SNSF Swiss Postdoctoral Fellowships 2024 Guidelines for Evaluators

ⓘ Information

NEW!

→ The SNSF attaches great importance to transparency and highly values the work of the reviewers. For this reason, **your evaluation reports will be communicated to the applicants** in order to justify the funding decision (without revealing your identity).

→ The SNSF has defined a **standardized format for the CV** (more information under evaluation criterion 1.4). Keep in mind that **no separate research output list** or **career plan** is requested. A **data management plan (DMP)** is only submitted for approved grants. Only assess the information provided in the research plan.

✓ Do

→ Use **English** in the evaluation report, regardless of the language chosen for navigation.

→ Provide explanations that reflect your **ratings** (see **score table**) in a brief and concise way. A rating of 7 or lower requires the specification of specific weaknesses. References such as "see above" must be avoided.

→ Assess each **evaluation criterion and sub-criterion** individually and independently from other criteria and sub-criteria, e.g. do not evaluate the aspect of "Impact" under "Excellence" (see chapter **Evaluation criteria**).
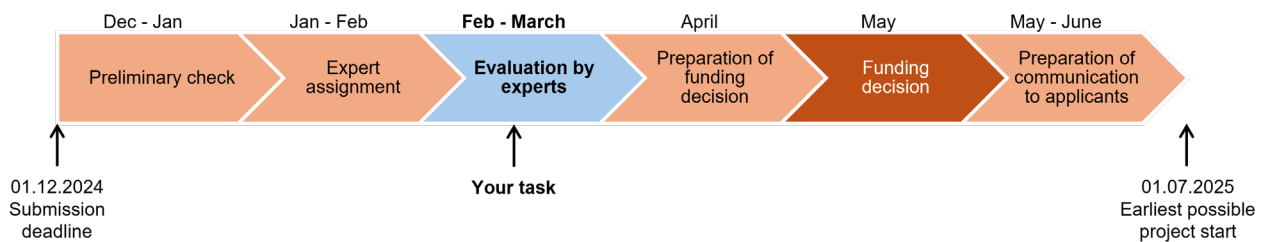
✕ Don't

→ Do not use **secondary criteria** (e.g. gender, discipline, reputation of the host institution, etc.) in your evaluation report.

→ Do not use **journal-based metrics** such as journal impact factor (JIF) or the journal's reputation as a proxy of the article's quality. Do not use the **h-index**.

→ Do not reveal your **identity** in the evaluation report.

Content

Evaluation procedure

The National Research Council of the SNSF and the evaluation bodies it appoints are responsible for the scientific evaluation and for making funding decisions.

The evaluation of the Swiss Postdoctoral Fellowships is conducted in a fully remote setting. Discipline-specific experts will evaluate proposals that meet the formal requirements. Two reviewers per application will independently prepare separate evaluation reports. In case of substantially diverging opinions, additional experts may be consulted.

Evaluation scores are given for each of the overall 9 criteria and calculated to a final numerical score. Proposals are ranked based on the final score awarded by two individual reviewers in their evaluations, according to the best practice evaluation principles applied by the SNSF. In special cases, additional experts may be consulted.

Proposals will be funded in order of priority based on their rank and the available funding. The Specialized Committee Careers and the Presiding Board of the National Research Council are responsible for placing the funding line based on the quality of the proposals assessed by the experts, the final

ranking, and taking into account the financial situation[1]. Funding decisions on proposals of similar scientific quality around the funding line may be reached by drawing lots.

At any stage of the evaluation, the introduction of secondary evaluation criteria 'ad hoc', as for example gender, discipline, research institution, is not permissible. Only evaluation criteria stated in the call document and in the evaluation forms can be applied for the evaluation of a proposal.

Scores and weight

The evaluation forms contain a 9-point grading scale valid for all aspects of the application.

9	Strong in all relevant aspects. No or negligible weaknesses.
8	
7	Strong in most relevant aspects. Few clearly identified weaknesses.
6	
5	**Strong in several relevant aspects. Some clearly identified weaknesses.**
4	
3	Some strengths in relevant aspects. Several clearly identified weaknesses.
2	
1	Few or no strengths in relevant aspects. Many serious weaknesses.

Use in your evaluation the **whole scale of qualifications**. **Use 5** (Strong in several relevant aspects. Some clearly identified weaknesses.) **as a starting point** and develop arguments to justify grading the application as 5, higher or lower. Please consider the explanations next to the grading scale. Justify any grade you give by expressing **strengths and weaknesses** (with the term 'because', at least for the critics). Your **comments need to be consistent with the given grade**, e.g. a score of 7 corresponding to "strong in most relevant aspects, few clearly identified weaknesses" requires a justification by strengths and weaknesses.

The proposal's overall score will be calculated according to the weighting of the three evaluation criteria. These weights are not mapped in the evaluation forms. Please keep them in mind for the overall evaluation of the application.

Evaluation criterion	Weight
Excellence	50%
Impact	30%
Implementation	20%

[1] As of 1.4.2025, the Programme Committee Careers will be responsible for these matters (new organisation of the Research Council).

Good evaluation practice

Everyone involved in the evaluation procedure - peer reviewers and members of SNSF evaluation bodies - are obliged to declare all potential conflicts of interest. Please see the [Factsheet for members of evaluation bodies](#).

Confidentiality

According to [SNSF regulations](#) (Annex 1), all users who have access to data in mySNF/the SNSF Portal that they have not personally submitted must keep these data confidential and must not forward them to unauthorized third parties.

Artificial intelligence (AI)

AI tools such as natural language processors, large language models, or other generative AI technologies have recently gained renewed public attention. Reviewers must be aware that uploading or sharing content or original concepts from an SNSF grant application or an assessment to generative AI tools violate the SNSF strict peer review confidentiality and integrity regulations. This includes but is not limited to tools such as ChatGPT, DeepL and Elicit.

For further information, please also consult the [Swiss Code of Conduct for Scientific Integrity](#), chapter 5.2.9.

Resubmissions

Some researchers whose proposal was rejected under Swiss Postdoctoral Fellowships 2021, 2022 and / or 2023 resubmitted their proposal (or present a new one) under Swiss Postdoctoral Fellowships 2024. If an application is a revised version of a rejected application, the researchers provide a **point-for-point response** to the critique raised in the rejection letter and a comment on significant changes or additions in the research plan (if applicable).

You can **access the previously submitted proposal** in the current proposal in the section "Evaluation (recommendation)" (go to "Revision of") or in the section "Projects related to this proposal" (go to "Connections to previous projects").

Please **include** in your **evaluation** a **comment** on the earlier submission and the **changes/adaptations in the new version**.

Page limit of the research plan

According to the [Guidelines for SNSF Swiss Postdoctoral Fellowships applications via mySNF](#) (section 3.1) the entire research plan (including references) must not be longer than 10 pages (including references). If applicants have uploaded a research plan longer than the specified page limit, excess pages have been made invisible by the SNSF Offices and therefore cannot be considered in the evaluation.

Do's and Dont's of good evaluation practice

DOs

The comments should be:

- ✓ Specific to the relevant criterion addressing each sub-criterion.
- ✓ Precise and definite.
- ✓ Clear, substantial, and concise.
- ✓ Consistent with the score awarded, which must reflect strengths and weaknesses.
- ✓ Based upon the quality of the scholarly outputs, using upon your personal scientific assessment (e.g. reading) of those outputs.

DONTs

The comments must not:

- ⊖ Be discriminatory, offending, or inappropriate.
- ⊖ Be based on assumptions and should not suggest ignorance or doubt.
- ⊖ Contain recommendations or suggestions to improve the project.
- ⊖ Contain factual mistakes. Whenever factual statements are made, they should be explicitly verified.

Do not use:

- ⊖ Journal-based metrics such as journal impact factor (JIF).
- ⊖ Journal's reputation (and its corresponding adjectives, e.g. high-impact/very good/standard…) as a proxy of an article's quality.
- ⊖ h-index (not appropriate for early career researchers) and other similar indices based on citation counts, even if standardized, e.g. for academic age.
- ⊖ Secondary criteria (gender, discipline, reputation of the host institution…).

Evaluation criteria

Please consider all information provided in the whole proposal during your assessment.

The three main evaluation criteria are:

1 **Excellence** - weighted 50%

2 **Impact** - weighted 30%

3 **Quality and efficiency of the implementation** - weighted 20%

1   Excellence

Excellence has 4 sub-criteria (1.1 – 1.4) and is about:
- → Quality and pertinence of the R&I objectives
- → Soundness of the methodology
- → Relevance of interdisciplinary approaches, gender and diversity aspects
- → Quality of the planned open science practices
- → Quality of the supervision
- → The researcher's existing professional experience

9	Strong in all relevant aspects. No or negligible weaknesses
7	Strong in most relevant aspects. Few clearly identified weaknesses
5	**Strong in several relevant aspects. Some clearly identified weaknesses**
3	Some strengths in relevant aspects. Several clearly identified weaknesses
1	Few or no strengths in relevant aspects. Many serious weaknesses

1.1   Quality and pertinence of the project's research and innovation objectives (and the extent to which they are ambitious, and go beyond the state of the art)

What to evaluate:

- → **Quality and pertinence** of the research and innovation objectives

- → Extent to which the proposed work is **ambitious** and goes beyond the current state-of-the-art in the field

- → Whether research and innovation objectives are **realistically achievable**, measurable, and verifiable

1.2 Soundness of the proposed methodology (including interdisciplinary approaches, consideration of the gender dimension and other diversity aspects if relevant for the research project, and the quality of open science practices).

What to evaluate:

→ **Soundness of the methodology**, including the concepts, models and assumptions that underpin the project; whether important methodological challenges are identified and measures to tackle them proposed.

→ Extent to which an **interdisciplinary approach** is relevant for the research; if relevant, evaluate how expertise and methods from different disciplines will be brought together and integrated; if not relevant, is this sufficiently argued in the proposal?

→ Extent to which the **gender dimension and other diversity aspects** are relevant for the research; if relevant, evaluate how they are taken into account in the project's research and innovation content; if not relevant, is a proper justification provided?

→ **Artificial intelligence** (AI): If the applicant plans to use, develop and/or deploy AI-based systems and/or techniques: evaluate to which extent the proposed systems or techniques are technically robust, accurate and reproducible and able to deal with possible failures and errors.

→ How appropriate **open science practices** are implemented as an integral part of the proposed methodology. If not considered appropriate in the context of the proposed work, whether this is sufficiently explained and justified in the proposal.

The gender and diversity aspects relate to the content of the planned activities, and not to gender balance in the teams in charge of carrying out the research.

The SNSF expects that data generated by funded projects are publicly accessible in digital databases provided there are no legal, ethical, copyright or other issues (**SNSF open research data policy**). Please refer in your evaluation of the research data management **to the points addressed in the research plan.** As an Evaluator, you should assess how appropriate open science practices are implemented as an integral part of the proposed methodology and how the choice of practices and their implementation are adapted to the nature of the work, in a way that will increase the chances of achieving the objectives.

→ If the proposal has appropriate justifications for not including open science practices, you should not penalize it. However, if open science practices are not sufficiently addressed, you might consider adding a shortcoming.

A Data Management Plan (DMP) is only requested for approved grants according to the requirements issued by the SNSF.

1.3 Quality of the supervision, training and of the two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host

> **What to evaluate:**
>
> → **Quality of the supervision** considering the qualifications and experience of the supervisor(s), their level of experience on the research topic proposed and their track record of work, including main international collaborations, as well as the level of experience in supervising/training especially at advanced level
>
> → Effectiveness of the **planned training activities** for the researcher (scientific aspects, management/organization, horizontal and key transferrable skills, …)
>
> → Assess the **two-way transfer of knowledge** between the researcher and host organization
>
> → If applicable: the rationale and added value of the non-academic placement

Scientific supervision arrangements should clearly define that the proposed supervisors have sufficient expertise in supervising researchers at postdoctoral level. Supervisors should have the time, knowledge, experience, expertise, and commitment to be able to offer the appropriate support to the researcher and provide for the necessary progress, review and feedback procedures/mechanisms.

Postdoctoral Fellowships proposals can include an additional (optional) period for the maximum total duration of one third of the SNSF Swiss Postdoctoral Fellowship at different host institutions, including institutions in the non-academic sector (institutions operating in applied fields; intersectoral mobility). The request for such a placement must be an integral part of the proposal, explaining the added-value for the project and for the career development of the researcher, and will be subject to evaluation. The mandatory documents for such a stay include a letter of invitation and a detailed budget of the costs, which must be included in the limit for the project funds.

→ When placements are not properly described or lack relevance or added-value for the project and for the career prospects of the researcher, you should reflect this in the comments and scores.

1.4 Quality and appropriateness of the researcher's professional experience, competences and skills

> **What to evaluate:**
>
> → **Curriculum vitae** of the researcher, including their research outputs, their professional experience, competences, and skills.
>
> → Quality and appropriateness of the researcher's existing **professional experience** in relation to the research proposal.

In order to comply with the DORA principles, the SNSF has introduced a standardized CV format in October 2022. The scientific qualifications of each applicant, in particular the track record and the

expertise to carry out the research project, have to be assessed on the basis of the new CV. Please consult the [fact sheet](#) to learn more about the format and its use in the evaluation.

Reviewers are kindly asked to consider the scientific qualifications of applicants based on their entire research output (including, when applicable, datasets, software, prototypes, etc.), in addition to research publications. The entire research output of the applicant can be evaluated through the ORCID account that is attached to the new CV. In this context, the scientific quality and relevance of a paper is deemed much more important than publication metrics or the reputation of the journal in which it was published. The scientific quality and relevance of selected research outputs may be assessed directly by the sources provided by each applicant in the section "Major achievements" of the CV.

In general, the evaluation has to be done against the background of the scientific discipline and the net academic age of each applicant.

Please note that no separate "Research Output list" is requested. All the necessary information should be included in the applicant's ORCID account that is included in the new CV.

2 Impact

Impact has 3 sub-criteria (2.1 – 2.3) and is about:
- → The enhancement of the researcher's career perspectives and skills development expected through the proposal implementation
- → Dissemination, exploitation, and communication of the research
- → Direct scientific, societal, and economic impact of the proposal

9 Strong in all relevant aspects. No or negligible weaknesses
7 Strong in most relevant aspects. Few clearly identified weaknesses
5 Strong in several relevant aspects. Some clearly identified weaknesses
3 Some strengths in relevant aspects. Several clearly identified weaknesses
1 Few or no strengths in relevant aspects. Many serious weaknesses

2.1 Credibility of the measures to enhance the career perspectives and employability of the researcher and contribution to his/her skills development

What to evaluate:
- → The **credibility of the measures** to enhance the researcher's expected **career perspectives** inside and/or outside academia.
- → The **credibility of the measures** to enhance the researcher's expected **skills development**.

Please note that no separate Career Plan is requested. All the necessary information should be included in the applicant's research plan under 2.1.

2.2 Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities

Dissemination means public disclosure of the results by appropriate means, whereas **exploitation** is the use of results, e.g. for commercial purposes or in public policymaking.
Communication measures and public engagement strategy: the aim is to inform and reach out to society and demonstrate the activities performed, and the utility and benefits the project will have for citizens.

→ The dissemination, exploitation and communication measures have to be concrete and proportionate to the scale of the project.

What to evaluate:
- → Planned **dissemination and exploitation** activities, and the target group(s) addressed
- → If relevant, the strategy for the management and protection of **intellectual property**
- → Planning of **communication and public engagement** activities (their objectives, main messages, tools and channels)

2.3 The magnitude and importance of the project's contribution to the expected scientific, societal and economic impacts

Magnitude: how widespread the outcomes and impacts are likely to be. For example, in terms of the size of the target group, or the proportion of that group, that should benefit over time.
Importance: the value of those benefits. For example, number of additional healthy life years; efficiency savings in energy supply, etc.

What to evaluate:
- → Scale and importance of the **expected scientific, societal and economic impacts** as they are outlined in the proposal
- → How the results are expected to have an **impact beyond the immediate scope** and duration of the proposal
- → **Credibility of the quantified estimates** (magnitude and importance) of the project's contribution to the expected outcomes and impacts

3 Quality and Efficiency of the implementation

Quality and efficiency of the implementation has 2 sub-criteria (3.1 – 3.2) and is about:
→ Quality and effectiveness of the work plan
→ Risk assessment and contingency plan
→ Quality and capacity of all participating organizations, including non-scientific hosting arrangements

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3.1 Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages

Risk assessment: please assess whether all possible risks associated with the project and the appropriate contingency measures have been identified, including for instance the risk of the researcher to work in an adverse social/political context (example: safety of the researcher, their family and research participants). If the risks have a severe impact on the implementation and on the project as a whole, please reflect this in the comments.

What to evaluate:
→ Quality and effectiveness of the **work plan**, including deliverables and milestones
→ Appropriateness of the **effort assigned to work packages** (WP), including timing and duration of the different WPs
→ Research and/or administrative **risks** that might endanger achievement of the objectives, and the **contingency plans** proposed should such risks occur
→ Whether a **Gantt chart** is included (mandatory) and whether it is consistent and complete in relation to the whole work plan (taking into account WPs, scientific deliverables, milestones)

3.2 Quality and capacity of the host institutions and participating organizations, including hosting arrangements

What to evaluate:
→ Quality of the **hosting arrangements**, including integration in the team/institution and support services available to the researcher
→ Quality and capacity of **participating organizations**, including infrastructure, logistics, facilities

→   If applicable, the quality of the hosting arrangements and the capacity of the infrastructure/facilities of the non-academic placement host

The text in this document is based on the MSCA guidelines (Manual_for_Evaluators FINAL_2021; standard-briefing-slides-for-experts_he_en (Version 25.06.21) which have been slightly modified for the Swiss Postdoctoral Fellowships in accordance with SNSF rules and evaluation practices.

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