
Guidelines for applicants

Sinergia programme

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FONDS NATIONAL SUISSE
DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE

Preamble

The Sinergia programme

With the Sinergia programme, the SNSF aims to encourage promising research fields which necessitate a synergetic research approach in order to address complex and innovative scientific issues. Thus the Sinergia funding scheme offers the possibility of financing inter-, multi- and multidisciplinary projects drawn up on the initiative of collaborating research groups. Except in special cases, a Sinergia project consists of three to four sub-projects conducted by different groups of researchers. A Sinergia project lasts for a maximum of 36 months; a single follow-up project is possible.

In general, all Sinergia applicants must be established researchers (see Guidelines for selecting SNSF funding schemes) who are doing research in Switzerland. The deadline for the submission of Sinergia applications is 15 January each year. The applications are evaluated by the National Research Council of the SNSF based on the assessments provided by external reviewers who are generally based abroad. Project grants are awarded through a competitive process.

Documents relating to the Sinergia programme

The documentation regarding the Sinergia programme encompasses:

- the Guidelines for applicants of the Sinergia programme as reference for persons who intend to prepare and submit applications, also provides information on the evaluation procedure for applications;
- the [Regulations on Sinergia grants](#) and the [Funding Regulations of the SNSF](#), which serve as the legal basis for the SNSF's decision-making;

The documents are available on the SNSF website (www.snsf.ch). They may also be downloaded in *mySNF*, the electronic platform used by the applicants and evaluators (www.mysnf.ch). The Guidelines for applicants of the Sinergia programme are based on the [Regulations on Sinergia grants](#), the [Funding Regulations](#) and the [Organisational regulations of the National Research Council](#). Their sole purpose is explanatory and they do not in any circumstances substitute the three mentioned regulations.

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1. From the preparation of applications through to the communication of decisions - the main points in brief

The Sinergia programme of the Swiss National Science Foundation is aimed at supporting small networks of researchers. Some promising scientific fields necessitate a synergetic approach in order to address complex and innovative scientific questions. The Sinergia funding scheme offers the possibility of financing inter-, multi- and multidisciplinary projects initiated collaboratively by different research groups. The responsible applicant of a Sinergia project must be engaged in research in Switzerland or work for a Swiss research institution abroad. However, one of the co-applicants may be a foreigner based outside Switzerland if his/her knowledge is needed and there is no group with the required knowledge and the same level of expertise within Switzerland. **All disciplines and all topics** are in principle eligible for funding through Sinergia. The projects are concerned with **basic** research or **user-inspired** research, be it disciplinary or interdisciplinary.

Before submitting an application, you must clarify certain points. Please ensure that the formal and personal requirements for submitting an application are met.

As applications are submitted to the SNSF online via the mySNF platform, you should apply for a user account there in good time. **Some parts of the application can be prepared in advance** (and uploaded as pdf documents once your account has been activated - **pdf uploads**). This applies, in particular, to the research plan (max. of 10 pages describing the entire project, then max. of 10 pages for each sub-project), the CV (2 pages) and the publication list (for the last 5 years). Please enter all other data online in mySNF, in particular administrative and financial data.

This document offers basic advice on how to draft an application. Help texts for entering data online and for completing individual data containers will be available to you in mySNF when you compile a new application.

Proposals must be submitted by **15 January** at the latest. The Administrative Offices of the SNSF examine whether the formal and personal requirements are met and, this being the case, forward your application for scientific evaluation. The respective decisions are communicated to you in the form of a ruling after the relevant meeting of the Presiding Board of the Research Council, which takes place approximately six months after the submission date. Approved projects may not begin before 1 August. A Sinergia project lasts for a maximum of 36 months. A single follow-up project is possible and must also be completed within 36 months. A follow-up application for a Sinergia project must not focus only on individual sub-projects, rather it must address all sub-projects as a whole just as the initial application did. The eligible costs and the submission and starting dates of follow-up projects are governed by the same rules as apply to new Sinergia applications.

2. Points to be clarified before drafting an application

2.1 User account in mySNF

If you do not already have a user account for mySNF, please register at www.mysnf.ch. The login information will subsequently be sent to you by post. To guarantee timely access, new user accounts must be requested no later than five working days before the relevant submission date (from abroad: two weeks ahead of the submission date). Your *mySNF* access will remain in place for future submissions or for the lifetime management of approved projects.

2.2 About the applicants

2.2.1 Scientific track record

Please clarify before drafting an application, whether you have the necessary scientific experience ([Funding Regulations, Article 13](#)). The Sinergia funding scheme is intended for groups of established researchers. In the SNSF's understanding, established researchers are qualified scientists who hold a permanent or long-term position (for instance, a professorship) at a Swiss research institution, have one or more of their own research groups, have already been awarded funds by third parties under a competitive procedure, teach young scientists and have experience in organising and administrating science projects. In addition, they must be able to show that they will themselves make a **substantial contribution** to the planned project and that the necessary infrastructure needed to carry out the intended research work is at their disposal. Non-professorial applicants who are not academically entitled to supervise doctoral candidates may need to entrust co-applicants or other competent persons with the task of supervising the doctoral candidates to be employed in the planned project. This must be stated in the application, if applicable.

2.2.2 Personal requirements

When you prepare the application, please clarify whether you meet the personal requirements for submitting applications ([Funding Regulations, Article 8](#)). Physical persons carrying out **scientific research in Switzerland** or at specific Swiss institutions abroad **for non-commercial purposes** are eligible to be the responsible applicants of a Sinergia project. They may be **either employed or self-employed** (in Switzerland). **However, they must be able to show that they are in employment or self-employed for the duration of the planned research project.** Retired researchers may only be granted project funding by the SNSF if their home institution is prepared to partially finance the project and if their project is deemed excellent. The SNSF may also accept legal persons as applicants.

2.2.3 Co-applicants

Co-applicants must fulfil the same conditions as applicants with regard to their scientific track record and personal requirements. However, in the case of a Sinergia project, it is possible for a co-applicant to lead a research group abroad if the latter's expertise is necessary for the project and there is no group with the same knowledge and level of expertise in Switzerland. Each of the co-applicants is personally responsible for the project. However, only the applicant representing the research group shall be legally responsible vis-à-vis the SNSF, and any grant awarded shall be paid to his/her institution. **It is important that all co-applicants make a substantial contribution to the project.** Researchers making only a small contribution to the planned project must be registered under the item "Collaboration" in the online form on mySNF.

Except in special cases, a Sinergia project consists of 3 to 4 sub-projects conducted by different groups of researchers. For Sinergia projects consisting of more than 4 sub-projects, a special request must be made to the Administrative Offices of the SNSF. A sub-project is generally carried out by a research group consisting of only a few persons. For each sub-project, there must be a responsible researcher (who is generally a [co-]applicant) (Figure 1).

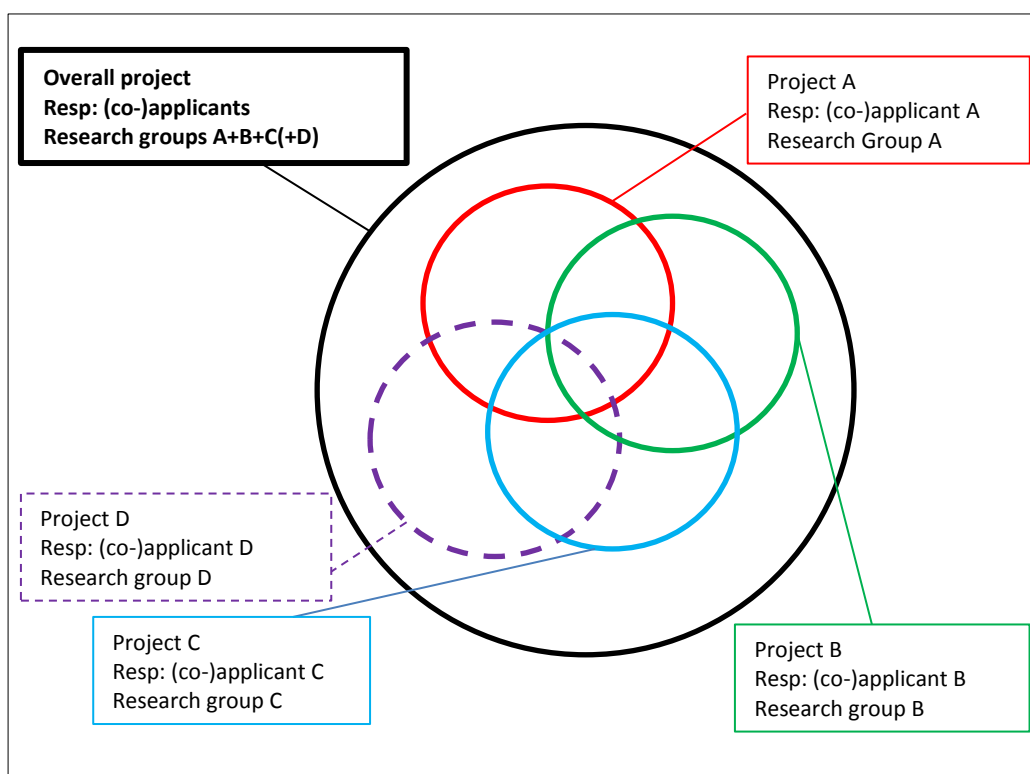


Figure 1. Organisation of a Sinergia project

2.3 Overlaps with ongoing projects and applications

If you have ongoing projects at the SNSF and would like to submit further projects, please make sure that the latter deal with a different topic. Furthermore, as an applicant you should be in a position to make a substantial contribution to all your SNSF research projects ([Funding Regulations, Article 15](#)). When entering an application in mySNF, you must explain the thematic demarcations between your projects. This also concerns ongoing projects that are financed by other funding organisations. In the event of thematic overlaps with ongoing projects, the SNSF will carefully examine whether the latest proposed project adds significant scientific value.

If you submit identical or thematically overlapping applications to the SNSF and to other funding organisations during the same period, you will be obliged to inform the SNSF about the status and outcome of the evaluation procedure being carried out at the other organisation. The SNSF does not support research that is already fully financed by other institutions.

2.4 Eligible costs

Before compiling the application, please clarify which costs of the proposed project you wish to have covered by the SNSF and whether these costs are eligible for funding at the SNSF ([Funding Regulations, Article 19](#)). The funds requested in a Sinergia proposal need to be clearly more substantial than for an individual project. At the same time, they must clearly not exceed the lowest funding level assigned to a National Research Programme or a National Centre of Competence in Research. Each sub-project must present its own detailed budget.

In the Sinergia funding scheme, **applicants may not apply for payment of their own salaries**. Eligible costs in Sinergia programmes comprise: **personnel costs** (salaries and social security contributions for scientific and technical staff), **research costs** (expendable items and maintenance, travel costs and field expenses, conference- and workshop-related costs), **co-ordination costs** for the overall project (salary for scientific co-ordination, internal meetings) and, to a limited extent, **investment costs** (acquisition costs of equipment). All eligible costs must be linked to the project ([General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations](#)). If you wish to have positions for doctoral candidates covered by the SNSF grant, please refer to the [salary and social security rates of the SNSF](#) (in German and French). If you wish to have postdoctoral or technical posts covered by the SNSF grant, please refer to the SNSF salary rates of your institution. If your institution does not have its own salary rates, please contact one of the financial officers of the SNSF.

2.5 Formal requirements

Before drafting the application, please familiarise yourself with the formal requirements for applications ([Funding Regulations, Article 9](#)), in particular the language that the application must be written in. A Sinergia project must be written in English; this simplifies the search for external reviewers. Exceptions may be approved; in this regard, please contact the Administrative Offices of the SNSF before submission. Furthermore, the research plan, CV and list of publications must meet the require-

ments stipulated by the SNSF. Applications must be complete and submitted on time.

3. Creating the upload documents

3.1 CV and publication list of the applicants

The CV and the publication list must be uploaded as pdf documents. The **CV must not exceed two DIN A4 pages** and should be written in the same language as the research plan.

The **publication list** should contain only the **publications of the last five years** and should be structured as follows:

1. peer-reviewed articles (original work)
2. Summary articles
3. Monographs
4. Contributions to books
5. Other relevant publications

The sub-categories "published" and "in press" are permissible in all five of the above categories. Articles connected to the research project must be clearly distinguished as such. At the beginning of the list, please include a link to a website containing your comprehensive publication list.

During the scientific evaluation of the project, the personal criteria "Scientific track record" and "Applicants' expertise with regard to the proposed project" are evaluated on the basis of the CV, the publication list and the "Current state of your own research" chapter in the research plan. In order not to put younger researchers with less experience at a disadvantage, the publication list is limited to the last five years.

3.2 Scientific part of the application (research plan)

The research plan must be uploaded as a pdf document. It must be compiled in accordance with the requirements set out in the Annex to this document. The research plan must consist of original text that has been written by the applicants themselves. A limited amount of published and unpublished text written by third parties, or of published text written by yourself, is permissible in the chapters "Current state of research in the field" and "Current state of your own research". Such text must be clearly distinguished as quoted text, i.e. the text must be marked as a quotation in the customary manner and the source indicated in connection with the quotation as well as listed in the bibliography.

Based on the research plan, the application is evaluated with regard to the general criteria "Scientific relevance", "Topicality", "Originality", "Suitability of methods" and "Feasibility" as well as with regard to the specific criteria for Sinergia applications: "Value added by joint research approach", "Competence, complementarity and col-

laboration of the groups involved", "Organisation and networking concept for the groups involved" and "Promotion of young researchers".

4. Creating the online application

In the *mySNF* entry mask, please select the option "Create new application". Then select "Sinergia" under "Programmes (national and international)". Once you have decided whether to enter an application from scratch or use one of your previous applications as a template (this is applicable to follow-up applications), the data containers you need to fill in will be displayed in the menu bar.

The data concerning (co-)applicants and applications is to be entered in the *mySNF* entry mask. The data concerning the application includes, in particular, the title, the discipline(s), keywords, any relation to other projects and applications, scientific collaborations as well as requested and available funds.

5. Receipt and verification of the applications at the Administrative Offices of the SNSF

5.1 Verification of formal requirements

The Administrative Offices of the SNSF check whether the submitted applications meet the formal requirements ([see Art. 9 of the Funding Regulations](#)). If the formal requirements are met, the SNSF decides to consider the respective application and forwards it to the Research Council for evaluation. If the formal requirements are not met, the application is not considered.

5.2 Verification of personal requirements

In the verification of personal requirements, formal conditions are examined in accordance with [Art. 8 of the Funding Regulations](#) (only research for non-commercial purposes, only one research group abroad, professional independence of applicants ...). If the (co-)applicants meet all the requirements, the SNSF decides to consider the relevant application and forwards it to the Research Council for evaluation. If the personal requirements are not met, the application is not considered.

5.3 Verification of scientific integrity

The Administrative Offices of the SNSF check whether the application breaches any rules of scientific integrity. Should there be any indications of scientific misconduct, all processing of the application is suspended until such time as the application is cleared of suspicion through an investigation. If the suspicion is confirmed, the SNSF may impose sanctions (see [Regulations of the National Research Council on the treatment of scientific misconduct by applicants and grantees](#)).

5.4 Contacts between the applicants and the Administrative Offices of the SNSF

Prior to and during the submission of applications, you can address your queries and requests for information to the Administrative Offices of the SNSF by phone or e-mail. When checking submitted applications, the Administrative Offices may contact you in order to clarify issues related to the application. Before, during and after the evaluation, the applicants are obliged to:

- provide any information requested by the SNSF
- cooperate in clarifying facts
- inform the SNSF about any new facts that may be relevant to the funding decision

The SNSF does not provide you with any information concerning your applications while the evaluation procedure is in progress and until the decision is communicated in written form.

6. Evaluation procedure and communication of decisions

The evaluation procedure for Sinergia is divided into three successive stages:

Submission of applications and administrative measures: The Administrative Offices of the SNSF receive applications from researchers via the *mySNF* platform. They then check whether the requirements for submitting an application have been met and inform the applicants accordingly.

Evaluation: Evaluation consists of two steps. In an initial step, the applications are assessed by external reviewers. Subsequently, they are submitted to the National Research Council, which forwards them for evaluation to the Specialised Committee Interdisciplinary Research (FA-ID, a body of the National Research Council composed of members of all divisions of the SNSF). For the evaluation of Sinergia projects, the FA-ID is complemented by members of the National Research Councils of the divisions in order to optimise the level of expertise available to the FA-ID in specific fields covered by the submitted projects. In this second phase, each application is evaluated by a referee who is a member of this enlarged FA-ID. The referee's evaluation is based principally on the external reviews. Subsequently, the referee presents the application and the assessments to the members of the enlarged FA-ID. The evaluation of Sinergia proposals is based on the following criteria:

- Value added by the joint research approach;
- Selection of the involved groups (complementarities, coherency of the collaboration, etc.);
- Organisation of the collaboration between the involved groups;
- Effect of the collaboration on the promotion of young researchers.

Decision: The FA-ID and the members of the Research Councils of the divisions discuss the applications and take a provisional decision on each application. Subsequently, the Presiding Board of the Research Council examines whether the

procedures have been correctly applied and the budget and other conditions complied with. If this is the case, it endorses the provisional decision.

Final decisions are generally taken five-and-a-half to six months after the submission date. The Administrative Offices of the SNSF forward the final decisions to the applicants as soon as possible in the form of a ruling (in accordance with the Federal Act on Administrative Procedure).

7. Annex: requirements for the research plan of a Sinergia application

A research plan for the overall project as well as research plans for each sub-project need to be submitted with Sinergia applications. The scientific part of the overall project must be divided into five chapters (2.1 to 2.5), preceded by a summary (1). Please adopt the chapter headings listed below either word for word or in approximate terms. Applications are generally forwarded to external reviewers for assessment ([Funding Regulations, Article 18](#)). Please submit a detailed research plan (especially in chapter 2.3) which clearly describes the benefits expected from a cooperative approach (as a network), the goals of the research project and the scientific approach. This will facilitate the assessment of the scientific content of the overall project.

For Sinergia applications, the scientific part of the application must be written in English. Exceptions may be approved; in this regard, please contact the Administrative Offices of the SNSF before submission.

7.1. Research plan of the overall project

The information in this section concerns the overall project.

1	Summary of the research plan	The summary (max. 1 page) should characterise the application and place the planned project in a wider scientific context.
2	Research Plan	The research plan must not exceed 10 pages and 40,000 characters (with spaces), illustrations, formulae, tables and bibliographies included. A minimum of point 10 font size and 1.5 line spacing must be used. In general, the research plan should not contain any annexed documents.
2.1	Current state of research in the field	Making reference to the most important publications, particularly by other authors, please explain: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• which previous insights provided the starting point and basis for the planned studies;• in which areas research is needed, and why;• which important, relevant research projects are currently underway in Switzerland and abroad.

2.2	Current state of your own research	<p>For a new application, please present the research work that the various (co-)applicants have already undertaken in the relevant field or in related fields and mention the corresponding publications.</p> <p>For a follow-up to an already approved project, please report on the work conducted in the scope of the previous project and the results obtained.</p>
2.3	Research plan of the entire project	<p>Based on the information provided under 2.1 and 2.2, please indicate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the benefits expected from a co-operative approach (as a network); • the concrete overall goals that you expect to achieve in the course of the project; • the scientific approach (combination of different methods, techniques, etc.) to be used in addressing the overall goals of the project. <p>If the submitted project is declared as interdisciplinary, you must explain on approx. one page what this interdisciplinarity consists of, why it is essential and how it will be taken into consideration when the research plan is implemented.</p>
2.4	Organisation of the collaboration	<p>Please answer the following questions:</p> <p>What scientific contribution is each of the sub-projects expected to make?</p> <p>How will the research work be structured as regards content and schedule?</p> <p>Which specific measures will be taken to enhance interaction (joint development of concept, continual exchange of knowledge, etc.) and to integrate results. Please specify the time and the means you will devote to this end?</p> <p>How will the collaboration of different groups in a network promote the education of young scientists (postdocs and doctoral candidates)?</p>
2.5	Relevance and impact	<p>Please describe the impacts you expect your research in the proposed project to have for the discipline and for science as a whole (research and education/teaching). In addition, please mention the form in which you wish to make your research results public (articles in science journals, monographs, conference proceedings etc). If applicable, please indicate whether and to what extent the proposed project will have a broader impact and what this impact will be.</p>

7.2. Research plans of sub-projects

Please compile a research plan for each of the sub-projects involved. The research plan of a sub-project must not exceed 10 pages and 40,000 characters (with spaces), illustrations, formulae, tables and bibliographies included. A minimum of point 10 font size and 1.5 line spacing must be used.

3.1	Interactions with the overall project	Please explain how this sub-project is linked to the other sub-projects and to the overall project.
3.2	Detailed research plan	<p>Please specify the approach you are taking and the concrete objectives that you aim to achieve in the period of funding. The following points should be addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concrete goals that you expect to achieve in the course of the sub-project;• Studies or experiments needed and/or envisaged to reach the set goals;• Methods by which the research goals are to be reached;• Data situation / collection of data. <p>Please do not repeat information already mentioned under 2.3. Item 3.3 should only contain information on a sub-project, whereas item 2.3 concerns the entire project.</p>
3.3	Schedule and milestones	As far as this is possible, please compile a schedule that includes the different phases of the sub-project and the most important interim goals. This plan should also indicate the main tasks with which the persons funded by the SNSF are to be entrusted (doctoral candidates, postdocs).