
Guidelines for Applicants

Agora funding scheme

May 2015

Preamble

Agora

The Agora funding scheme of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) has been devised to support researchers who want to communicate with the public. The scheme aims to promote the spread of knowledge as well as the exchange of views and perspectives about scientific research. It therefore encourages projects involving two-way processes - with interaction and listening - which generate dialogues between researchers and the public.

Researchers based in Switzerland or doing their research abroad under an SNSF fellowship may submit applications for public communication projects each year between 15 May and 15 August. The applications are evaluated in a competitive procedure by an international commission composed of scientists and experts in science communication.

Agora Documentation

The Agora documentation consists of:

- the [guidelines for applicants](#), which provide assistance in preparing and submitting applications along with a description of the evaluation procedure;
- the guidelines for experts (external reviewers and referees), where the principles and criteria of the evaluation procedure are described in detail;
- the [Agora Regulations](#) and the [Organisational Regulations of the Commission for Communication projects](#), which provide the legal basis for the SNSF's decision-making.

These documents are available on the [SNSF's website](#). They can also be downloaded via the electronic platform [mySNF](#) which is used by the applicants and reviewers. The guidelines are based on the Agora Regulations and the Organisational Regulations of the Commission for Communication projects. They are not legally binding and do not in any circumstances substitute the mentioned formal legal documents.

Contents

| | | |
|-----------|---|----------|
| 1. | Preparation of applications and evaluation – essential points | 4 |
| 2. | Points to be clarified before submission | 5 |
| 2.1 | User account for mySNF | 5 |
| 2.2 | Cooperation with the communication office | 5 |
| 2.3 | Projects | 5 |
| 2.4 | Applicants | 6 |
| 2.5 | Collaborators | 7 |
| 2.6 | Cost and duration of the project | 7 |
| 2.7 | Co-financing of projects | 7 |
| 2.8 | Formal requirements | 7 |
| 3. | Preparation of upload documents | 8 |
| 3.1 | CV | 8 |
| 3.2 | Project plan | 8 |
| 4. | Online submission of the application | 8 |
| 5. | Acceptance and examination of applications by the administrative offices | 8 |
| 5.1 | Verification of formal requirements | 8 |
| 5.2 | Communication between the applicants and the SNSF | 8 |
| 6. | Evaluation procedure and communication of decisions | 9 |
| 7. | Annexe: guidelines for project plan | 9 |

1. Preparation of applications and evaluation – essential points

Agora is a funding scheme for projects that aim to communicate research issues to the public. The projects must not only transmit knowledge about scientific research, but also encourage exchanges of views and perspectives between researchers and the public. Researchers based in Switzerland or those doing research abroad under an SNSF fellowship are invited to submit an application. Funding amounts of between CHF 5,000 and CHF 200,000 are granted for a maximum of three years. Projects from all disciplines are accepted, provided that the project is linked to the applicants' current research, which must have been selected via a competitive procedure (e.g. peer review of a project or a scientific publication). To ensure that the communication is of high quality, applicants may collaborate with persons, institutions or organisations specialising in knowledge transfer or public dialogue. These may include museums, journalists, communication experts, science explainers, educators, artists, scenographers, etc.

We strongly recommend contacting the [communication office](#) of your research institution at the planning stage of your project so that it can give you optimum support. We also suggest that you contact the [Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences](#) (www.akademien-schweiz.ch) as well as their competence centre for dialog [Science et cité](#) (www.science-et-cite.ch), both of which are partner organisations of the SNSF. They can give you information on how to link your project to activities of their members or other existing initiatives.

A number of points need to be clarified before the application is submitted. Applications are submitted to the SNSF online via the mySNF platform. Applicants must therefore apply for a user account for this platform in advance. They must also ensure that the formal and personal requirements for the application are met. Certain parts of the application can be prepared in advance (pdf uploads), for instance the project description (10 pages) and CVs (2 pages). All other data is entered online by the applicant, in particular administrative data and budget details. The purpose of the present document is to assist you in filing the content of the application. Assistance for the online submission and for entering data in the individual containers is provided in mySNF when a new application is drafted.

The call for proposals is launched on 15 May each year. Applications must be submitted by no later than 15 August. The administrative offices of the SNSF examine whether the formal and personal requirements are met and, if this is the case, forward the application to the evaluation commission. Approximately 5 months after the submission deadline, the applicants are informed of the decision made with regard to their application by means of a ruling. Projects may start as of 1 February in the year following the year of submission at the earliest.

2. Points to be clarified before submission

2.1 User account for mySNF

If you do not already have a user account for mySNF, please register at www.mysnf.ch. The login information will then be sent to you by post. New user accounts must be requested at least five working days before the submission deadline (from abroad: 2 weeks before the submission deadline). You will be able to reuse this account for further applications submitted at a later date or for the lifetime management of approved projects.

2.2 Cooperation with the communication office

We recommend that you contact the communication office of your institution at an early stage during the preparation of your project. They may be able to help you with planning, or inform you about existing projects and answer practical questions (e.g. what insurances and authorisations are needed). The communication office may also inform you about the communication principles of your institution. It is also possible for a person from the communication office to be associated with your project (see chapter 2.5).

2.3 Projects

2.3.1 Content, topic and format

Before submitting your application, please make sure that your project is suitable for Agora ([Agora Regulations](#)). Agora supports projects that promote dialogues between researchers and the public about research results, as well as general questions such as science as a profession, scientific method, opportunities and risks of scientific research, etc. The responsibility for communicating directly with the public should lie primarily with the researchers. Furthermore, the projects must involve the active participation of members of the public. This participation might take various forms depending on the target audiences' interests and needs.

For example, for school children the objective of the active participation might be to inspire, inform and educate them by underscoring the relevance of current research to their life experiences. This can also be valuable to adult audiences, but events targeted at them also need to include listening to the public's views and responding to their comments and concerns. Some projects may take this process one step further and play a formal role in policy making by working in partnership with the public to solve problems by drawing on each other's expertise.

Projects are generally carried out in Switzerland. Projects linked to a research topic with a pronounced international dimension may be allowed to carry out certain activities abroad.

You are free in your choice of research topic as long as it belongs to your current field of research. Agora is open to all disciplines. The projects may use different formats and means of communication, such as events, debates, exhibitions, interactive Internet platforms, games, artistic productions, etc. The financing of books, films or other non-intrinsically interactive formats is covered only to the extent that they are integrated within a range of communication measures leading to discussions or debates with the public, who can interface directly with the researchers at that time.

The projects can be integrated within an existing framework, such as a series of activities, a website, a science festival or a visitors' day at a research institution. Before setting up your project, we strongly recommend that you contact the communication office of your institution as well as

the [Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences](http://www.akademien-schweiz.ch) (www.akademien-schweiz.ch) and their competence center for dialog [Science et cité](http://www.science-et-cite.ch) (www.science-et-cite.ch) to gain information on any existing projects to which your project could be linked or into which it could be integrated. As far as possible, the projects should be sustainable in a way that allows them to be easily reused at a later stage once the funding period has ended. Projects that follow mainly commercial goals are not supported.

The research to which the communication project is linked must have been selected through a competitive evaluation procedure (e.g. peer review of project proposal or scientific publication). Agora cannot be used to finance communication projects exclusively linked to ongoing National Research Programmes (NRPs) or ongoing National Centres of Competence in Research (NCCRs). If you are interested in conducting a communication project in connection with an NRP or an NCCR, please address the person in charge of communication at the programme in question.

2.3.2 Target audience

The target group can be chosen freely. It may, for instance, include adults, young people or schools. The following types of projects are excluded, however:

- Communication addressed to peers (researchers); communication linked to academic teaching (students); technology transfer
- Projects whose primary goals are to promote the profile or reputation of an institution
- Research into science communication (such projects are financed under the research funding schemes of the SNSF)

The projects must be addressed to a well-defined target group which must be as large as possible. Agora strongly encourages projects geared at target groups that are normally difficult to reach and show a certain tendency to avoid scientific and social topics, for instance, adolescents and elderly people, or socially underprivileged people with little schooling, or people with an immigrant background.

2.4 Applicants

2.4.1 Personal requirements

Before you prepare the application, please clarify whether you meet the personal requirements for submitting an application ([Agora Regulations](#), Article 6). Researchers based in Switzerland or working abroad under an SNSF fellowship whose research does not pursue commercial ends are eligible to submit an application regardless of the stage they have reached in their career and their level of experience in public science communication. The communication project must be linked to the applicants' current research work.

2.4.2 Co-applicants

Please decide before you begin preparing the application whether you wish to apply on your own or together with other researchers as a group. Co-applicants need to meet the same personal requirements as applicants and are personally responsible for the project in equal measure. Legal responsibility, however, lies solely with the applicant representing the group, whose institution is the recipient of any funds awarded for the project. Co-applicants must make a significant contribution to the project.

2.5 Collaborators

Before submitting your application, please ensure that the collaborators associated with the project meet the requirements ([Agora Regulations](#), Article 5.3). Specialists in knowledge transfer or dialogue with the public may collaborate in the project, e.g. museum staff, journalists, communication specialists, science explainers, educators, artists or scenographers. Furthermore, employees from your institution or externals may participate in your project as collaborators to provide scientific, technical or administrative support (e.g. for scientific outreach, design and printing, or for setting up exhibitions and websites). The collaborators can be remunerated under the project grant.

2.6 Cost and duration of the project

Please clarify the project costs you wish to have covered by the SNSF and whether they are assumed by the SNSF ([Agora Regulations](#), Article 11). Costs for the development and realisation of the project are assumed by the SNSF (salaries, fees, material, production costs, project management etc.) as well as advertising and distribution costs in Switzerland and abroad. You may not include your own salary in the budget. Material and service costs exceeding 20,000 Swiss francs must be accompanied by competing offers from more than one supplier/service provider.

Amounts between 5,000 and 200,000 Swiss francs are awarded per project for a maximum of 3 years. You may prolong a project by submitting a follow-up application to complete the initial project and implement a second phase based on the results achieved. The theme must be similar to the initial project. Follow-up applications are subject to the same rules and procedures as the initial projects. Only one follow-up is permissible.

2.7 Co-financing of projects

In your application you must indicate any other resources at your disposal for the project (from institutions, departments, third entities etc.). These resources may comprise personnel, material, infrastructure or services etc. Your application must specify any requested or confirmed co-financing of your project by third entities along with the parts of the project to be funded by the SNSF. The SNSF strongly encourages applicants with large-scale projects to seek additional sources of funding. Please note that the SNSF will not co-finance projects with organisations whose interests and objectives contradict those of Agora or the SNSF in general.

2.8 Formal requirements

Please familiarise yourself with the formal requirements before preparing your application ([Agora Regulations](#), Article 7). The application as a whole (project plan, administrative and financial data) must generally be written in English so that it may be evaluated by international experts. Exceptions may be granted for German, French and Italian in justifiable cases if a corresponding request is made prior to the submission of the application. Furthermore, the requirements with regard to the project plan and CV must be met and the application must be completed and submitted in good time.

3. Preparation of upload documents

3.1 CV

The CVs of the applicants, co-applicants and important collaborators must be submitted in PDF format. They should not be longer than 2 DIN A4 pages and should be written in the same language as the project plan. It must show the competencies and any experience that may be useful for implementing the project. Team members with experience in science communication with public audiences should specify this in a dedicated section of their CV.

3.2 Project plan

The project plan must be a pdf document. It must comply with the requirements stated in the annexe (7.).

4. Online submission of the application

You need to create a new application in the mySNF entry mask. Thereafter please select the Agora funding scheme. Once you have indicated whether you wish to create an entirely new application or use an application you had already created as a template (e.g. for follow-up applications), you will see all data containers that you need to input in the menu bar.

Data on applicants and applications need to be entered in the mySNF entry mask. Key data on applications comprise the title, keywords, relation to SNSF research projects and requested and available resources.

5. Acceptance and examination of applications by the administrative offices

5.1 Verification of formal requirements

The administrative offices of the SNSF verify whether the submitted applications meet the personal and formal requirements ([Agora Regulations](#), Article 6 and 7). If the application meets the requirements, it will be considered by the SNSF and forwarded to the Commission for Communication Projects for evaluation. If the requirements are not met, the SNSF will not consider the application.

5.2 Communication between the applicants and the SNSF

Before and during submission of the application, the administrative offices will answer applicants' questions and provide information with regard to the applications by phone and e-mail. After submission, i.e. during the evaluation procedure, the administrative offices may contact the applicants to clarify issues concerning the application documents. Before, during and after the evaluation procedure, applicants are obliged to:

- provide any information requested by the SNSF

- cooperate in clarifying facts
- inform the SNSF about any new facts that are relevant for the funding decision

Apart from this, the SNSF does not provide any information concerning applications as of the beginning of the evaluation procedure through to the dispatch of the final decision.

6. Evaluation procedure and communication of decisions

The evaluation procedure in Agora consists of three parts, which are in chronological order:

- **Submission of applications and administrative steps:** The administrative offices of the SNSF receive the applications via the electronic mySNF platform. They verify whether the application requirements are met and inform the applicants accordingly.
- **Evaluation:** The applications are evaluated by an international commission of scientists and science communication specialists based on the following criteria: competencies of the project team, quality of the content communicated, appropriateness of methods and communication concept in relation to the chosen target group, feasibility of the project, expected quantitative and qualitative impacts. For large-scale projects, the commission additionally obtains external reviews of the project, which are considered in the evaluation.
- **Decision:** The commission discusses the applications and makes a provisional decision on each application. The Presiding Board of the National Research Council then verifies the correctness of the procedure and approves the provisional decision or returns it to the commission.

The final decisions on Agora applications for a specific submission deadline are generally made five months after the application is submitted. The administrative offices of the SNSF communicate the decisions to the applicants without delay in the form of a ruling.

7. Annexe: guidelines for project plan

The project plan must consist of 5 chapters (items 2.1-2.5), which must be preceded by a summary (item 1). Please use the chapter titles indicated below. Please submit a detailed project description which clearly specifies the purpose of the project and the methods envisaged. The application will be assessed by an international commission and the project plan must therefore be submitted in English. Permission to submit the project plan in German, French or Italian may be granted exceptionally subject to prior request if valid reasons are given. These guidelines also apply to follow-up applications. Budget details must be entered online in mySNF. If the project is co-financed by a third party, an overview of the entire budget may be included in the project plan or submitted as a separate attachment.

| | | |
|---|----------------|--|
| 1 | Summary | The summary (maximum 1 page) should characterise the application and place the project in a wider context. |
|---|----------------|--|

| | | |
|-----|--|---|
| 2 | Project description | It must not exceed 10 pages or 40,000 characters with spaces, including illustrations, formulae, tables and bibliography. A minimum font 10 and line spacing 1.5 must be used. As a rule, no annexes should be added to the project plan. |
| 2.1 | Context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please describe the overall goals of the project and demonstrate its importance, taking into account the needs and expectations of the researchers and the public. Position the project in relation to the best practices in public science communication. Also make a link to current initiatives with which your project could be connected or in which it could be integrated. • Please describe how the content to be communicated is related to your current research and provide evidence of the fact that this research has gone through a competitive evaluation procedure (e.g. peer review). • If the team has experience in public science communication that is relevant to the proposed project, please mention the activities involved along with their results. • For follow-up applications, it is important to show how the proposed project is related to the initial project. |
| 2.2 | Detailed project plan | <p>Please indicate the objectives you intend to pursue during the application period based on the information provided under item 2.1. In particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain the information and message that you wish to communicate to the public and put them in relation to the interests and knowledge level of the latter. Define your target group (type and size). • describe the communication concept and communication methods, explaining why they are suited to the project and to the needs of the target group. Please outline the elements of the project that enable dialogues between researchers and their targeted group. Specify how the interaction takes place, how the public participates and how its feedback could be documented. • describe the impacts that you expect from the project in quantitative and qualitative terms. This may include creating or increasing awareness of research topics and challenges or stimulating interest in a research topic. • explain how and to what extent the project could be integrated in existing initiatives as well as networked and sustained beyond the funding period. |
| 2.3 | Schedule, milestones and actors | <p>To the extent possible, please provide a schedule for the project, including different milestones and interim objectives, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the persons involved (applicants and collaborators). CVs must be attached to the application as PDF documents.</p> <p>The budget is to be entered in mySNF. We recommend that you include in this document (or attach to it) an overview of the overall budget in combination with the major milestones of the project. This is particularly relevant in the case of co-financing.</p> |
| 2.4 | Promotional measures | Please describe the measures envisaged to create awareness of the project among the target group (marketing, advertising). |
| 2.5 | Evaluation | <p>Please explain how you intend to assess the project and its impact. This should include both target setting (e.g. number of visitors to an event or a website) and importantly whether your specific objectives have been achieved. Measurability should therefore be a major criterion used in the initial selection of objectives. For more information on evaluations see:</p> <p>http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/RCUK-prod/assets/documents/publications/evaluationguide.pdf</p> <p>Evaluation: Practical guidelines. A guide for evaluating public engagement activities. Research councils UK, April 2011.</p> |