

# Evaluation form and guidelines - Spark call 2025

## 1 Introduction

The Spark funding instrument of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) aims to enable scientists to develop and test novel and unconventional scientific approaches, methods, theories, standards and/or ideas that can be developed or tested within a short time (max. 1 year, in case of a valid scientific justification up to two years) and limited resources (max. CHF 100'000). The focus lies on the novelty and unconventionality of the proposed research project as well as its scientific quality and potential impact, not on the specific experience or track record of the applicant. Therefore, Spark projects are evaluated in a double-blind evaluation procedure, in which the experts know neither the identity nor the previous, current or any possible future position(s) or affiliation(s) of the applicant. The double-blind evaluation is based on the project description only. This document is anonymous and structured as follows:

1. Project summary (max. 1 page);
2. Project plan (max. 5 pages and max. 20,000 characters) consisting of:
  - 2.1. Current state of research in the field (including a statement explaining the novel and unconventional nature of the project and a description of the extent to which the proposed research project is distinct from existing research and not a continuation thereof);
  - 2.2. Detailed description of goals, methods, approach, expected results and possible risks (inclusion of a detailed budget is not mandatory);
  - 2.3. Description of the potential impact of the research project;
3. Bibliography (no limitations regarding maximum pages or characters).

In case the administrative offices of the SNSF detect any passages that are insufficiently anonymized, the according passages are blackened before the project description is sent to the external experts.

Applicants must demonstrate their eligibility and necessary skills in separate documents. In addition, they must separately provide a detailed project budget as well as any necessary authorisations. These documents are checked by the administrative offices of the SNSF before the project description is submitted to the external experts.

## 2 Evaluation procedure

Each Spark proposal is independently evaluated by two members of an international pool of experts. Both experts provide a written, criteria-based assessment. In their assessments, the experts set out the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal regarding three evaluation criteria and apply a standardised numerical scale to each criterion (see the evaluation criteria, the corresponding assessment questions and the numerical scale below). After the evaluation, the proposals are categorised into different funding priorities based on the mean value of the evaluation criterion "Novelty / unconventionality of the proposed research project". If it is not possible to fund all proposals that have the same funding priority, preference

is given to proposals with a higher score for the "Scientific quality of the project" and "Potential for significant impact" criteria.

### 3 Evaluation guidelines


The experts are asked to take note of and adhere to the following evaluation guidelines for Spark projects:

- All evaluations must be written in English.
- Each evaluation criterion must be assessed individually and independently from the other criteria or other proposals.
- All ratings must be substantiated by explanations. References such as "see above" must be avoided. While the explanations can be brief, they must elucidate the reasons as to why the expert has decided to award a specific rating. The statements of the experts are communicated to the applicant in order to justify the funding decision (without indication of the expert's identity).
- Ratings must always reflect the provided explanations. Overly positive or critical evaluations with no justification cannot be taken into account.
- A lack of preliminary data or the riskiness of a research project must not negatively affect an evaluation, as these aspects are explicitly encouraged for the Spark funding scheme.
- The identity of the expert must under no circumstance be revealed in the assessment.
- Experts shall not take guesses on the identity of the applicant (e.g. by looking for possible self-citations in the bibliography) or actively search for this information in other sources, i.e. on Google or similar. Evaluations that refer to assumed age, gender, nationality, institutional affiliation, experience etc. of the applicant cannot be taken into account.

## 4 Evaluation criteria

### Scientific quality of the proposed project


Rate to which extent project's research approach, methodology and organisation are sound and convincing, to which extent the outlined scientific approach is feasible, to which extent the proposed research methodology is suitable for achieving the goals of the project, and to which extent the proposed timeline and resources are appropriate and justified. Please assess the feasibility of the project based on the project framework (6-12 months duration, 24 months in case of a valid scientific justification; maximal budget of CHF 100'000). Please refer exclusively to these aspects when evaluating this criterion.

Specific strengths * (4000 characters (max.))	 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; height: 100px;"></div>
Specific weaknesses * (4000 characters (max.))	 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; height: 100px;"></div>
Comments (8000 characters (max.))	 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; height: 100px;"></div>

<input type="radio"/>	9	Strong in all relevant aspects. No or negligible weaknesses.
<input type="radio"/>	8	
<input type="radio"/>	7	Strong in most relevant aspects. Few clearly identified weaknesses.
<input type="radio"/>	6	
<input type="radio"/>	5	Strong in several relevant aspects. Some clearly identified weaknesses.
<input type="radio"/>	4	
<input type="radio"/>	3	Some strengths in relevant aspects. Several clearly identified weaknesses.
<input type="radio"/>	2	
<input type="radio"/>	1	Few or no strengths in relevant aspects. Many serious weaknesses.

### Novelty/unconventionality of the proposed project



Indicate to which extent the project idea or chosen theoretical/methodological approach is novel and the project is clearly distinct from established ideas or approaches. Indicators of novelty could be a lack of existing or completed projects, literature or other scientific results for the topic in question. Furthermore, please indicate to which extent the project idea or chosen theoretical/methodological approach is unconventional (e.g. unorthodox, out of the box, bold, early phase, untested, explorative, etc.) and distinct from established, standardised approaches. Please refer exclusively to these aspects when evaluating this criterion and do not let it be influenced by your assessment of the scientific quality or potential impact.

Specific strengths * (4000 characters (max.))	 <div style="height: 100px;"></div>
Specific weaknesses * (4000 characters (max.))	 <div style="height: 100px;"></div>
Comments (8000 characters (max.))	 <div style="height: 100px;"></div>

<input type="radio"/>	9	Strong in all relevant aspects. No or negligible weaknesses.
<input type="radio"/>	8	
<input type="radio"/>	7	Strong in most relevant aspects. Few clearly identified weaknesses.
<input type="radio"/>	6	
<input type="radio"/>	5	Strong in several relevant aspects. Some clearly identified weaknesses.
<input type="radio"/>	4	
<input type="radio"/>	3	Some strengths in relevant aspects. Several clearly identified weaknesses.
<input type="radio"/>	2	
<input type="radio"/>	1	Few or no strengths in relevant aspects. Many serious weaknesses.

### Potential for significant impact

Assess the extent to which the project has the potential to bring about transformative change in a central scientific topic and/or pave the way for a new field of research or a new method/technology and/or change attitudes and behaviour within society. In addition, please assess the extent to which the potential for significant impact is commensurate with possible project risks. Please refer exclusively to these aspects when evaluating this criterion.

Specific strengths * (4000 characters (max.))	 <div style="height: 150px;"></div>
Specific weaknesses * (4000 characters (max.))	 <div style="height: 150px;"></div>
Comments (8000 characters (max.))	 <div style="height: 150px;"></div>

- |                       |   |  |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> | 9 | Strong in all relevant aspects. No or negligible weaknesses.               |
| <input type="radio"/> | 8 |  |
| <input type="radio"/> | 7 | Strong in most relevant aspects. Few clearly identified weaknesses.        |
| <input type="radio"/> | 6 |  |
| <input type="radio"/> | 5 | Strong in several relevant aspects. Some clearly identified weaknesses.    |
| <input type="radio"/> | 4 |  |
| <input type="radio"/> | 3 | Some strengths in relevant aspects. Several clearly identified weaknesses. |
| <input type="radio"/> | 2 |  |
| <input type="radio"/> | 1 | Few or no strengths in relevant aspects. Many serious weaknesses.          |


**Anonymity**

Was it possible for you to identify the identity, host institution and/or career level of the applicant from the project description (without trying to actively search for this information in other sources, i.e. on Google or similar)?

Yes

No

If yes, write the name, host institution and/or career level of the presumed applicant:



A rich text editor toolbar with icons for Bold (B), Italic (I), Underline (U), Bulleted List, Numbered List, Link (Ω), Undo, Redo, Cut, Copy, Paste, and Print.