

Guidelines for Public Communications by the Swiss National Science Foundation

1. Introduction

A private foundation acting under public mandate, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) promotes scientific research and the competitiveness of Swiss scientific enterprise. By the very nature of its mission and activities, the SNSF needs to ensure that its official institutional (i.e. regarding the foundation itself) and scientific communication is of high quality. With this in mind, it sets out the following Guidelines. It expects its employees and members of SNSF bodies, as well as any person working under an SNSF mandate, to abide by these standards governing the organisation and quality of communication.

Researchers supported by the SNSF are required to comply with the *Regulations governing information...*, as well as these Guidelines, when using SNSF communications media¹. Communications relating to SNSF research programmes (NRPs, NCCRs etc.) are subject to additional standards.

2. Responsibilities

In accordance with the SNSF statutes², the responsibility for the SNSF communications lies with the Administrative Offices. These work to ensure that communication with the public is effective and that the SNSF's funding activities are presented in the correct light. The Communication division handles the SNSF's in-house and external communication as delegated by the Director. The Administrative Offices coordinate with other SNSF bodies, when such bodies are involved.

The following are official spokespeople for the SNSF: the President of the Foundation Council, the President of the Research Council, the Director and the Head of the Communication division (media spokesperson). Other persons may also be authorised.

¹ According to Article 3.3, f of the [Regulations governing information, usage and rights in relation to the results of research](#), (in French or German), from 17 June 2008

² [Statutes](#) of the SNSF (in French or German) dated 30.03.2007, Article 27, paragraph 2, d

3. Guidelines

The SNSF is bound by legal and ethical principles of public communication. The SNSF therefore

- abides by the principles of the Confederation's Information Services Conference in its information policy;³
- acts in a coordinated way and provides advance information to in-house audiences (integrated communication) and – as far as possible and to the extent that they accept the required cooperation procedures – to external persons or organisations directly concerned by an item of institutional or scientific information.

3.1 In its institutional communication, the SNSF

- acts in accordance with the principles of continuity, transparency⁴, truth, accuracy, objectivity, consistency, mutuality and legitimacy;
- acts respectful towards public representatives and private citizens; refrains from biased propaganda, innuendo, manipulation, concealment, deceit and disinformation; restricts itself to providing substantial information and using objective arguments;
- acts based on appropriateness, in a coordinated way and generally on its own initiative. It does not abuse its moral authority nor does it convey ideologically motivated messages;
- uses non-sexist language which promotes gender equality;⁵
- acts professionally, in accordance with best practice in public relations and journalism;
- maintains internet-based communication and publishes relevant institutional and scientific information online (in particular, a database of funded projects). An electronic newsletter is available to inform people of current affairs;
- publishes its information in German and French and, as far as resources and priorities permit, and taking into account audience needs, also publishes in Italian and English;
- uses an “issue management” approach to communicating topics which are socially and politically very sensitive or likely to cause controversy;
- follows clear branding and corporate design guidelines. All use of the SNSF logo or name must comply with Article 3.4 of the Regulations governing information, or be cleared in advance with the Communication division.
- publishes statistical data on research funding in its annual report and on its website; responds to other requests for information after evaluation and in compliance with data protection and privacy laws.

3.2 In its scientific communications destined for the public, the SNSF

- encourages public debate on scientific findings and issues, promotes the sharing of knowledge between scientists and interested groups and supports open access for research results;⁶
- bases its information and arguments on current and well-founded scientific findings;
- collaborates with the researchers it supports in its various communication outlets (media relations, the scientific magazine Horizons, publications, the web etc.). As publisher, it limits its responsibility to the selection of topics, the selected means of communication, and its own possibly made summaries or use of the research results. The responsibility for the contents

³ [Guidelines issued by the Information Services Conference of the Confederation](#) (in German or French), January 2007

⁴ See the Law on Transparency (Loi sur la transparence) of 01.07.2006

⁵ See the [SNSF Mission Statement on Equality between Women and Men](#), issued on 16.01.2008

⁶ See Chapter 2 of the Regulations governing information...

of the findings lies with the scientists. The latter communicate in their own names and have no authority to obligate the SNSF as an institution⁷.

- ensures that the means of communication is appropriate to the intended audiences and meets the highest professional standards;
- acts in the name of, and to the benefit of, the freedom of scientific research;
- acts on the principles of ethics and the integrity of those conducting research⁸.
- respects the intellectual property and data protection rights of researchers.

3.3 Standards for media relations

In addition to the fundamentals set out above, media relations should observe the following principles:

- currency and significance of scientific findings and their potential interest for the general public;
- transparency of information given to journalists;
- generally all information is peer reviewed and documented with accessible records (e.g. lay summary, scientific publication, summary report etc.);
- equal treatment of all media for active communication measures;
- professional journalistic standards and ethics in the formulation and editing of press releases, press conferences and other press materials.

The SNSF's media relations are handled by the Communication division or their appointed representatives.

4. Failure to comply with standards

The SNSF will sanction failures to comply with the above Guidelines according to Article 45 of the Regulations on grants where researchers are concerned, and using other legal procedures and means in the case of SNSF employees or their agents.

5. Contact

The Communication division is available to provide information about the SNSF's communication policy and activities.

Approved on the basis of Article 27, para. 2, D of the SNSF Statutes by the Director of the Swiss National Science Foundation, on 1st October 2008.

⁷ The SNSF decides to support a research project after evaluating the application through peer review. When the research work has been completed, the SNSF makes a final assessment, weighing the importance of the findings and checking that the funding has been properly used. The assessment process generally involves publication of the results in scientific reviews.

⁸ [European Charter for Researchers](#), Brussels 2005