

Special Call on Coronaviruses

Call document

of 4 March 2020

The National Research Council, based on Articles 3 and 48 of the Funding Regulations of 27 February 2015¹ issues the following Regulations:

1. General provisions

Article 1 Principles and scope of the call

¹ On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the recent COVID-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. There is an urgent and immediate need for research in order to gain a better understanding of the newly identified virus and its possible future evolution, to understand and contain the spread, develop diagnostics and improve patient care and the public health response.

² The present call is for research proposals that have the potential to contribute to the understanding of coronaviruses, including the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) and the illness it causes and Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), in order to improve the clinical management or public health response within a timeframe of two years. The call is based on the research agenda defined by the WHO¹, as well as the priorities of the Federal Office of Public Health and the SNSF's own assessment of research capacity in Switzerland.

³ The call covers the following priority areas:

- Virological, immunological, and immunopathological aspects of SARS-CoV-2 infection that may be relevant for understanding pathogenesis, for the development of vaccines and advancement into clinical testing of therapeutics (including repurposing) and diagnostic tools;
- Animal and environmental research on the origin and evolution of SARS-CoV-2, and research on control measures at the human-animal interface;
- The natural history, clinical characterisation and management of COVID-19 disease;
- Epidemiological studies, for example studies on key parameters determining transmission, risks of severe adverse outcomes, forecasting spread of the outbreak and estimating the effect of public health measures (clinical and economical benefits);

¹ [Regulations of the Swiss National Science Foundation on research grants](#)

- Infection prevention and control, including best practice to protect health care workers; and prevent (or if not prevented, at least rapidly recognise and halt) hospital-acquired infections;
- The societal impact at large, including developing strategies to understand and combat misinformation, stigma, and fear;
- Impact of official and social media communications on understanding and behaviour of policy makers, health care workers, patients and populations;
- The social and political history, including for instance public communication, legal aspects, border controls, mobility restrictions by States of COVID-19 disease;
- International relations, global coordination, response systems and crisis management, including measuring/mitigating economical and political effects;
- Ethical considerations for research, including the design of clinical, epidemiological, anthropological, and public health studies.

⁴ Projects conducted for directly commercial purposes will not be funded.

Article 2 Applicable law

¹ Applications must be in line with the regulations outlined in this call document. In addition and if no specific provision is formulated in the present call, the other regulations of the SNSF apply, in particular the Funding Regulations² and their General Implementation Regulations³.

²The present call is eligible for overhead contributions as defined in the relevant SNSF regulations.⁴

Article 3 Duration and amount

¹ Grants are awarded for a duration of up to 24 months. The SNSF does not consider applications that request a longer duration.

² The funding awarded will typically range from a minimum of 50,000 to 300,000 Swiss francs. The SNSF may approve larger grants if the planned research requires exceptionally expensive approaches, and if the need for an elevated budget is well justified.

2. Requirements for applicants and applications

Article 4 Personal requirements for applicants

¹ Natural persons are eligible to submit applications if they meet the eligibility requirements for the submission of applications pursuant to Arts. 4 and 5 of the Project Funding Regulations⁵.

² If several applicants make a joint submission, the requirements pursuant to Art. 12 of the Funding Regulations will have to be met. One applicant may be based outside Switzerland if his/her expertise is essential. Applicants based abroad have to meet the eligibility requirements *mutatis mutandis*.

² [Regulations of the Swiss National Science Foundation on research grants](#)

³ [General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations](#)

⁴ [Regulations on overhead contributions](#)

⁵ [Regulations on project funding](#)

Article 5 Applications and grants in relation to other funding schemes

¹ International collaboration with and contribution to existing networks or programmes on the topic is important and endorsed.

² At the time of submission or during an ongoing project of the present call, applicants may also receive grants for research on other topics under any other SNSF funding scheme.

³ It is permissible to submit the same research proposal or a research proposal with overlapping content to other national or international funders, for example to other Corona research initiatives. In such cases, the submission to other funding agencies must be declared in the application, or declared as soon as the proposal is submitted to the other agency.

⁴ It is not permissible to accept funds for the same work from different sources. In the event of approved projects receiving full or partial funding from other sources, the SNSF may withdraw or adjust its funding.

Article 6 Submission of applications

¹ Applications must be submitted via the electronic platform *mySNF* under the funding scheme “SNSF Special Call Coronavirus” by 5 p.m. Swiss local time on 25 march 2020.

² Applications must be in English and include the following information and documents:

- a. administrative information, budget and CV/research output lists as per the requirements set out in *mySNF*;
- b. a project description consisting of a project summary (maximum 1 page) and project plan (up to 10 pages).

³ The project description pursuant to paragraph 2 letter b must comprise the following elements:

1. project summary;
2. Project plan consisting of
 - 2.1. state of research in the field together with a statement explaining how the proposed research project aligns to the call priority areas;
 - 2.2. description of milestones, methods, approach, expected results, timeline, potential risks and, if applicable, justification of elevated budget; and
 - 2.3. potential impact of the research, *i.e.* rapid implementation, enabling early and valuable outcomes.

Article 7 Eligible costs

¹ The following costs are covered by the grant:

- a. the salaries of scientific and technical staff of the research project according to the salary ranges and rates prescribed by the SNSF. Doctoral students salaries may be charged to Coronavirus Special Call projects if progress with their PhD is not jeopardised and full funding of their PhD beyond the grant is guaranteed;
- b. material costs that are directly linked to the research work, particularly material of enduring value, expendable items, field expenses, travel costs or third-party charges, the costs of computing time and gaining access to data as well as costs for granting access to data (Open Research Data);

- c. direct costs incurred through the use of research infrastructures (including high security labs) linked to the research work (*i.e.* no maintenance or amortisation costs);
- d. costs for national and international cooperation and networking activities carried out in connection with the funded research.

² For applicants from abroad, the norms of the relevant country will be applied *mutatis mutandis*, with the SNSF's maximum rates generally serving as an upper limit.

³ The SNSF awards global budgets. Transfers between the individual cost categories during the funding period are permissible.

3. Assessment criteria, procedure, grants

Article 8 Assessment criteria

Grants are awarded based on the following criteria:

- a. Scientific quality of the proposed research project;
- b. Qualification of the applicant(s);
- c. Alignment of the application to the identified call priority areas (Article 1 paragraph 3 above);
- d. Potential for timely and significant contributions to the research field.

Article 9 Grant administration

¹ Grants are awarded and administered based on the regulations of the present call and the other provisions of the SNSF that are applicable to the grant.

² The project must be started no later than three months after the earliest possible starting date as defined in the ruling.

Article 10 Non-consideration

¹ The SNSF does not consider applications from applicants who do not meet all requirements. If one applicant does not meet the eligibility requirements, the application will generally not be considered for any of the applicants, unless it is easily possible to evaluate the application without considering the ineligible person.

² The SNSF also rules not to consider the application if the submitted documentation is incomplete or erroneous or if the necessary evidence is not provided or does not meet the specified requirements. The SNSF may grant a limited period of time to correct minor administrative errors and may consider the application if the deadline for correction is met. However, the project description may no longer be changed once the submission deadline has expired.

³ Non-consideration decisions are communicated to the applicants in the form of a ruling.

Article 11 Evaluation process

- ¹ Proposals are evaluated by members of an international pool of experts.
- ² Generally each proposal is independently evaluated by three members of the pool. All experts provide a written assessment. Two reviews are acceptable, if a third review cannot be obtained.
- ³ There will be no meetings of international experts.
- ⁴ Proposals are graded based on the assessments obtained for each proposal.
- ⁵ If it is not possible to fund all applications that have the same overall grade, preference will be given to applications with a higher score for the criterion “Potential for timely and significant contributions to the research field”. In case of identical scores, applications will be selected by drawing lots.

Article 12 Decisions

- ¹ Funding is decided by the Presiding Board of the Research Council.
- ² Decisions are communicated to the applicants in the form of a ruling.
- ³ Negative rulings will be justified in summary form. In particular, the applicant will be informed about their assessments for the different criteria (Article 8 above).
- ⁴ Applicants who are excluded as a result of the procedure described in Article 11 paragraph 5, will be informed accordingly in the negative ruling.

Article 13 Right of appeal

Applicants have the right to appeal against rulings issued by the SNSF.

4. Reporting, entry into force

Article 14 Reporting

- ¹ Corresponding holders of grants must submit an annual financial report and must meet their obligations with regard to the documentation of output data.
- ² Due to the specific nature of the call, a symposium will be organised towards the end of the funding period where grantees will present and discuss their results. The presentation is mandatory.
- ³ The obligation to document output data ends three years after completion of the project.
- ⁴ The SNSF is entitled to demand the correction of incorrect and the completion of incomplete reports.

Article 15 Publication and accessibility of research results

During the project or immediately after its completion, grantees are obliged to make their research results available to the public in an appropriate manner, mentioning explicitly the support received from the SNSF. In particular:

- a. manuscripts need to be made available on open access preprint repositories (*e.g.* bioRxiv.org for life sciences), in order to make findings immediately available to the scientific community.
- b. scientific publications financed by the SNSF must be openly accessible as defined in Article 11.9 of the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations⁶.
- c. researchers share the data underlying a publication on publicly accessible repositories, at the latest when the relevant scientific work is published.
- d. by the end of the grant, all research data collected with the aid of the grant must be made publicly available, while respecting ethical and confidentiality constraints.
- e. Approved applications must set up a Data Management Plan according to the requirements issued by the SNSF. At the time of submission of the application, DMP data may still be incomplete.
- f. the publication of research data must follow the SNSF open research data policy and the FAIR DATA Principles⁷.

Article 16 Entry into force

These Regulations enter into force on 4 March 2020.

⁶ [General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations](#)

⁷ The FAIR principles stand for Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable (Wilkinson, M. D. *et al.* The FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship. *Sci. Data* 3:160018 doi: 10.1038/sdata.2016.18 [2016])