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Regulations on Ambizione grants (Ambizione Regulations)

1 July 2020

The National Research Council,

based on Articles 4 and 48 of the Funding Regulations of 27 February 2015¹,

issues the following Regulations:

1. General

Article 1 Objectives and principles

¹ The Swiss National Science Foundation (hereinafter: the SNSF) awards Ambizione grants to outstanding postdoctoral researchers who intend to pursue a scientific or an academic career at a Swiss research institution within the higher education sector or at a non-commercial research institution outside the higher education sector.

² The purpose of the Ambizione grant is to help researchers build their scientific profile and become scientifically self-reliant at an early stage with an independent research project.

³ Ambizione grants are open to researchers from all disciplines.

⁴ The researchers supported with an Ambizione grant must devote their entire work time to the research project funded by the SNSF. The work quota of Ambizione grantees is generally 100%. A work quota of at least 80% is permissible in cases such as those envisaged in Article 6 paragraph 1.

⁵ A research stay of no more than 12 months at an academic host institution or an institution of the practical realm (intersectoral mobility) may be envisaged as part of the Ambizione grant pursuant to the provisions of Article 9.

⁶ Specific conditions may be set to promote candidatures in individual research fields.

¹ http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/allg_reglement_16_e.pdf

Article 2 Types of grant and grant duration

¹ The SNSF awards the following types of Ambizione grants:

- a. "Ambizione grant with salary" (grantee's salary and project funds);
- b. "Ambizione project grant" (project funds only).

² Ambizione grants are awarded for a maximum of four years.

³ The minimum duration of funding is two years.

⁴ The provisions of these Regulations apply to both types of Ambizione grant. Should a provision apply only to one type of Ambizione grant, this will be indicated by "Ambizione grant with salary" or "Ambizione project grant".

Article 3 Ambizione for researchers who do clinical work

¹ The following special provisions apply to researchers doing clinical work. They

- a. must devote at least 80% of the funded work quota to the project and training related to the project;
- b. must devote a minimum of 10% on average to clinical work over the entire funding period.

² In exceptional cases, for disciplines where manual skills are of prime importance, a larger percentage share may be granted for clinical work pursuant to paragraph 1.

Article 4 Extensions

Ambizione grants cannot be extended. However, the SNSF reserves the right to permit grant extensions for the reasons defined under Clause 5.4 of the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations.

2. Personal and formal requirements

Article 5 General personal requirements

¹ Professors in permanent or temporary employment with or without tenure track are not eligible to submit applications for Ambizione grants.

² Only applicants who, on the submission date, hold or have been promised a non-professorial research position with prospects of an academic career are eligible to apply for an Ambizione project grant.

³ Applicants must have:

- a. a doctoral degree (PhD) or must have completed their studies in human, dental or veterinary medicine (Staatsexamen or equivalent exam, hereinafter "medical degree"). Applicants without a doctorate (PhD) are also eligible if they have conducted research work for three years after their higher education degree, which may be deemed to be equivalent to a doctorate;
- b. a proven record of at least one year (with an average work quota of 80%) of research work since receiving their doctorate (the date of the exam or thesis defence is the relevant date) or equivalent qualification; or

- c. completed, as an applicant with a medical degree, at least three years of clinical work and at least one year (with an average work quota of 80%) of research work since receiving their medical degree.

⁴ Applications must be submitted within four years after obtainment of the relevant degree pursuant to paragraph 3 letter a. For applicants with a medical degree, the window is 9 years.

⁵ The time windows pursuant to paragraph 4 will be calculated based on the relevant submission deadline for Ambizione applications. The time windows may be extended if one or more of the reasons set out in Clause 1.11 of the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations apply. The reasons for extending the time window must be explained in the application.

Article 6 Other personal requirements

¹ Applicants must:

- a. have an excellent scientific research output;
- b. be capable of carrying out the proposed research project independently;
- c. commit themselves as grantees to a work quota of 100% (1.0 FTE). A part-time work quota corresponding to at least 80% (0.8 FTE) is permissible if the grantee has care duties or is pursuing higher qualifications at a higher education institution to further his/her career;
- d. have any work quota reduction due to the reasons stated under letter c in the course of the ongoing grant approved by the SNSF. Any further work quota reduction may be approved on request in the event of the successful acquisition of significant third-party funding (e.g. ERC grant);

² In addition to the above-mentioned requirements, applicants must meet the general application requirements pursuant to the Funding Regulations and the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations.

Article 7 Formal requirements

¹ Applications for Ambizione grants must be submitted to the SNSF electronically.

² The submission deadlines are published on the SNSF website.

3. Applications and eligible costs

Article 8 Applications

¹ Applications for Ambizione grants must be submitted in accordance with the requirements issued by the SNSF and must include all the necessary information and documents.

² According to SNSF requirements, the mandatory documents must include, in particular, written confirmation by those responsible at the research institution that the institution will

- a. integrate the grantee at the research institution;
- b. provide him/her with a workplace and access to the infrastructure required to successfully complete research work during the approved funding period;
- c. assume a commensurate share of the applicant's research expenses (e.g. for material, equipment, personnel, travel, etc.).

³ the research institution also gives its opinion on the project, its independence and the scientific self-reliance of the grantee.

⁴ For researchers doing clinical work, the research institution must confirm in writing that the grantee can generally devote at least 80% of the funded work quota to the project and to his/her own further training and a minimum of 10% (on average during the entire funding period) to clinical work.

⁵ In the case of applications for an Ambizione project grant, the research institution must confirm in writing the grantee's period of employment as well as the envisaged proportion of research work to other activities/duties. In addition, a statement on envisaged career path measures and career prospects associated with the employment is required.

Article 9 Mobility

¹ Mobility is aimed at enhancing the grantee's scientific profile and creating optimal preconditions for a scientific or an academic career.

² As mobility is an assessment criterion for Ambizione grants, the applicant must include an explanatory statement on this subject in the application. When assessing the applicant's career path (retrospective mobility) and the measures planned under the grant (prospective mobility), the SNSF takes into account different types of mobility.

³ If the applicant did not conduct a research stay of 12 months after the doctorate at an institution other than the one where he/she obtained the doctorate, or after the equivalent degree or the medical degree, the applicant must explain in the application how he/she plans to achieve mobility that is equivalent in qualitative terms under the Ambizione grant.

⁴ Equivalent mobility under an Ambizione grant pursuant to paragraph 3 may be achieved as follows:

- a. stay at a non-commercial research institution (host institution) in Switzerland or abroad;
- b. stay at an institution in the practical realm (industry, administration, etc.; intersectoral mobility) in Switzerland or abroad;
- c. other types of mobility, particularly short visits or international collaborations.

⁵ Stays at a host institution pursuant to paragraph 4 letters a and b may not exceed 12 months in total; they may be spent at more than one institution and split into a number of shorter periods. If the duration of the Ambizione grant is less than four years, the maximum duration of the stay will be reduced proportionately.

⁶ The applicant may request a stay at a host institution either in the application or during the grant period within the scope of the approved budget.

⁷ Each request for a stay at a host institution must be accompanied by a letter of invitation from the relevant host institution confirming that the requirements pursuant to Article 8 paragraph 2 letters a and b are met for the duration of the stay.

Article 10 Eligible costs: Ambizione grant with salary

¹ An Ambizione grant covers the grantee's salary incl. social security contributions. The SNSF determines the amount of the salary by agreement with the research institution and in accordance with the salary scales generally applied by the institution to researchers with comparable qualifications.

² For researchers doing clinical work, the SNSF covers the share of the salary awarded for the research work. The share allocated for clinical work must be financed by the research institution.

³ The SNSF may set an upper limit for the salary.

⁴ In addition, project funds pursuant to Article 11 paragraph 1 letters a - h are covered. Such funds may not exceed CHF 400,000 for the four-year grant. If the duration of the Ambizione grant with salary is less than four years, the maximum amount will be proportionately smaller.

⁵ When awarding an Ambizione grant, the SNSF takes into account any significant third-party funding acquired for the same or for a strongly overlapping research project, such as an ERC grant. In such cases, the SNSF grant is limited to the salary financed pursuant to paragraphs 1 and 2.

Article 11 Eligible costs: Ambizione project grant

¹ The following project funds are covered by an Ambizione project grant:

- a. salaries of employees whose positions are approved by the SNSF;
- b. material costs that are directly linked to the approved project, in particular material of enduring value, consumables, field expenses, travel costs, third-party charges, costs for computing time and data as well as costs for making research data freely available (Open Research Data);
- c. direct costs of the use of infrastructure for conducting the research project;
- d. costs for the organisation of conferences and workshops in connection with the funded research;
- e. costs for national and international cooperation and networking activities regarding the funded research;
- f. costs for career measures;
- g. costs for gender equality measures;
- h. mobility costs incurred by the grantee.

² Project funds must not exceed CHF 400,000 for the four-year grant pursuant to paragraph 1 letters a - h. If the duration of the Ambizione project grant is less than four years, the maximum amount will be proportionately smaller.

Article 12 Employment of staff

¹ The SNSF may approve the employment and financing of employees if the application includes a reasoned request to this effect. The provisions set out in Clause 7 of the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations apply.

² Applicants may request a salary for a doctoral student. In such cases, the research institution must confirm the supervisor of the doctoral thesis in writing.

³ If a salary for a doctoral student is approved with the Ambizione grant, the position must be filled at the latest six months after the start of the grant.

⁴ In the confirmation, the supervisor of the doctoral thesis and the research institution must guarantee the due completion of the doctoral thesis after expiry of the grant or in the event of the project being abandoned prematurely.

⁵ If engagement of a postdoctoral researcher is envisaged for the project, the confirmation must include a commitment by the research institution to contribute at least half of the said researcher's salary.

4. Submission of applications and other SNSF grants: restrictions

Article 13 Ambizione grants in relation to other forms of funding offered by the SNSF²

¹ Proposals may only be submitted for a duration of support for which no other

- a. project grants have been requested, approved or started under the project funding scheme, the Sinergia or SPIRIT funding schemes, or the programmes of the SNSF;
- b. career grants of the SNSF have been applied for.

The restrictions apply to the entire application procedure.

² Parallel submissions for the Postdoc.Mobility scheme are limited to applications for a return grant.

³ If a parallel submission is ruled impermissible, the proposal will not be considered by the SNSF.

⁴ For the period following the approval date and for the entire duration of an Ambizione grant, the grantee may not apply for any other project funding, Sinergia or SPIRIT grants or for any grants under the SNSF's programmes. The submission of funding proposals after expiry of the Ambizione grant is thus permissible.

⁵ Grantees may not apply for any further career grants of the SNSF. As an exception, grantees may apply for a PRIMA or an Eccellenza Professorial Fellowship 18 months after starting their Ambizione grant at the earliest. If an Eccellenza Professorial Fellowship is awarded, the Ambizione grant will lapse as soon as the Eccellenza Professorial Fellowship is started, and the unspent money already transferred to the grantee will have to be refunded to the SNSF.

Article 14 Repeated submissions: limitation

¹ Applicants whose application was rejected may apply at the most a second time for an Ambizione grant regardless of the subject matter of the project.

² Application procedures terminated because the applicant has breached scientific integrity rules are regarded as rejections in accordance with this provision.

5. Assessment criteria and procedure

Article 15 Assessment criteria

¹ Applications that meet the personal and formal requirements are evaluated scientifically.

² The following assessment criteria are applied:

- a. the applicant's scientific research output:
 - scientific quality and independence in the achievements to date;

² Pursuant to a decision by the Research Council's Presiding Board of 18 September 2020, there is no waiting period for the submission of applications by holders of Postdoc.Mobility fellowships.

- achievements to date in relation to the net³ academic age;
- b. The applicant's career development and retrospective and prospective mobility based on the submitted statement; in particular, the applicant's overall mobility will be assessed at the end of the project in view of the goals of the scheme and the applicant's career goal.
- c. scientific independence of the applicant at the chosen research institution;
- d. scientific relevance, originality, topicality and independence of the research project;
- e. approach and methodology of the research project as well as its feasibility;
- f. Suitability and added value of the research institution in supporting the research project scientifically and ensuring and promoting the independence of the applicant, as well as facilitating his/her continual intellectual development and continuing education.
- g. broader impact for applications in use-inspired basic research.

Article 16 Evaluation procedure and decision

¹ The selection procedure is divided into two phases. In the first phase, the best applications are selected for the second phase based on the submitted documents. If necessary, proposals may be reviewed externally. Applicants who are not admitted to the second phase are informed through a written ruling in which the reasons for the decision are set out.

² The SNSF arranges for the applications chosen for the second phase to be reviewed by external experts. In the second phase, the SNSF generally asks the applicant to present the research project and career plan in person, as well as answer the questions put by the evaluation body.

³ Decisions for the second phase are communicated to the applicants in a written ruling.

6. Grants and grant administration

Article 17 Grants and start of funding period

¹ Ambizione grants are awarded, transferred and managed according to the rules issued by the SNSF, notably the provisions of the Funding Regulations and its Implementation Regulations.

² Ambizione grants may generally be started ten months after the submission deadline at the earliest. The earliest possible start of funding is announced in the call.

³ Any changes to the research project or the conditions for conducting it must be submitted to the SNSF in advance for approval.

Article 18 Non-acceptance or premature termination

¹ If grantees forego Ambizione grants or have to terminate their research work prematurely, they must notify the SNSF without delay in writing, stating their reasons for doing so.

² In such cases, the SNSF terminates the grant. The remaining amount of the grant must be refunded to the SNSF.

³ The net academic age comprises the time span starting with the date of the thesis defence or equivalent qualification or with the medical degree and ending with the submission deadline, minus all non-academic activities (including any interruptions for the reasons stated in Clause 1.11 paragraph 2 letters a-e of the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations), calculated in full-time equivalents.

Article 19 Reporting

¹ Grantees are obliged to send the SNSF periodic reports in accordance with the requirements defined by the SNSF, notably financial and scientific reports.

² The duty to provide output data will remain in place after submission of the final report and end three years after expiry of the grant.

7. Applicable law and entry into force

Article 20 Applicable law

Subject to any specific provisions in these Regulations, the provisions of the Funding Regulations and the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations, in particular, apply.

Article 21 Entry into force and repeal of existing regulations

¹ These Regulations enter into force on 1 August 2020.

² These Regulations replace the regulations on Ambizione grants of 14 June 2016. The transitional provisions set out in Article 22 of these Regulations remain reserved.

Article 22 Transitional provisions

¹ These Regulations apply to the funding arrangements initiated prior to their entry into force. However, if rights assigned to grantees on approval of funding are not in accordance with the new Regulations, such rights will nonetheless remain in force.

² In response to a reasoned request, the SNSF may in the following exceptional cases extend Ambizione, Ambizione PROSPER and Ambizione SCORE grants or Ambizione Energy Grants which are approved or ongoing under the Regulations on the awarding of Ambizione, Ambizione PROSPER and Ambizione SCORE grants of 15 August 2012, generally for a maximum of 12 months:

- a. in the event of clinical work (Ambizione PROSPER/SCORE);
- b. in the case of an interruption or reduction of the employment level due to maternity or care duties during the grant period;
- c. Ambizione Energy grants are only extended if the grantee has demonstrably been presented with the prospect of a professorship at a Swiss research institution within the higher education sector.