



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra
Swiss Confederation

Innosuisse – Swiss Innovation Agency



Schweizerischer Nationalfonds
Fonds national suisse
Fondo nazionale svizzero
Swiss National Science Foundation

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU): Strategic partnership between Innosuisse and the Swiss National Science Foundation

Innosuisse and the SNSF are collaborating closely and effectively since several years. As collaboration is further intensifying, they have decided to formalize it by putting forward in this MoU a number of principles which both organisations adhere to.

1. Goal

Research and innovation are a driving force for economy and society – through the gain and use of knowledge and knowhow as well as through the education and training of a highly qualified working force. This applies specifically to Switzerland where the economic and social wellbeing and international competitiveness is strongly built on research and innovation. Innosuisse and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) are the key players in public research and innovation funding on the national level. Their missions and activities strive to further develop the very high performance of Switzerland in research and innovation at the international level – through competitive funding.

Innosuisse and SNSF must both be state-of-the-art autonomous funders in their specific fields of expertise. Moreover, within the framework of their legal mandates, the two organizations have jointly decided to align their strategic objectives and closely collaborate. Their mutual goal is to foster a high-performance, efficient public funding environment that stimulates and facilitates scientific discoveries and science-based innovations.

2. Partnership approach

The partnership of Innosuisse and the SNSF comprises several elements:

- a common understanding of the roles of both organisations, the coherence and complementarity of their activities and their mutually shared goals within the Swiss ERI setting and within the framework of international cooperation
- the coordination of funding policies and funding portfolios
- collaboration, exchange and mutual support on the operational and the strategic level
- a joint communication with the actors and institutions in research, innovation and politics that testifies to this partnership

3. Common understanding

Innosuisse and the SNSF understand that research and innovation fuel each other: Scientific breakthroughs may lead to unexpected innovations, but unsolved challenges in economy and society may as well inspire and boost research. Thus, it is of great importance for Switzerland that the two organizations together provide a funding environment that facilitates the circulation of ideas, knowledge and knowhow between actors in research, innovation, academia, economy and society.

Innosuisse and the SNSF acknowledge that block funding to the institutions of higher education is an important factor of success in the Swiss ERI system. They are convinced, however, that competitive funding for research and innovation on the national level is the crucial gateway to quality, new ideas and international competitiveness. In Switzerland, only Innosuisse and the SNSF can offer national, state-of-the-art, transparent and accountable assessment processes based on expert knowledge and international standards, through which the most promising ideas in research and innovation are selected.

Innosuisse and the SNSF, as actors on the national level, can have a high impact on the regional players in research and innovation and actively assume this driver role. They stimulate and facilitate collaboration across institutions, actors, sectors and disciplines, also at the international level. Innosuisse and the SNSF adhere to the principle that often the best ideas in research and innovation come from researchers and innovators active in academia, industry and other relevant organizations in the field (bottom-up principle). They do acknowledge, however, that both organizations must ensure that relevant research and innovation are carried out to contribute to address today's global challenges such as climate change, digitalization or the fight against pandemics. Further, they commit to foster positive changes to the way research and innovation work is done.

In international comparison, Switzerland spends much on research and innovation, although growth is slowing down and block funding is becoming more prominent. Innosuisse and the SNSF jointly aim to underline the importance of competitive funding. They strive to achieve maximum impact with their investments and are committed to run their operations in the most effective and efficient manner. In this sense, Innosuisse and the SNSF coordinate their funding portfolios and their funding policies.

4. Coordination of funding portfolios and funding policies

Innosuisse and the SNSF coordinate their funding portfolios in particular those at the intersection of research and innovation based on two underlying principles: i) respect the legal mandate and the autonomy of the partner organization, ii) establish coherence in the overall funding portfolio for research and innovation. To this end, Innosuisse and the SNSF avoid duplication of funding initiatives and strive to fill funding gaps. The latter can be done either by one of the partners or jointly (i.e. Bridge).

Coordination also comprises coherence and linkage between the portfolios of each partner. Innosuisse and the SNSF ensure that researchers and innovation actors are fully aware of the overall funding offer and able to choose the appropriate instrument. The two organizations may also align funding initiatives and methods and create networks with the aim to stimulate the integration of practical experience and knowledge in the conception of research initiatives where appropriate, to speed up and facilitate the uptake of scientific results by innovation actors and, in general, to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and knowhow in both directions (i.e. National Research Programme Covid-19 using the Innosuisse coaching and mentoring approach and follow-up knowledge and technology transfer instruments).

Furthermore, Innosuisse and the SNSF exchange experience, best practices and views in their strive to align their funding activities with the needs of a sustainable and equitable development of society and economy.

5. Collaboration, exchange and mutual support

Innosuisse and the SNSF engage in a mutual learning process in order to fully understand the principles, approaches and goals of the partner organization with the ultimate goal to provide continuity and cross-fertilisation between research and innovation.

On the strategic level, Innosuisse and the SNSF coordinate their focus and planning, in particular the multiannual plans, and they coordinate, where appropriate, their positions towards the other ERI partners, the federal administration and the political actors.

On the operational level, Innosuisse and the SNSF actively exchange expert knowledge and experts to the benefit of their funding instruments. This applies to the Innovation Council and the National Research Council as well as to the offices and to the expert level. When running joint instruments or initiatives, Innosuisse and the SNSF ensure appropriate representation of each organization. On the level of the offices, the CEOs strive to install a working climate of mutual interest, trust and understanding.

Collaboration is ensured by regular high-level strategic meetings, by regular meetings on the office level, by joint running of or activities in funding instruments (i.e. Bridge, NRP Covid-19), by joint projects (i.e. start-up monitoring, road show) and by exchange of staff.

6. Communication

Communication is an important element to convey the partnership between Innosuisse and the SNSF to external stakeholders on all levels. The communication units of the two organisations collaborate closely to achieve this goal.

On the strategic and political level, Innosuisse and the SNSF jointly develop common messages and jointly plan communication activities wherever relevant. The goal is to show that Innosuisse and the SNSF have joined forces in the interest of the ERI domain and actively shape the latter (i.e. towards parliament, the federal administration, the ERI partners, the economy including economic associations and the public at large).

On the operational level, the two organisations coordinate the information given to researchers and innovation actors concerning funding opportunities (i.e. by references on the website, joint roadshows). They refer to the partner organization whenever appropriate in their daily communication business.

7. Amendments

Amendments to this MoU are possible anytime and have to be signed by both parties.

February 2021