

Call for Tenders: Mapping and Strategic Assessment of Knowledge Exchange Approaches in National Research Programmes

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1 Introduction

While the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) places particular emphasis on funding basic research, it also has a strong portfolio of funding instruments designed to promote research activities with the potential to deliver societal impact. Among these, the National Research Programmes (NRPs) are a prominent example: their topics are defined by the Federal Council of Switzerland and assigned to the SNSF for implementation with the explicit aim of fostering research that helps tackle issues of national importance. Therefore, the research conducted within these programmes is not only expected to deliver impact within its respective academic fields, but also in Swiss society. The present call for tenders invites proposals that study the NRPs with the aim of increasing our understanding of which knowledge exchange activities work in which contexts. It is expected that some of the results from the

study will also help to further the SNSF's broader aims of promoting synergies and exchange between research and non-scientific actors and practices.

2 Context

The work required to create societal impact is often profoundly different from the work that produces academic impact, as it requires different networks, skills, values, strategies, and, above all, time.¹ As a result of this, it is not always expedient to expect researchers to perform all tasks related to knowledge exchange themselves. This is particularly true in the context of an NRP where that work is expected to be a central part of the overall outcomes. Therefore, many NRPs have begun to issue mandates to external knowledge exchange professionals, who then conceptualise and accompany the knowledge exchange activities of the entire research programme. Nevertheless, the knowledge exchange strategies developed within NRPs are very diverse as each programme has very specific stakeholder landscapes to consider.

While the great variety of NRPs is one of their key strengths, it is also what makes their knowledge exchange activities difficult to track and assess. The SNSF has sought to evaluate knowledge exchange activities on several occasions in the last twenty years and the resulting (external) reports have helped to further hone this funding instrument and distinguish it within the SNSF portfolio. However, all previous evaluations found it difficult to assess clearly whether previous knowledge exchange strategies achieved the desired societal impact. Two of the most recent evaluations, have dealt with the challenges posed by the variety of the NRPs and the vague nature of the term 'impact' in similar ways.² They both recommended that each new NRP should state its intended outcomes – be they academic and/or societal – at its outset and include pragmatic reflections on how these can be achieved and measured. This is solid advice that is currently applied in the most recent NRPs (80-84).

Yet recent years have shown that relying solely on tailor-made solutions for the planning, reporting, and assessing of NRP knowledge exchange activities comes with its own set of challenges. First is the question of resources: Designing knowledge exchange strategies and corresponding impact pathways with appropriate and measurable indicators from scratch at the outset of every NRP places a significant burden on Steering Committees, Programme Managers, as well as researchers working on NRP projects.

Secondly, the current approach has led to a situation in which it is difficult to valorise past knowledge exchange activities and track potentials for societal impacts for external reporting. This situation is evolving under current political and financial pressures that emphasize increased accountability of all funding instruments. The upcoming study of knowledge exchange activities in past NRPs will address these challenges by working towards the following objectives.

¹ Jonna Brenninkmeijer, 'Achieving Societal and Academic Impacts of Research: A Comparison of Networks, Values, and Strategies', *Science and Public Policy*, 49.5 (2022), pp. 728–38, doi:10.1093/scipol/scac022.

² *Impact Evaluation of National Research Programmes 59, 60 and 61*, Technopolis Group, February 2018, see [nfp_wirkungspruefung_schlussbericht_en.pdf](#); and *Wirkungsprüfung Nationale Forschungsprogramme*, Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CEST), 2006, the latter can be made available to interested project teams on request.

3 Objectives

3.1 Mapping knowledge exchange measures in the NRPs

Taking the Technopolis typology (2018) of NRPs as a starting point, the study will map the knowledge exchange activities of NRPs 62-84.³ In the course of this work, the typology will be tested, adjusted, and developed.

An initial goal is to examine whether the knowledge exchange activities of NRPs attributed to the same Technopolis (arche-)type show an identifiable profile. The study should also make a point of examining examples of knowledge exchange measures that did not achieve the desired results and reflect on what learnings might be drawn from those instances. Ideally, the resulting typology of knowledge exchange activity profiles will begin to provide a sense of which activities work well for which NRP types.

The objectives for this part of the study are thus as follows:

- Mapping of past and ongoing knowledge exchange and communication activities within a typology.
- Processing and presenting the resulting typology and knowledge exchange profiles in such a way that they can serve as the basis for a living institutional memory.

It is the aim of such an institutional memory to collect learnings and impulses on knowledge exchange and communication activities in specific contexts and (arche-)types as an orientation for the SNSF that can be continuously enriched and developed by the actors working with it.

3.2 Developing strategic impulses for knowledge exchange approaches in the NRPs

This second part of the study will aim to develop future-oriented strategic impulses for how to integrate knowledge exchange measures more efficiently into the NRP processes. In doing so, the modularity anchored in the typology developed in the first study phase will continue to be of crucial importance. It is conceivable that some impulses work well for specific (arche-)types, but not for all. For many NRPs it might, for instance, make sense to include a Theory of Change as early as the programme concept stage of the initiation phase in order to help anticipate the trajectory of upcoming knowledge exchange activities and to help define relevant actors and stakeholders early on. For other types it might be sufficient to include a simple logic model at a later stage of programme development. The key focus of the impulses provided should be efficiency and efficacy: How should knowledge exchange measures be approached in order to offer the best return on investment in terms of resources in a specific context?

It is expected that this part of the study will analyse the entire lifecycle of a selection of past (and potentially ongoing) NRPs in order to assess their knowledge exchange strategies. Questions of particular concern are, for example: Are the communication strategies and measures adopted by the NRPs

³ *Impact Evaluation of National Research Programmes 59, 60 and 61*, Technopolis Group, February 2018, see [nfp_wirkungspruefung_schlussbericht_en.pdf](#), here esp. p. 2.

efficiently shaped, organized, implemented, and adapted to target audiences? At what point in the NRP lifecycle should a Theory of Change be established? When should a head of knowledge exchange be selected? In which cases is it particularly important that heads of knowledge exchange have a close affinity for the topic of the NRP? Are there instances where it might make sense to mandate someone with one or several specific knowledge exchange activities, rather than with the overall responsibility for the knowledge exchange strategy of an entire NRP?

This part of the study should thus analyse NRP knowledge exchange strategies and measures (for instance through the use of case studies of specific NRPs) and develop impulses for how to design more efficient knowledge exchange strategies in the future. We further expect to receive strategic impulses on how to improve the continuous assessment and valorisation of knowledge exchange measures and strategies.

The overall objectives for this second part of the study are as follows

- Systematic evaluation of NRP knowledge exchange and communication strategies and measures
- Developing strategic impulses for how to create efficient knowledge exchange strategies in various types of NRP
- Developing strategic impulses for the (future) reporting, assessment, and valorisation of knowledge exchange measures and strategies

Again, the output resulting from this part of the study should be conceived as a living document that can be continuously extended and developed during the daily work of the SNSF office.

4 Available Data and Documentation

The SNSF will make available the following documentation for the study:

- Feasibility studies, programme concepts, call documents of NRPs
- Previous knowledge exchange mandates and concepts
- Annual reports of knowledge exchange heads
- Research plans (esp. chapter on implementation) of research projects funded by NRPs
- Interim and final reports of research projects within NRPs
- NRP syntheses and final report to the Research and Federal Councils
- Previous evaluations of knowledge exchange and impact of SNSF funding instruments

5 Expected outputs and outcomes

It is expected that this mandate will produce the following outputs:

- An NRP typology that maps and visualises previous knowledge exchange strategies and measures

- A set of strategic impulses for the future integration of knowledge exchange into the NRP lifecycle

Both outputs should be conceptualised as (a) living document(s) that can be continuously developed by the NRP team after the end of the project. They should serve as an institutional memory where learnings, challenges, and successes in connection with knowledge exchange activities can easily be collected and found when they are needed.

Such a strategically oriented institutional memory for knowledge exchange approaches should ultimately make for clearly targeted future knowledge exchange activities that require fewer resources. In particular, Programme Managers, Steering Committees, and the Programme Committee of the Research Council will profit from quick access to a pool of tried and tested ideas and tools when designing and running NRPs. The modularity of the typology approach will be crucial here, as it can allow for the simplification and even the streamlining of measures where that makes sense, while keeping more complex knowledge exchange measures in place where they are needed.

In each NRP, research projects are ordered around a common goal. That goal almost always has a knowledge exchange component. In order to achieve the latter, knowledge exchange activities within a programme have to follow the rhythm of the research process. They therefore need to be flexible and agile, as well as reflected. This is not a straightforward task, and a well-kept institutional memory should help to ease the tension between the necessity for rolling processes and the implementation of targeted strategies to achieve knowledge exchange aims. Moreover, it will help to lend visibility to knowledge exchange successes and provide guidance for the steering of external knowledge exchange staff.

6 Time frame

End of October 2025	Call published
1 December 2025	Deadline for tenders
Early January 2026	Decision and formal mandate offer and contract
February 2026	Start of study
June 2025	Interim report
October 2026	Draft report submitted for consultation
November 2026	Final output submitted to SNSF

The interim report and draft report deadlines are approximate. Beyond these submissions, it is expected that mandatees will engage in regular exchange with the SNSF.

7 Tenders

Tenders must be submitted in writing by **1 December 2025** to Pierre Willa, Head of Thematic Research (pierre.willa@snf.ch) and Regine Maritz (regine.maritz@snf.ch).

They should include:

- Outline of the approaches and methods to be used to operationalise the goals and objectives outlined above
- Information and resources required from the SNSF
- Conditions of cooperation between eventual project partners: respective roles in study design, communication, reporting etc.
- A timeline, including availability in respect to the timing mentioned under ch. 6, and milestones
- Budget, structured according to subtasks/analyses, with hourly rates and cost ceiling.
- Presentation of project team, references, project portfolio.

Compelling offers will be invited for an interview. The interview will last a maximum of 45 min, including presentation, questions and discussion. **Interviews will be online and will take place in the afternoon of 15 December 2025.** This invitation for tenders will be re-issued if proposals are insufficient in number or content.

7.1 Selection criteria

The tenders shall be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- General quality of the proposal
- Focus and plausibility of the methods proposed
- Appropriateness / innovative aspect of the output medium proposed (living document to serve as institutional memory)
- References based on previous projects
- Competences and in-depth knowledge of the team in the thematic area of programmatic research, research communication, and societal impact assessment
- Cost efficiency

7.2 Budget

The cost for this study is capped at CHF 75'000.

7.3 Conflict of interest

In order to avoid conflicts of interest, members SNSF bodies are excluded from submitting an offer and from collaborating in a team implementing the proposed study. The tender issuer will make a corresponding declaration in the contract.

7.4 Contact

For further information please contact:

Regine Maritz, Programme Manager NRP, regine.maritz@snf.ch, +41 31 308 22 56

8 Glossary

- **Knowledge exchange** is a multidirectional practice of sharing, adapting, and applying knowledge across research, practice, policy, industry, and society. In our definition, it includes *knowledge and technology transfer (KTT)*—the movement of scientific, technological, social, and cultural insights into practical use—alongside *implementation* of evidence in real-world contexts and *science communication* that makes knowledge accessible and engaging.
- **NRPs** are National Research Programmes that promote research projects that contribute to solving societal challenges of national importance. Federal offices, research institutes, research groups or individuals propose topics and potential priorities for an NRP to the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI). The Federal Council definitively selects the NRPs and assigns them to the SNSF for implementation.
- **Steering Committee** is an expert commission composed of scientific experts and at times practice stakeholders that directs the entire NRP process, from project selection through to the final programme synthesis.