

Extended call document: SNSF Starting Grants

Excellent researchers who are currently unable to apply to the European Research Council for ERC Grants at Swiss research institutions because of the successful mass immigration initiative may apply for comparable grants at the SNSF in the context of transitional measures in 2014. The aim is to maintain Switzerland's strong position as a centre of research. Applicants with destination Switzerland who intended to apply for a Starting Grant with the ERC can submit their proposal to the SNSF. This document describes the rules and procedures for submitting a proposal to the Temporary Backup Scheme **SNSF Starting Grants**.

1. From the preparation of applications through to the decision – the main points in brief

The call is open as of **15 March 2014** and will close on **25 March 2014 (midnight Swiss time)**. Applicants of any nationality with destination Switzerland who intended to apply for an ERC Starting Grant can submit their proposal to the SNSF via the electronic platform *mySNF*.

This funding scheme will provide up to **CHF 1.5 million for up to five years** to excellent young scientists who want to pursue ground-breaking, high-gain/high-risk research in Switzerland and propose ambitious but feasible research. Scientific quality of the research project and the applicants' qualifications are the only evaluation criteria. This scheme is open to all research disciplines and topics. Host institutions must agree to ensure conditions in which the applicants can direct the research and manage their funding.

Before submitting an application, the formal and personal requirements should be noted.

As applications must be submitted to the SNSF online via the *mySNF* platform (www.mysnf.ch), the applicant needs to apply for a user account in good time. Some parts of the application can be prepared in advance (and uploaded as PDF documents once the account has been activated – PDF uploads). This applies, in particular, to the **extended synopsis (5 pages), the CV (2 pages), the track record (2 pages) and the scientific proposal (15 pages)**. 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 completing individual data containers will be available in *mySNF* when a new application is entered.

Upon submission, the Administrative Offices of the SNSF examine whether the formal and personal requirements are met and, if this is the case, forward the application for scientific evaluation. A **two-phase evaluation** procedure will be conducted by panels of mostly international experts. The outcome of the first phase of the evaluation will be communicated to the applicant at the latest in September 2014. The applicants will be informed of the final decisions in December 2014. The projects can start, at the earliest, in February 2015.

2. Points to be clarified before drafting an application

2.1 User account in *mySNF*

The applicant must have a user account for *mySNF*. Registration is possible at www.mysnf.ch. The login information will subsequently be sent by e-mail. To guarantee timely access, new user accounts must be requested no later than two working days before the relevant submission deadline. The *mySNF* access will remain in place for future submissions or for the lifetime management of approved projects.

2.2 Eligibility criteria for the applicant

Please clarify before drafting an application whether all the eligibility criteria listed below are fulfilled.

Obtainment of PhD degree:

The applicant must have been awarded his/her **PhD** or an equivalent degree¹ between 11 December 2006 and 11 December 2011 (eligibility time window). However, the PhD degree may have been awarded before 11 December 2006 if one or several of the circumstances listed below apply to the applicant:

- Maternity: each child increases the eligibility time window by 18 months;
- Paternity: each child increases the eligibility time window by the actual amount of paternity leave taken;
- For illnesses longer than 90 days, clinical training or national service: the eligibility time window is increased by the actual amount of leave taken for each incident which occurred **after** the PhD was awarded.

The applicant must be able to document these circumstances appropriately. In any case, the PhD degree must not have been awarded before 11 June 2001.

Medical doctors are only eligible if they also held a position that requires the equivalent of a doctorate (e.g. post-doctoral fellowship, professorial appointment). If the applicant holds both a PhD and an MD and obtained the MD first, the MD will be considered the first eligible degree. However, the certified date of the MD's completion must lie between 11 December 2004 and 11 December 2009.

Multiple applications/funding:

- The applicant may submit a proposal under the call identifier ERC-2014-StG. He/she must, however, inform the SNSF of the parallel submission and will not under any circumstances receive both grants.
- A researcher who submitted an ERC Starting Grant under the Work Programme 2013 and was evaluated as category C may not submit a proposal in response to this call;
- A researcher participating as principal investigator in an ERC frontier research project may not submit a proposal to this call, unless the existing project ends no more than two years after the call deadline.

¹ Potential applicants who do not have a PhD but a degree they think might be equivalent are invited to contact the SNSF before submitting a proposal in order to clarify their eligibility.

- In case the SNSF organises Temporary Backup Scheme calls (Starting, Consolidator and Advanced Grants) in 2015, applicants whose proposal is evaluated as category B or C in the first evaluation phase for this call may not submit a proposal to any of those calls in 2015.

Track record:

The applicant should have a promising track record and must have already shown the potential for scientific independence. For example, he/she should have at least one important publication as main author, without the participation of his/her PhD supervisor, in a major international peer-reviewed multidisciplinary scientific journal, or in the leading peer-reviewed journals of his/her respective field. Presentations at well-established international conferences, granted patents, awards, prizes, etc., are also expected depending on research field and stage in career.

2.3 Eligibility criteria for host institutions

The host institution must be established in Switzerland as a legal entity (public or private) founded under Swiss law. Although the applicant does not need to be employed by the host Institution when he/she submits the proposal, the host institution must employ the applicant for at least the duration of the project. The percentage of employment will depend on how much time the applicant will devote to the project, but it must be at least 50%. Furthermore, the applicant must spend at least 50% of his/her total working time in Switzerland. Should Switzerland participate in Horizon 2020, this constraint would be changed to '50% of his/her total working time in an EU member or associated state'. Finally, the host institution will be the only participating legal entity. Exceptions to this will be considered if they are well justified.

Before submitting the application, please discuss the procedure for conducting the project with the host institution. The latter must provide a commitment letter. The SNSF will also accept letters that were initially addressed to the ERC.

2.4 Formal requirements, ethical issues and research integrity

Applications must be complete, in English and submitted in good time. Research activities and methods that have ethical implications or may raise questions which will require sound ethical assessment need to be declared. Hence, please take note of the Swiss laws and ethical standards. Furthermore, the rules of scientific integrity must be strictly respected.

3. Eligible costs

SNSF Starting Grants are awarded up to a maximum of CHF 1.5 million for 5 years. In addition, up to CHF 500,000 can be requested to cover the installation costs for an applicant moving to Switzerland as a consequence of receiving the SNSF Starting Grant and/or for the purchase of major equipment and/or access to large facilities.

Before drafting an application, applicants should clarify and consider the following points pursuant to the guidelines concerning the requested budget (see the Annex for information on eligible and non-eligible costs, as well as for cost categories). Please use whole CHF integers only when indicating requested costs. Costs have to be subdivided in personnel costs, travel, equipment, consumables, publications costs (through open access), other direct costs and any envisaged subcontracting costs. The costs in each category must be indicated in five annual allotments.

A sub-contractor is a third party who carries out part of the project based on an agreement on business conditions. Sub-contracts may only correspond to a limited part of the project and must be fully justified in the “resources” section of the research plan.

Indirect costs must not be specified in the proposal form. The SNSF pays the host institution an overhead of 15% of the total direct eligible costs (excluding sub-contracting).

All eligible costs must be linked to the aims of the project for its entire duration. The resources requested should be in accordance with the needs of the project and fully justified. The project cost estimation should be as accurate as possible. The evaluation panels assess the estimated costs carefully and are entitled to reduce unjustified budgets.

The size and composition of the team must be indicated, mentioning the key team members and their roles. If team members employed by another host institution participate in the project, this should be justified in relation to the additional financial costs this may incur for the project.

When requesting positions for doctoral students to be covered by the SNSF grant, please refer to the salary and social security rates for [doctoral students of the SNSF](#). For postdoctoral or technical posts covered by the SNSF grant, please [refer to the SNSF salary rates](#) of the host institution.

All available resources for the realisation of the project have to be declared as well as the required infrastructure and equipment. It is advisable to include a short technical description of the equipment needed, together with a justification of its necessity.

4. Creating the upload documents

All documents must be written in English and submitted as PDF files. Please note that the first phase of the scientific evaluation of the project only takes into consideration the extended synopsis, the CV and the track record.

4.1 Extended synopsis

The extended synopsis must allow the evaluation commissions to assess the scientific approach. It must therefore contain the state of the art of the proposed research as well as a short description of the scientific proposal. It is particularly important to present the ground-breaking nature of the project and its feasibility. Its length must not exceed five pages and it must be uploaded in the *mySNF* datacontainer “Extended Synopsis”.

4.2 Research plan

This document will only be considered during the second phase of the evaluation process.

The research plan must be divided into three chapters; its total length should not exceed 15 pages and must be uploaded in the *mySNF* datacontainer “Research Plan”.

- a. **State of the art and objectives:** making reference to the most important publications, particularly by other authors, please explain:
 - a. which previous insights provided the starting point and basis of the planned studies;
 - b. the potential impact of the proposed research;

- c. any innovative aspects of the proposed approach, including multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary aspects
- b. Methodology:** based on information provided in the first chapter, please specify the approach taken and the concrete objectives you aim to achieve in the period of funding. The following points should be addressed:
 - a. studies or experiments needed or envisaged to reach the set goals;
 - b. methods by which the research goals are to be reached;
 - c. any novel approaches addressing the “high-risk/high-gain” balance;
 - d. focus on any intermediate step where contingency plans may be required.
- c. Resources:** all requested resources must fit the scientific objectives of the proposals. This must be fully justified in the proposal. This part should not include any table summarising the total costs of the project since a detailed budget must be entered in the *mySNF* datacontainer “Requested Funding”.

4.3 CV of the applicant

The CV should include the standard academic and research record of the applicant and should not exceed two pages. Any gaps in the scientific career and/or unusual academic paths should be clearly described so that they can be appropriately taken into account by the evaluation commissions. The document must not exceed two pages and must be uploaded in the *mySNF* datacontainer “CV/Track Record”.

4.4 Track record

The applicant must provide a list of achievements representing their past track record. He/she must therefore list his/her past activity in terms of publications, patents, invited presentations or prizes and awards. The document must not exceed two pages and must be uploaded in the *mySNF* datacontainer “CV/Track Record”.

Please note that the list of publications may only contain publications in major international peer-reviewed multi-disciplinary scientific journals or in leading peer-reviewed journals, conferences proceedings or monographs of their respective fields. Please give the most representative publications: **up to ten publications may be listed**. All those co-authored with the applicant’s PhD advisor must be excluded. The sub-categories “published” and “in press” are permissible.

4.5 Commitment of the host institution

Applicants must provide a written and binding commitment letter of the host institution confirming its willingness to host the proposed research. Applications that do not include such institutional statements at the submission deadline will not be evaluated. The SNSF will also accept letters that were initially addressed to the ERC. It must be uploaded in the *mySNF* datacontainer “Confirmation host institute”.

4.6 Cover letter

The applicant should provide an explanation for any request for extending the eligibility criteria. This can be included in a cover letter to be uploaded in the corresponding *mySNF* data container.

4.7 Other annexes

The applicant should provide a scanned copy of documents proving his/her eligibility for submitting a proposal to the funding scheme, i.e a PhD certificate indicating the date of the award. Any

request for an extension of the eligibility period should be justified by additional documents uploaded in the container “Other annexes”.

5. Creating the online application

To create a new application, please select the option "Create new application" in the *mySNF* entry mask by navigating to the relevant funding scheme under **Programmes > Temporary Backup Schemes > SNSF Starting grants**.

The data concerning the applicant and the application are 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 running projects and current applications, the host institution, and the budget.

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

Verification of formal requirements and eligibility

The Administrative Offices of the SNSF check whether the submitted applications meet the formal requirements and whether the applicant and the host institution are eligible upon receipt. Proposals by eligible applicants are forwarded to the competent evaluation panel. If there is any doubt regarding eligibility which needs clarification, the evaluation of the proposal may be initiated. The proposal may then be formally rejected even after the start of the evaluation process.

Verification of scientific integrity

The Administrative Offices of the SNSF may check whether the application respects the rules of scientific integrity. (see [Regulations of the National Research Council on the treatment of scientific misconduct by applicants and grantees](#)).

Contacts between the applicants and the Administrative Offices of the SNSF

Prior to and during the submission of applications, queries and requests for information can be addressed to the Administrative Offices of the SNSF by phone or e-mail. When checking submitted applications, the Administrative Offices may contact applicants 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 give applicants any information concerning their applications while the evaluation is in progress and until the decision is communicated in written form.

7. Evaluation procedure and communication of decisions

The evaluation of the submitted proposals is based on the principle of competition, where the applications are assessed on the basis of the expert reviews and rated in comparison to the other applications. Three panels will evaluate the proposals in a two-phase procedure. The panels are

established by the Commission for ‘Temporary Backup Schemes’ (CTBS), which oversees all SNSF funding activities related to Horizon 2020 ([link to rules](#)).

Evaluation panels

The CTBS will establish three evaluation panels:

- Humanities and social sciences
- Mathematics, natural and engineering sciences
- Biology and medicine.

Applicants can indicate which panel should evaluate their application when submitting the proposal via *mySNF*. Assignment to a primary and a secondary panel is possible in case of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary proposals. The panel chairpersons decide jointly with the SNSF Administrative Offices to which panel an individual proposal will be assigned.

Evaluation procedure

The evaluation procedure is divided into the following phases:

Phase 1:

Three members of the competent panel independently evaluate the research project’s general scientific aspiration (based on the extended synopsis) as well as the applicant’s CV and track record. External experts or members of another panel might provide individual assessments of proposals of a markedly multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary nature. The panel members discuss and rank the proposal (A, B or C rating). All proposals rated B or C will be rejected after confirmation by the CTBS. Applicants in category A will be invited to present their project during an interview.

Phase 2:

Proposals rated A will be assessed by both external reviewers and members of the competent evaluation panel (based on the full proposal). The applicants may list up to three persons who should not act as external reviewer in the evaluation of their proposal. Such requests must be well justified. On the basis of the written assessments and the interview with the applicant, the competent panel decides whether the proposal fully meets the evaluation criteria and will be recommended for funding or whether it meets some but not all of the evaluation criteria and will therefore not be recommended for funding.

The panels will complete their evaluation with a report on every proposal. The SNSF is legally required not to reveal the identity of reviewing persons to the applicants. The funding recommendation will be submitted to the CTBS, which examines the recommendations and issues a proposal for final funding decisions and for rejections to the SNSF Presiding Board.

Evaluation criteria

The only criterion guiding the evaluation of the proposals is *scientific quality*. It will be applied to the assessment of both the content of the proposed research and the scientific achievements and potential of the individual applicant.

Scientific quality of the research project

1. The ground-breaking nature and projected impact of the proposed research;
2. The ambition and contribution of the project beyond the state of the art;
3. The extent to which the proposed research is high risk/high gain;
4. The feasibility of the scientific approach and the appropriateness of the methodology, the resource planning and proposed time-scale.

Qualification of the applicant

1. His/her intellectual capacity, creativity and ability to conduct original research;
2. His/her scientific achievements, typically exceeding the state of the art;
3. His/her commitment to the proposed research.

Outcome of the evaluation and communication of the decisions

Every proposal will be evaluated and marked based on the two main criteria – research project and applicant – in each evaluation phase.

After the first phase the applicants will be informed about the outcome, i.e the rating of their proposal.

The outcome of the second phase will be conveyed to the applicants after the final decision of the SNSF Presiding Board.

In addition, once the evaluation of their proposal has been completed, applicants will receive an evaluation report which will include the rating of their proposal as well as the overall appreciation of their proposal's strengths and weaknesses.

Projects recommended for funding by the panels will be financed by the SNSF if sufficient funds are available. Proposals will be funded in priority order based on their rank.

The applicant may request a reconsideration of the decisions communicated if he/she considers the decisions to be flawed. The request will be treated in accordance with Art. 28 of the Organisational Regulations of the National Research Council.

The decisions may be appealed against before the Federal Administrative Court.

Annex

7.1. Eligible and non-eligible costs

7.1.1. **Direct eligible costs** support the research, management, training and dissemination activities necessary for the realisation of the project:

- **Personnel costs** cover the salary and social security contributions for the PI, salaries and social security contributions for scientific and technical staff (for PhD students' salaries,

please refer to SNSF rates, for other collaborators, please refer to the SNSF salary rates of the host institution);

- **Material costs** that are directly related to the realisation of the project, namely material of enduring value, expendable items, field expenses, travel costs or third-party charges; material, costs for publication of results, including for open access, IPR costs;
- Costs for the project-related use of infrastructures at institutions or laboratories that are expressly provided for under the terms of the call;
- **Costs for sub-contracting** (see Annex 7.2.);
- **Further costs** provided for by the regulations and the terms of the call.

7.1.2. **Indirect costs** are not to be indicated in the proposal form. The SNSF pays the host institution an overhead of 15% of the total direct eligible costs (excluding sub-contracting).

7.1.3. **Non-eligible costs** cannot be reimbursed through the grant, in particular:

- Costs related to return on capital
- Debt and debt service charges
- Provisions for possible future losses of debts
- Interest owed
- Doubtful debts
- Currency exchange losses
- Excessive or reckless expenditure
- Costs reimbursed under another EU grant
- Deductible VAT