory third party contribution from being undermined by supplementary overhead contributions. As part of the evaluation of the introductory phase of overhead contributions, the exclusion of the NCCR from overhead eligibility will be examined. For further overhead exclusions, see Question 9.

9. Which SNFS funding programmes are not entitled to overhead contributions? Why not?

The SNSF overhead contribution policy excludes a few SNSF funding programmes. The three reasons for exclusion are:

- *Programmes which include mandatory contributions of the research institution's own resources (this applies, for example, to the NCCR)*
- *Programmes which include contributions to foreign institutions (territoriality principle; different compensation systems for indirect research expenses abroad)*

- *Situations where indirect research expenses do not exist or are negligible (in the case of publication grants, for example).*

10. How high is the overhead contribution?

Overhead contributions amount to a maximum of 20% of the eligible SNSF research grants. Parliament has made provisions for fixed overhead contributions during the three introductory years, 2009-2011: 2009 - CHF 36.7 million; 2010 - CHF 80.8 million; 2011 - CHF 93.5 million which is a total of CHF 211 million. The percentage rate is based on the ratio of available overhead funds to SNSF grants with overhead eligibility. In the introductory phase, overhead contributions will range between around 6% and 18% of the baseline grants.

11. How is the overhead contribution calculated?

The overhead contribution is calculated on the basis of the previous year's total grants with overhead eligibility. In the introductory year, the calculation is based on the baseline grants for the period from January to September 2009.

12. Is the overhead contribution transferred to the new research institution if I change research location?

No, the overhead contribution remains with the university or research institution originally entitled to it. What is crucial here are the circumstances at the time of the acceptance. The SNSF, in conjunction with the universities, chose a simple model for the introductory phase of the overhead contributions which did not include retroactive or compensatory adjustments. The universities are, thus, at liberty to arrange a transfer of overhead contributions among themselves.

13. Can the research institution keep the overhead contribution if I do not conduct the project or fail to complete it?

If the project is not carried out, the answer is no; if the project is discontinued, the answer is yes. In principle, the overhead contributions for a research institution are calculated on the basis of the previous year's baseline grants and are not subject to retroactive adjustment. There is no adjustment if a project is discontinued, and subsequent overhead-related payments cannot be assigned for additional grants. The exception to this is where an approved grant is renounced and the project is not executed at all. Here, the SNSF will deduct overhead contributions already assigned to the relevant research institution from the next overhead contribution settlement.

14. Will overhead contributions be a permanent feature of the SNSF funding system from 2009 onwards?

This is still an open question. SNSF overhead contributions have been settled for the introductory phase of 2009-2011. Whether they will be continued in the next Federal Council funding period, and in what form, is still open. The SNSF will evaluate its experiences with the introductory model

in conjunction with the beneficiaries of overhead contributions and report to the Swiss Federal Department of Home Affairs.

15. Are private research institutions also entitled to overhead contributions?

No, institutions that are purely private, for-profit organisations are not eligible for SNSF overhead contributions. To receive overhead contributions, the research institution concerned must receive federal or cantonal support and have non-profit status.

16. Where can I obtain further details?

Further details and information on the regulations for overhead contributions can be found in the SNSF overhead dossier: <http://www.snf.ch/E/current/Dossiers/Pages/overhead.aspx>

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