Swiss National Science Foundation

Indo-Swiss Research Framework

Explore

Opening date: 25 November 2026

Closing date: 26 February 2027

1 Introduction

The Indo-Swiss Research Framework is a long-term programme designed to strengthen cooperation between the Swiss and Indian research communities through new funding opportunities and complementary measures. Within this framework, the Explore instrument supports exploratory collaborations between researchers in Switzerland and India for up to 12 months. Explore is intended to help partners test new ideas, build or consolidate a consortium, assess feasibility, align methods and data access, and prepare the ground for a longer-term joint research project. Novel and unconventional scientific approaches are explicitly encouraged.

Funders involved

The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) launches the Explore call within the Indo-Swiss Research Framework together with the Department of Science and Technology (DST). The SNSF will support the researchers in Switzerland, while the DST finances the research being conducted in India.

2 Explore grants

Explore Grants are aimed at promoting exploratory Indo-Swiss collaborations with clearly defined objectives for a short initial phase of joint work. Proposals should explain why an exploratory phase is needed, what concrete steps will be undertaken during the grant period, and how the collaboration could develop into a longer-term research project. Explore may be used, for example, to establish new partnerships, develop proof-of-concept work, align methods and data, prepare shared research protocols, or assess the feasibility of a future joint proposal.

Project duration: Explore grants should last between 9 and 12 months. Proposals with a duration of less than 9 months will not be considered.

Explore grants may serve as the starting point for a longer-term collaboration under the Indo-Swiss Research Framework or through other SNSF funding schemes. If the collaboration does not continue beyond the Explore phase, the reasons for this should be clearly explained in the scientific report submitted as part of the regular reporting requirements.

3 Research scope

Explore is open to all research topics focusing on basic science: In contrast to the larger Joint Research Projects foreseen under the framework, Explore is designed to enable researchers to test promising ideas, build new interdisciplinary or cross-sector partnerships, and lay the groundwork for future collaboration opportunities. The instrument is therefore particularly suited to novel, emerging, high-risk or unconventional scientific approaches.

Activities may include, for example:

- development of a new Indo-Swiss collaboration
- pilot activities to test feasibility, assumptions, methods, workflows or access to co-applicant's data and infrastructure
- preparation of shared concepts, protocols, indicators, or implementation plans
- exploration of interdisciplinary or unconventional approaches that require an initial testing phase before a larger proposal can be submitted

Proposals must explain the scientific rationale for the exploratory phase, the expected added value of the Indo-Swiss collaboration, and how the proposed activities will position the consortium for a possible follow-up project, and any expected output at the end of the grant period.

4 Eligibility

Each proposal must consist of exactly one applicant based in Switzerland and one applicant based in India. Additional applicants are not permitted. Applicants based in Switzerland act as the contact persons on the Swiss side and are responsible for the scientific and administrative coordination of the proposal and, if funded, of the grant. Each applicant may submit only one proposal per call.

The call is open to researchers of eligible research institutions in Switzerland and India. Applications involving ineligible applicants, from either Switzerland or India, will not be considered.

Eligibility criteria in Switzerland

Applicants requesting funding must meet the eligibility requirements of the SNSF. The SNSF Funding Regulations, the General implementation regulations and the Regulations on Project Funding are applicable or applicable mutatis mutandis where not stated otherwise.

Applicants may submit a proposal to the Explore call even if they currently hold another SNSF grant or have applied for one. During the funding period of an Explore grant, grantees may also apply to other SNSF funding schemes, including bilateral funding programmes, provided that there is no substantial thematic overlap and that they can make a substantial contribution to each project. The restrictions set out in Article 2(7) and Article 15 of the Regulations on Project Funding for the SNSF's national project funding shall not apply. Ambizione grantees may contact the SNSF office to verify their eligibility.

Project partners as described in the SNSF Funding Regulations are not entitled to receive funds from the SNSF if their affiliated institution is located in India.

Eligibility criteria in India

- Indian faculty/scientist working at public/private universities/national laboratories, and other legal entities (e.g. higher education and national research institutions) planning to carry out a non-profit-oriented research project within the frame of this call are eligible for application.
- Those who have at least 10 years before superannuation may apply for the call, the early career researchers/faculty may get preference.
- The Indian PI should be in regular employment and in active research.
- The project may have only one Indian PI.
- Indian PI needs to collaborate with Switzerland faculty /scientist to submit a joint project.

5 Funding

Explore Grants contain two separate budgets: one budget in INR for the Indian applicant (paid by the DST) and one budget in CHF for the applicant based in Switzerland (paid by the SNSF according to its rules). The available budget for this Call will enable the funding of up to 20 projects, provided that a sufficient number of high-quality proposals are submitted. The funding per project must be in line with the respective regulations in India and Switzerland, respectively.

Both the Swiss and the Indian budget must be submitted in the SNSF portal (a PDF is to be uploaded for the Indian budget. The relevant details can be found in the portal).

Eligible costs in Switzerland

The maximum permissible budget for the Swiss part of an Explore grant is CHF 100,000. Proposals with a budget less than CHF 50,000 will not be considered.

- Personnel costs (salaries within the salary ranges and rates set by the SNSF and social security contributions of scientific and technical employees); please note that the salaries of applicants are not eligible costs;
- Material costs that are directly related to the research work, expendable items, field expenses, travel expenses, third-party charges or computing time;
- Material of enduring value (max. CHF 50,000);
- Direct costs incurred through the use of research infrastructure linked to the research work;
- Costs for granting access to research data (Open Research Data, max. CHF 10,000 per project);
- Costs for the organisation of conferences and workshops in connection with the funded research;
- Costs for national and international cooperation and networking activities carried out in connection with the funded research.

The SNSF regulations apply to the Swiss budget unless otherwise specified in this call document. Overhead costs are not admissible. The SNSF calculates and pays the overhead contributions separately and directly to the host institution in Switzerland.

Please note that costs for open access publications can be requested separately via the OA platform of the SNSF. However, costs for Open Research Data (ORD) must be taken into account at the time of submission of the application. They cannot be covered by a supplementary grant.

Eligible costs in India

Maximum budget per project is up to INR 15,00,000.

- Travel expenses (International & Domestic): Costs for national and international cooperation and networking activities carried out in connection with the funded research.
- Consumables & Contingency: up to max. INR 2,00,000/- (as per DST norms)
- Workshop & Conference: up to max. INR 3,00,000/- (as per DST norms) Costs for the organisation of conferences and workshops in connection with the funded research;

Please Note: DST will not support any kind of manpower/staff or instrument costs. Also, there is no provision of institutional overhead from DST under this call.

Visits between Switzerland and India

Travel and research visits may be included where they are necessary for the exploratory objectives of the grant. When budgeting visits between the Swiss and Indian partners, expenses related to international travel are to be charged to the budget of the visiting side and the living expenses (local hospitality etc.) to the budget of the hosting side. Overseas health/medical insurance should be included in the budget of the visiting side. A maximum of two research visits per person is permitted for research personnel for a duration of up to two weeks. Travel and accommodation costs are subject to the regulations of the respective countries.

Accommodation and per diem in India: The Swiss Scientists visiting India within the framework of the approved projects will be provided fully furnished institutional guesthouse accommodation or a hotel (if the institutional guesthouse is not available), with reasonable facilities subject to the limit decided by DST. In addition, they will be provided a per diem allowance for meals and out of pocket expenses including local travel and airport transfers as per DST norms for each visit. The visits should be proposed within the maximum budget per project.

Accommodation and per diem in Switzerland: The eligible accommodation and per diem costs for Indian researchers visiting Switzerland are determined in accordance with the SNSF General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations.

6 Submission

Proposals are to be jointly prepared by the Swiss and Indian applicants and submitted via the SNSF Portal. Hard copies will not be accepted.

Submission on the SNSF Portal: After login into the SNSF Portal, the correct call must be selected (Indo-Swiss Research Framework – Explore). All participating researchers who are required to enter information in the portal must have an account (applicants and project partners).

Applicants should allow sufficient time to create the necessary user accounts and to complete all required administrative steps before the deadline.

Please note that **the SNSF uses a specific CV format**. Filling in the information might take some additional time. You can find all relevant information here.

Indian researchers may attach the following documents filled and signed as per the format mentioned in the link here.

- Bio-data of the Indian PI along with list of publications of last three years (format is same as Annexure-I)
- Consent Letter / No-Objection letter / Forwarding letter from Institute/ University of Indian PI **(format attached as Annexure-II)**
- Conflict of Interest (to be given by the Indian PI in prescribed format) (format attached as Annexure-III)

For specific technical questions related to the SNSF Portal, applicants may contact the support team via the SNSF Service Portal or by telephone (+41 31 308 22 00).

Data management (only for funded grants): A Data Management Plan (DMP) is requested for approved grants according to the requirements issued by the SNSF. Missing or inaccurate statements in the DMP need to be added/revised. A definitive and updated version of the DMP must be provided by the end of the project grant. For more details on the DMP format requirements and procedure see: Data Management Plan (DMP) - Guidelines for researchers.

The submitted information must comply with the **principles of scientific integrity.** All applicants take responsibility for the correctness of their contributions. If the research plan is not written in accordance with the rules of good scientific practice, all applicants may be held accountable and may be asked to provide a statement; ultimately the project may not be considered. Reference is made to internationally recognised standards on good scientific practice as well as to the SNSF's Research Integrity Regulations.

Deadline for submission of applications: 26 February 2027, 17:00:00 Swiss local time.

Incomplete applications and applications received after the deadline will not be considered. All documents submitted must be in English.

7 Evaluation

The evaluation process is highly competitive and only highly rated applications will be considered for funding. The process consists of the following steps:

- All proposals submitted to this call will be evaluated through a two-stage procedure consisting of an independent peer review followed by an evaluation panel.
- **Peer review:** After submission, the Offices of DST and SNSF will identify two suitable discipline-specific experts to assess each proposal according to standard international peer review procedures.
- **Evaluation panel:** Based on the peer reviews, the top-ranked proposals will be further discussed by an evaluation panel composed of experts nominated by the SNSF and DST. The panel will assess and rank the proposals based on the peer reviews and its own assessment, resulting in a final ranking list.
- **Decision:** Based on the ranking established by the evaluation panel and the available budget, the final funding decision will be taken jointly by the Programme Committee International Cooperation of the SNSF and the DST.

The criteria used to evaluate the scientific quality of the proposals are:

- Novelty/unconventionality
- Suitability of methods and feasibility

- Applicants' scientific track record and expertise
- Added value of the collaboration/complementarity, including long-term perspective and expected outcomes

The results are expected to be communicated as of the third quarter of 2027. The contact person in Switzerland will receive a decision letter from the SNSF, while the contact person in India will be informed by the DST. In case of rejection, the main reasons leading to the decision will be given to the applicant based in Switzerland. In case of approval, the Swiss budget and the conditions will be listed in the decision letter. The decision letters are not subject to appeal.

8 Reporting

The Swiss and Indian grantees will report separately to their respective funder(s) in accordance with the applicable rules.

In Switzerland:
The Swiss corresponding applicant will be responsible for reporting to the SNSF. A final financial and scientific report will be requested by the end of the project.

In India:
The Indian applicant will be responsible for reporting to the DST. The DST rules apply both for the financial and the scientific report, depending on the field of the project.

9 Payments

In Switzerland (SNSF funding): The standard SNSF rules apply. In principle, the Swiss budget for the Explore Grants is transferred to the Swiss corresponding grantee in one single instalment before the beginning of the project.

In India (DST funding):

Payment modalities on the Indian side will follow the rules of the participating funding organisation(s).

10 VAT

In Switzerland (SNSF funding):
The Explore grants are not subject to VAT or other taxes and charges. However, research expenses are not excluded from VAT. Therefore, all eligible costs incurred during an Explore grants (e.g. equipment, consumables, etc.) can be charged to the grant, including VAT, unless the research institution (e.g. universities, public research organisations, etc.) is able to recover VAT.

In India:
Not applicable.

11 Publications and intellectual property

The grantees are obliged to publish research results generated by the Explore grants in an appropriate form and according to SNSF and DST standards as per the existing national and institutional norms.

Intellectual property rights belong to the respective researchers and/or their employing institutions. Grantees are obliged to define such rights together with their employer according to art. 44 Funding Regulations. It is the responsibility of each grantee to ensure the efficient protection and proper distribution amongst project participants of any intellectual property rights arising from the accomplishments of the joint research projects.

If necessary, an agreement should be reached in advance. It is the responsibility of both PIs to make sure such an agreement is signed before the project starts. A copy of the agreement needs to be sent to the DST and the SNSF.

12 Further information and contacts

In Switzerland, SNSF

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In India, DST

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Annex 1: Guidelines for writing the research plan

The research plan must be uploaded as a PDF in the SNSF portal. The research plan must not exceed **5 pages and 20,000 characters with spaces, whichever limit is reached first.** The page and character limits include the title or front page, footnotes, illustrations, formulae, tables (and, if applicable, the table of contents), but not the bibliography. At least **font size 10 and line spacing 1.5** must be used. The research plan may not contain any annexed documents. It is not permitted to use the SNSF logo in the research plan.

The page and character count in the SNSF Portal is binding. Applications with research plans that are too extensive cannot be submitted. Note that the number of characters may vary slightly depending on the document format / PDF coding.

The research plan submitted to the SNSF Portal must be written in English and be structured as follows:

1. research plan (maximum five pages and 20,000 characters) consisting of:
    a. 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;
    b. current state of own research and partnership aspect
        i. Please describe briefly the work done by the different applicants (PI from India and Switzerland) in the relevant research field or in related fields and indicate the relevant publications.
        ii. Explain how the different applicants (PI from India and Switzerland) complement each other for the proposed research project and the added value of this collaboration.
    c. detailed description of goals, methods, approach, the role and responsibilities of each applicant in relation to the proposed project, expected results, outcomes and potential risks;
    d. description of expected impact and potential continuation of collaboration
2. Bibliography (no limitations regarding maximum number of pages or characters).