

National Centres of Competence in Research (NCCRs)

Call for proposals 2017



The Swiss National Science Foundation is launching a call for the fifth series of National Centres of Competence in Research (NCCRs). The key points are summarised in this call document. Detailed guidelines regarding the submission and evaluation process are set out in the Extended Call Document 2017 ¹.

1. Aim and scope

The objective of the "National Centres of Competence in Research" (NCCRs) as a funding scheme is to sustainably strengthen Swiss research in areas of strategic importance. Research proposals will be funded if they are of the highest quality, and if they add value to the overall research plan so that it amounts to more than the sum of the individual projects. The proposed research must show a potential for innovation, including the advancement of collaborative approaches in individual disciplines as well as across disciplinary boundaries.

The Swiss government also employs the NCCR scheme to develop new and innovative research structures and promote close coordination between institutions in the Swiss research environment. NCCRs are intended to launch structures and initiatives that improve knowledge and innovation transfer from research to the private sector and to society at large; they are also expected to promote academic careers, equal opportunities in research and science communication.

NCCRs are based at one or more higher education institutions. The structural measures implemented within the scope of an NCCR are supported by the home institution and coordinated with its strategic planning.

2. Basic information about the call

The call is aimed at research initiatives in all science areas.

Scope of the call

The fifth call will lead to the establishment of 5-6 new NCCRs, which will be launched in early 2020. SNSF funding of a maximum of 20 million Swiss francs has been earmarked for each new NCCR for the first four years. These federal funds will be augmented with the contributions of the home institutions.

¹ http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/nfs/NCCR_extended_call_2017.pdf

Requirements for the submission of NCCR proposals

All submissions must be made by the designated NCCR director. The NCCR directors and the project leaders (further applicants) must have an excellent track record and must be employed at a Swiss research institution. In addition, NCCR directors must be experienced in managing large research networks.

NCCRs can be based at and supported by one or more home institutions.

Procedures / submission deadlines

The selection procedure comprises four stages. For detailed information, please refer to the Extended Call Document:

1. Designated NCCR directors must send a letter of intent to nccr@snf.ch by no later than **1 December 2017**.
2. The directors set out the visions and potential of the intended initiative in an outline proposal. The outline proposal must be submitted to the SNSF by **1 February 2018** together with a letter of support from the home institution(s). The SNSF evaluates the submissions based on an international peer-review process and appoints an interdisciplinary panel. The SNSF will communicate the results of the evaluation at the end of July 2018.
3. After assessment of the outline proposals, initiatives that continue to be supported by their home institutions may be elaborated into a detailed research programme and submitted as a full proposal by **3 December 2018**. The SNSF evaluates the full proposal on the basis of an international peer-review process and appoints expert panels. Based on the panels' recommendations, the SNSF forwards to the SERI² a list of prioritised, outstanding proposals (shortlist). The SNSF will communicate the results in summer 2019.
4. The SERI assesses the proposals recommended by the SNSF in terms of their relevance to research and higher education policies. In autumn 2019, the EAER³ selects the new NCCRs to be funded from the shortlist.

Selection criteria

The selection criteria for NCCRs are set out in Article 8 of the Ordinance of the EAER on the Research and Innovation Promotion Ordinance⁴:

Scientific and structural assessment criteria applied by the SNSF

- Scientific quality of the research plan as a whole and of the individual projects, including the potential to stimulate interdisciplinary research, new scientific approaches/methods within individual disciplines, and collaboration in new research fields;
- Critical mass and added value of the NCCR in comparison with the sum total of the individual projects;
- Plausibility of the goals/measures with respect to knowledge and technology transfer, the promotion of young researchers and career prospects for women in academia;
- Aptitude of the main actors for the proposed scientific research;
- Quality of management of the NCCR and aptitude of the NCCR director;
- Adequacy of the requested financing and third-party funding;
- Suitability of the home institutions;
- The research topic's strategic relevance for research in Switzerland.

² State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation

³ Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research

⁴ RIPO-EAER: https://www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c420_111.html

Criteria the SERI uses to assess proposals recommended by the SNSF as relevant to its strategic research and higher education policies

- Underpinning of the competence centres in the strategic planning of the home institutions;
- Division of work and coordination within the higher education sector;
- Incorporation into the regional and national overall distribution of competence centres (or 'leading houses') in accordance with the goals of the NCCR programme;
- Relation to the federal government's research policy objectives;
- Embeddedness within Switzerland's international scientific cooperation agreements and cooperation endeavours at an institutional level.

The Swiss government (SERI / EAER) selects the NCCRs to be funded from the SNSF shortlist. It gives high priority to proposed NCCRs that are relevant to research policy issues it currently considers to be of prime importance, e.g. digitalisation⁵. In addition, the government expects that the NCCR call will result in projects that strengthen basic research in the area of digitalisation and use the potential of digitalisation technologies in various fields of application.

3. Legal framework

The Research and Innovation Promotion Act (RIPA⁶), and in particular the Research and Innovation Promotion Ordinance (RIPO⁷) and the Ordinance issued by the EAER on the Research and Innovation Promotion Ordinance (RIPO-EAER⁸) provide the legal framework for NCCRs. This concerns, in particular, rules with regard to the NCCR calls, the selection process and the selection criteria.

4. Further provisions

The procedural rules applicable to this call are set out in detail in the Extended Call Document 2017⁹ for the fifth NCCR call. SNSF provisions shall also apply.

5. Contact / further information

For information about the call and the NCCR funding scheme, please do not hesitate to contact the NCCR team at the SNSF (tel. 031 308 23 34; e-mail nccr@snf.ch)

You may also refer to www.snf.ch/nccr-call for further information.

⁵ Digitalisation action plan: <https://biblio.parlament.ch/e-docs/390767.pdf> (German);

<https://biblio.parlament.ch/e-docs/390768.pdf> (French)

⁶ https://www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c420_1.html

⁷ https://www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c420_11.html

⁸ https://www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c420_111.html

⁹ http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/nfs/NCCR_extended_call_2017.pdf