

Call for proposals for a study outline

Evaluation of the Agora funding scheme

1. Introduction

The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) funds scientific research in all disciplines through a wide range of funding schemes. These are subject to external evaluation at regular intervals to examine their objectives and how they are reached. The scientific communication funding scheme Agora is part of the Program funding scheme of the SNSF.

The aim of the Agora funding scheme is to promote knowledge dissemination and exchange of opinions and perspectives on scientific research. It supports projects that explicitly include elements of interaction and mutual listening, therefore encouraging dialogue between scientists and the general public. Grants of between CHF 5,000 and CHF 200,000 are awarded for small-format communication projects or larger scale projects with greater impact. Agora supports a range of activities, including discussions and debates, practical workshops, participative science, multimedia projects, serious games, theatre and performance, interactive exhibitions and educational projects.

Since 2011, 83 (37%) of the 221 Agora applications submitted to the SNSF have been funded.

2. Objective : evaluation of the format and the appeal of the funding scheme

- a) The main aim of Agora is to encourage knowledge transfer in modern scientific research and to promote dialogue between scientists and society. The scheme has now been available for five years but the number of applications for Agora funding remains modest (see table 1). For this reason, there is a need to establish its potential for development and to propose actions that will allow the programme to grow positively. Proposals may take the form of a roadmap with accompanying evaluation criteria that allow the progress of the process to be monitored.
- b) Establishing a real dialogue between the public and scientists is a key criterion in the awarding of the grants. This dialogue is important for a number of reasons: First, given the particular cultural and political situation in Switzerland, an educated and informed public is strategically important because, among other objectives, citizens need to be able to make informed decisions when called to vote in popular referendums. Second, feedback from the general public to scientists is intended to provide added value to the scientists in their work. The SNSF is keen to identify 1) the extent to which this funding

scheme may promote the dialogue between science and society, 2) the consequences of this dialogue, meaning the extent of truly informing the population and of the benefits to the scientists, and 3) the potential for development. The results obtained in this part will feed back into the objective described in a).

- c) Other pertinent questions to be examined in the scope of the study may be suggested freely by the evaluators themselves.

3. Database and methodology

The SNSF will make its data available to the agency in charge of the study in accordance with rules to be defined. The agency in charge will then be able to evaluate this data and conduct interviews with current and former Agora grantees.

Below is the number of Agora applications and grants over the years:

Table 1: Agora applications and grants 2011-2015

Year	Applications	Grants awarded
2011	69	18
2012	31	14
2013	52	19
2014	24	12
2015	48	20

83 grants have been awarded in total. Currently, 32 Agora grant holders are in the process of running their communication project (ongoing projects, some of them extended). Around 31 applications have been completed (as of January 2016). 20 grants have been awarded to projects that have not yet started.

In order to respond to the questions raised in section 2, the group chosen to conduct the evaluation must select a methodology that allows it to produce representative statistics using the collected data. It will also be necessary to create a suitable control group, in particular to evaluate the instrument's impact on scientists, their institutions and the population. Those conducting the evaluation may also need to undertake their own research to discover, with the support of the SNSF, the addresses of former grant holders for whom the SNSF no longer has up-to-date contact information. A comparison to existing similar and successful programmes, as well as evaluations of these, is, among others, a possible approach for the evaluation strategy.

The task to determine the number of people and the types of populations required to complete the questionnaire is also a part of the mandate.

It is imperative that all statutory requirements are respected, in particular those relating to data protection and confidentiality.

The report must be written in English, with summaries in German, French and Italian.

4. Offer

4.1 Scope of the offer and selection procedure

The candidates will be invited to present their approach and the methodology that they suggest within a 5-10 pages document. CVs and lists of evaluation projects conducted by those who will participate must be attached to this concept document (please provide evidence of evaluations that are relevant with regard to the present SNSF study). The offer should contain details in relation to the following:

- Chosen approach and methods
- A list of questions that should be investigated with the proposed approach, and difficulties that are envisaged
- Information and resources that the SNSF will be asked to supply during the course of the work, in particular in order to create a pertinent database
- Calendar and budget
- Project team members, references, comparable project track record

The Agora committee and members of the InterCo division will evaluate proposals. The selected agency will in a next step, be invited to revise the concept, taking into account any suggestions made by the SNSF.

4.2 Finances

Each concept must contain a brief draft budget relating to the proposed study. The total amount must not exceed CHF 60,000.

4.3 Contract

At the end of the selection procedure, the chosen applicant and the SNSF will agree a contract that sets the scope and content of the work.

5. Selection criteria

- Competence and experience of the persons responsible for the study in the realisation of qualitative and quantitative studies
- In-depth knowledge of issues relating to research policy and science communication in Switzerland and abroad
- Good knowledge of the SNSF's funding schemes, in particular in relation to science communication
- Methodological approach and feasibility of the study proposed
- Allocated time and budget

6. Schedule (proposed)

May 2016	Call for proposals
June 2016	Deadline for the submission of the concept
July 2016	Evaluation of the concepts by the SNSF
August 2016	Contract between the SNSF and the selected agency.
February 2017	Presentation of the main findings
March 2017	Submission of the report (including raw data) to the SNSF

Please submit concepts electronically to **agora@snf.ch** by **13 June 2016 at latest**:

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For more information about Agora, see:

<http://www.snf.ch/en/funding/science-communication/agora/Pages/default.aspx>

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